Speaking Subjects: Language, Subject Formation, and the Crisis of Identity

by

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Robyn Wiegman

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

From Labov’s (1963) finding that the centralization of the /ay/ and /aw/ diphthongs in Martha’s Vineyard was emblematic of resistance to local economic and social change, to Mendoza-Denton’s (2008) finding that variation in the realization of the /I/ vowel corresponds to gang affiliation among Latina girls in a Northern California high school, identity has been at the center of sociolinguistic analysis and theory for nearly a half century. Despite the centrality of this construct, sociolinguists have rarely stopped to ask about the epistemological, theoretical, and even political implications of identity. This dissertation offers a sustained, interdisciplinary critique of identity, as articulated both in linguistics and in contemporary poststructuralist theory more generally. Through engagements with cultural anthropology, feminist theory, cultural studies, and linguistics, this critique calls attention to identity’s epistemological baggage (e.g. collusion with neo-liberalism and Enlightenment-era humanism) and theoretical tendencies (e.g. overestimation of agency) and suggests, instead, a turn to poststructuralist theory of subject formation. Within the poststructuralist framework, identity has its analytic place among equally important theoretical constructs, including subject type, subject position, discourse, and subjectivity, as described in the work of social theorists such as Michel Foucault (1965, 1975, 1978) and Judith Butler (1990, 1991, 2004).
Two empirical studies of adolescent language use – one, a case study of a single speaker, the other an intensive ethnographic study conducted in a middle school – are presented and findings are considered in light of poststructuralist theory of subject formation. The first study focuses on the speech of one adolescent Mexican American female, “María,” whose patterns of language use underwent reorganization over a three-year period coinciding with a change in community, school, and peer group. Segmental and suprasegmental variables were analyzed from data collected from two time periods, T1 and T2. In order to account for modifications in “María’s” vocalic production, two vowel variables were selected for acoustic analysis: pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal allophones of /æ/. These variables were selected because of their saliency in Latino varieties of English (Thomas, Carter, & Coggshall 2006; Fought 2003; Thomas 2001). Midpoint measurements were taken for F1, F2, and F3 for a minimum of 25 tokens of each variable from T1 and T2 using PRAAT phonetics software (Boersma & Weenink 2009). María’s production of prosodic rhythm was also analyzed using the Pairwise Variability Index (Lowe & Grabe 1995). Over 400 measurements of syllable duration were made for the analysis of prosodic rhythm.

Changes in F1 and F2 for both vocalic variables were statistically significant—both allophones of /æ/ were lowered and backed from T1 to T2. Conversely, no statistically significant difference was found in prosodic rhythm. These findings are
analyzed in the context of two social processes: interpellation and racialization, and the role of social and linguistic agency is considered in light of these processes.

The second study is an intensive ethnographic investigation of a ‘majority minority’ middle school in North Carolina that took place over a five-month period. Detailed ethnographic fieldnotes and unscripted interviews with 50 African American, white, and Latino speakers in social groups identified during observation constitute the data for this study. The analysis focuses on the subjectivizing effects of the institution, particularly the institutional discourses of ‘choice’ and ‘value,’ on the cultural and linguistic practices of its students. Using discourse analytic methods, the analysis shows that talk by students across all major social divisions (grade level, popularity status, gender, and ethnicity) is inflected by institutional discourses. A complementary analysis considers the subjectivizing function of language ideology as it pertains to three distinct discursive formations about language: ‘proper talk,’ ‘ghetto talk,’ and Spanish. Finally, a quantitative, variationist analysis is presented of four core features of African American English: verbal –s absence, preterit copula leveling, copula deletion, and invariant be. The sociolinguistic patterning is complex, with African Americans and Latinos demonstrating different levels of usage for all four variables, with significantly different interactional effects between social variables (gender, popularity, gang affiliation) and linguistic variables (structure type, grammatical environment).
Dedication

A Graciela y Alma. Your stories humbled and inspired me.
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emotional investments in my work while demonstrating a rare combination of patience, understanding, and enthusiasm.
1. What crisis? Whose identity?

“The opposition between ‘theoretical’ and ‘empirical’ work is a false, or at least, distorted one…”

Gayle Rubin, 1994

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is invested in the claim that ‘identity’ is but a sliver of a much more complicated constellation of cultural, social, political, juridical, and psychic forces and orientations that result in individuals who speak. This larger constellation of forces and orientations, of which ‘identity’ is one piece, will be called subjectivity. It is therefore the case that the sum of the linguistic practices of individuals who speak exceeds the capacity of ‘identity’ to name and account for them. Thus, this work is about subjectivity and language. It is invested in the claim that the use of language by subjects is itself evidence for the production of those subjects. That is, the processes of subject formation are reflected in language and language use is, in addition, itself one of the processes that subjectivizes. Put simply, this dissertation is about speaking subjects.

The work that I do here encompasses a wide range of theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary approaches to thinking language. Therefore, the project is characterized by an intense interdisciplinary engagement, one that is reflected in the length of the work, given that committed interdisciplinarity precludes assumed disciplinary knowledges. However, throughout the course of the dissertation, I render as objects of study the very disciplines that contribute to the organization of the project.
That is, this project makes a sustained commentary best described as meta-disciplinary. The motivation for this is primarily organizational – to manage the overlapping, complicated and oftentimes conflicting valences assigned by the disciplines to words such as language, discourse, identity, and subjectivity. What this commentary punctuates is a project organized around empirical investigation – a case study of an adolescent girl who finds herself in a crisis of language and an ethnographic study of social formations within the context of middle school – and a corresponding intervention in theory – a critique of identity, as articulated primarily within linguistics, and the attendant introduction of subjectivity and the epistemological rubric it organizes.

The secondary title for this work is “language, subject formation, and the crisis of identity.” ‘Crisis of identity’ is a multiple entendre, referring at once to the problem of identity in linguistics, sociolinguistics, contemporary theory, and in my own project. It also refers to the adolescent subjects that I studied for this dissertation, for whom identity acutely organizes sociality and for whom identity is matter of acute daily practice. I go about trying to make sense of the crisis of identity – in both its contexts – in five chapters, each pulling a different piece of the crisis into its analytic lens. In the current chapter, I take Andresen’s (forthcoming) suggestion to use historiography as a method for theoretical intervention. I do this in two moves. First, by tracking the fluctuations in the way linguistics has theorized the social, I argue that the turn to mentalism brought about by Chomsky stunted the capacity of contemporary linguistics
to engage in social analysis. Second, I argue that ‘identity’ is an artifact of the historical fluctuations that lead to the contemporary moment in linguistics. I end by presenting the problem of identity as it pertains to linguistics, contemporary theory, and my own project.

In Chapter 2, I introduce an alternative way of thinking about identity, found in Post-structural theory of subject formation. I make this introduction through a rigorous engagement with feminist theory, where identity and subjectivity have been primary objects of analysis, and where Post-structuralism has been used with success to organize and clarify these terms. My decision to make my engagement with feminist theory a detailed one is also motivated by my commitment to a form of interdisciplinarity that does not distort its cross-disciplinary objects by oversimplifying them. I end by spending time with the work of Michel Foucault, whose thinking animates much of Post-Structuralism, and whose conceptualization of ‘discourse,’ ‘power,’ and ‘subjectivity,’ are useful for intervention I hope to make with speaking subjects.

Chapter 3 presents a case study of ‘Maria,’ a girl who immigrated to the United States from Mexico at age eight. The chapter presents data collected over a three-year period when I studied Maria’s language and shows that at the moment of a significant change in her life – changing schools – her language also changed. Using instrumental techniques from phonetics, I provide a detailed analysis of Maria’s linguistic production
of vowels before and after her change of school, and consider her overall change in language in the context of the theoretical framework I have set forth in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, I describe my findings from an ethnographic study I conducted for over four months at ‘Bedlington Middle School’ in an urban community in central North Carolina. Specifically, I outline the ways in which the school setting shapes the way students talk, through institutional discourses (choice, exchange value) and through forms of disciplinarity such as interpellation and language policing. I consider the ways in which these discourses and forms of power link with similar forms outside of the school setting to produce speaking subjects. I provide ethnographic and conversational data throughout the chapter in order to continually ground my claims in text.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the way students at ‘Bedlington Middle School’ talk. I examine the disciplinary function of language ideology and attitudes about specific forms of talk (‘ghetto,’ ‘Spanish,’ ‘white girl,’ ‘country’) that align in complex ways with ‘Bedlington’ subjects. I also provide a quantitative analysis of four morphosyntactic features of African American English (3rd person –s absence, copula absence, invariant BE, was/were leveling) found in the corpus of interviews I collected with ‘Bedlington’ students, and consider these findings in the context of subjectivization.
1.1.2 Theory, empiricism, and disciplinarity

This project attempts to do both, or be both, but I must to confess from the outset to being somewhat in the dark about where one term stops and the other starts. My defense is that I know that the terms are supposed to be, in a sense, oppositional, and I know what sort of situational, epistemological, and genealogical work they are supposed to do. In addition, I know how the terms figure ideologically in conversations about disciplinarity and institutionality, about the sciences and the humanities, and about the seriousness and value of particular modes of intellectual engagement. What remains a source of confusion is whether the questions about language, identity, and subjectivity that I want to raise here are theoretical questions or empirical ones. The source of the confusion is this: the primary discipline from which many of the methods and assumptions about language are taken in this work, linguistics, reminds me time and again that the answers to questions about the relationship between what we call “identity” and “language” lay in a sort of positivist description; everything we need to know about identity, or at least about the ubiquitous “linguistic identity” comes from listening to people speak. Thus, in effect, the theory and the method are coextensive, as will be discussed later in this chapter. When I turn, on the other hand, to the other disciplinary formations and attendant theoretical orientations that inform this work,

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1 I use ‘disciplinarity’ in two different ways throughout the dissertation. One use refers simply to the academic disciplines, and the other refers to a form of power that shapes subjects, as described by Foucault. These uses should be clear in context.
which mostly cohere around poststructural theory, I am at times reminded that there is little value in listening to or otherwise observing actual people.

Put differently, my inability to know is largely a function of the literatures that provide my training in these areas. For example, in linguistics, “theoretical” usually signals a certain orientation to a set of methods and assumptions about language that maps onto the Chomskyan generative program, which historically occupies a place of prestige in the discipline. Empiricism, on the other hand, now has its own cache within linguistics, but mainly as a result of the Labovian critical response to Chomsky, which was unabashedly anti-theoretical, a point that I will develop later in this chapter. And so while both “theory” and “empiricism” are legitimate ways of describing current practices in linguistics, the terms index very different rubrics for organizing the discipline and are still very much ideologically opposed. There is, for example, no such thing as a “theoretical sociolinguistics.” I will return to this question in the following section. The literature on identity in linguistics is confusing in a more direct way. At times identity is assumed to be a function of pre-existing demographic categories, or intersections of those categories. Other times, identity marks a purely agentive orientation to those categories on the part of individuals. Thus, identity is sometimes determined, sometimes chosen, and sometimes varying combinations of the two. Further, in linguistics, identity is usually taken to be the cause of something (a stylistic
repertoire, including linguistic ‘style’), whereas in contemporary theory, identity is generally taken to be the effect of something (history, culture, interpellation, discourse).

Another way of putting it is that a series of terms – language, identity, and subjectivity – which, in their varying disciplinary valences, have haunted my study of linguistics, language variation, and social theory and have done so on account of the fact that they haunt the literatures in which they are used. There is no way to organize these terms without tracking their disciplinary attachments. Therefore, while this work is “about” language, identity, and subjectivity, it is also encumbered with questions about disciplinarity, the boundary between theory and empiricism, and the location of linguistics within the humanities and interpretive social sciences. These areas form an important part of this investigation because one of my aims is to understand how the practices and assumptions of linguistics have produced certain legitimate ways of knowing how the subject of language is endowed with the ability to speak.

1.2 The Scope of Chapter 1

The overarching goal for this chapter is to explain the problem of identity as an epistemological framework in contemporary linguistic and sociolinguistic thought. This is a formidable task that will be undertaken in two steps, which I will briefly describe in reverse order here. The second step is to introduce what I call a ‘hermeneutics of identity’ – the framework in which identity and language are inextricably bound up with one another in linguistics. I will argue that within this hermeneutics, two
theoretical / conceptual mechanisms have linked identity to language. In the first, ‘identity-of-condition,’ the language-user is seen as constituted by the external identitarian categories identified by the researcher (geography by the dialectologists, and an array of demographic categories in American sociolinguistics). Within this framework, the type of language the speaker uses (what we might call, ‘dialect,’ including lexicon, phonology, and grammar) is a function of the categories, singular or intersecting, that form his/her social constitution. The second mechanism, what I will call ‘identity-of-choice,’ represents, as I will argue later, a critical response, even a backlash, to the top-down constitution of language-users by the conditions thought to produce them as speakers. Within the ‘identity of choice’ framework, the language-user is seen as an agent of his or her own linguistic expression. By deploying ‘sociolinguistic variables’ that are semiotically linked to a particular ‘local meaning’ or practice-based group, language users ‘construct’ their own [sociolinguistic] identities, which may or may not be seen to be in response to social forces greater than the speaker or his/her social group. Thus, the categories that link language to identititarian formations have shifted from ‘macro’ categories with discrete possible realizations (e.g. ‘gender,’ ‘male’ or ‘female’) to locally determined group formations with overlapping realizations (e.g. ‘jocks,’ ‘female’ or ‘male,’ ‘leader’ or ‘central member’ or ‘peripheral member’). The underlying epistemological assumption – people speak the way they do because of their identities – remains unchanged.
Unraveling the relationship between identity-of-condition and identity-of-choice necessitates a prior unraveling: what does the *socio* in sociolinguistics mean in the first place? From whom and from where do we inherit our understanding of the social (of which identity is a piece)? In order to tease out what we mean by ‘identity,’ we have to first go back, I contend, and tease out what we mean by ‘social.’ Thus, the first step in arguing that the identitarian epistemological framework is problematic is to argue that the hermeneutics of identity comes from somewhere; specifically, it is the result of movements of the conception of the social within the history of linguistics. Although the final critique that I make of identity can be applied across disciplines, I focus my discussion on the articulation of identity within linguistics.

In section 1.3, I will provide an historical account of the social in linguistic theory. I suggest that our contemporary understanding of the social is the product of a series of historical shifts in the discipline with respect to the possibilities of the social / linguistic relationship. Focusing primarily on linguistics in U.S. context, I examine the relationship between language and the social in several historical/conceptual periods, beginning with 19th Century ‘general linguistics,’ through 20th Century American structuralism, anthropological linguistics, behaviorism, the Cartesian-turn and, finally, the rise of Labovian sociolinguistics in the mid-21st Century. The final critique of identity itself does not follow directly from this tracing. Rather, what I am attempting to do is outline the historical conditions that facilitated the rise of an epistemological framework
in which the social was devalued, thereby leading to oversimplified and cursory notions of ‘identity.’ What I want to argue with this tracing is that, although sociolinguistics is in some respects autonomous from the rest of the discipline, our understanding of the social – from which our understandings of identity are derived – is a product of broader conceptual movements taking place within and outside of linguistics. To repeat: the critique of identity is cross-disciplinary; the particular application of this critique in this dissertation is more narrowly focused in linguistics.

In section 1.4, I detail the work of William Labov and his variationist linguistics, emphasizing the ways in which the variationist approach consolidates the linguistic-formalist project, opening up formalism to a new set of methods while shutting down the possibility of an interdisciplinary ‘sociolinguistics.’ I conclude this section of the chapter by briefly considering each approach within two metatheoretical frameworks taken from Figueroa (1994): Cartesianism / Hegelianism and Linguistic Formalism / Functionalism. I argue that the increasing influence of Cartesian / formalist conceptions of language and society, and the concomitant foreclosure of Hegelian / functionalist ones, lies at the heart of the current identitarian crisis in linguistics.

Focusing on eight specific limitations, I outline the problem of identity in the last section of the chapter, 1.5. This outline draws on critiques of identity made across the humanistic disciplines. I conclude by arguing that the absence of a theory of speaking subjects, and the attendant reliance on the culling of disparate, disciplinary-centered
empirical findings as the basis for our understanding of the relationship between the
social and language limits what we are able to know about a relationship that should be
central concern of a discipline called sociolinguistics.

1.3 A Survey of the Role of the Social in American Linguistics

The project of tracking the rise of identity, which I argue is tied to broader
movements in our understanding of the social, begins with historiography. While
identity is one of the legitimated frameworks through which linguistics articulates the
relationship between linguistic production and the language user, it is only so because of
the history of disciplinary articulations of sociality that provided the conditions for a
cursory form of identitarianism. This hermeneutics of identity, as understood in
linguistics, understands the language of an individual as being the result of his or her
social conditions and, on the one other hand, and as the result of the speaker’s agentive
endowment on the other. These two positions –identity-of-condition and identity-of-
choice, are tied to a broader epistemological framework whose discursive and
explanatory power is derived from disciplinary assumptions about language (speech-
centered), our orientation to disciplinarity (‘science’ of language), and our definitions of
the objects we study (sociolinguistic variable, etc.). Identity-of-condition and identity-
of-choice have evolved to be either implicitly opposed to one another and mutually
exclusive, or uncomfortably squeezed into the same explanatory framework, the
consequence of the latter being reduced to the familiar ‘structure’ versus ‘agency’
dilemma. What historical, disciplinary conditions allowed linguistics to find itself
trapped in the structure/agency quagmire that coheres around identity?

Figueroa (1994) calls attention to the time-depth of the concern for the social in
the history of linguistics. “The issues which are often associated with sociolinguistics
(for example, language diversity, the relationship between language and society) are
issues which have been around since attention has been paid to language and
languages.” (1) Despite this fact, it is commonly held that relevance was first given to
these concerns about five decades ago, when a particular methodological approach to
linguistics, variation analysis, was named ‘sociolinguistics.’

In order to apprehend the historical/epistemological development of a
hermeneutics of identity in linguistics, I investigate the major works of five prominent
thinkers on language, primarily in the U.S. canon, paying particular attention to the
movements in the analysis of the social. Of the language scholars that follow, each
represents an approach to linguistics that marks a particular philosophical,
methodological, or disciplinary moment in the past 135 years of scholarship in the U.S.,
though it is not my intention to present each as fully discrete and disarticulated from the
other. I begin in the late 19th century, with the work of William Dwight Whitney (1.3.1),
who provides one of the early thorough surveys of human speech written in the English
language (Hockett 1979). I examine a) Whitney’s social framing of language acquisition,
b) his emphasis on the social mechanisms of language change, and c) his coverage of the
social dimensions of language variation. In the work of Leonard Bloomfield (1.3.2), I examine writings on a) the speech community, b) the social factors of language variation and change, and c) language standardization and state-formation. I provide a general outline of B.F. Skinner’s *Verbal Behavior* (1.3.3), which I contend represents a radically social theory of language on account of its linguistic functionalism. Next I outline the general tenets of linguistic generativism offered by Noam Chomsky (1.3.4), focusing in particular on the ways in which the turn to Cartesian philosophy and corresponding emphasis on ‘mind’ work to foreclose the social richness of prior linguistic theory. In the historiographic sections that follow, I will cite heavily from the texts I am investigating, as the point is simply to excavate from the historical record the place of the social in the discipline prior to the late 20th Century. Once again, the critique of identity I provide later does not flow directly from the historiographic account I provide throughout section 1.3. Rather, the point is set up the conditions under which identity could later become a primary conceptual trope in linguistics.

1.3.1 William Dwight Whitney and 19th Century American (socio)linguistics

Though one could look much further back, I’d like to begin the long journey of tracing the linguistic / social relationship to 19th Century linguistics with William Dwight Whitney, whose *The Life and Growth of Language: An Outline of Linguistic Science* (1875)
places the social life of language front and center, alongside concern for the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of language, linguistic structure, language and thought, and language documentation. This is evident in the titles of the chapters: “The Conservative and Alterative Forces in Language,” “Local and Class Variation of Language: Dialects,” and “Language and Ethnology,” for example. But Whitney’s concern for the social is not so modular that it is limited to these chapters. That language is social, has social consequences, and is subject to social change is such an obvious reality that it is practically taken for granted, pervading nearly every page in one way or another. In order to demonstrate the richness of the social in Whitney’s work, I will briefly explain the following areas of his thought: language acquisition, language change, and language variation.

Whitney does not offer a social account of language acquisition per se; he is clearly more concerned with the extent to which language learning is similar to the acquisition of other forms of cognition (e.g., mathematical operations) and the extent to which language and thought are paired. But by posing the question about language acquisition holistically – “how does each speaking individual become possessed of his speech?” (1876, 7) – Whitney forces himself to contend with the social embeddedness of acquisition. This is evident in the emphasis that he places on learning, and in particular, learning as a cultural process. “There are probably few who would not at once reply that we learn our language; it is taught us by those among whom our lot is cast in
childhood.” (7) In a prescient line of reasoning reminiscent of recent work on language and cognition by Michael Tomasello, Whitney argues that before speech is possible, the child must first realize that he or she has similar characteristics and attributes as those in his or her social environment; in Tomasello’s words, the child must be able to identify with other human beings and see them as “intentional agents.” (Tomasello 1999, 86) Upon seeing himself as a person similar to other people, the child is able to engage in other forms of social cognition (again, using Tomasello’s language) that facilitate acquisition. These processes – including imitation and association – rely on the contexts of their social embedding. Further, the process of language acquisition is always incomplete; it constantly relies on further development: “the process of acquisition is a never-ending one…As he grows older, as his powers develop and his knowledge increased, he acquires more and more and in different departments, according to circumstances.” (25) The unceasing, socially embedded nature of language acquisition is reflected in the title itself: The Life and Growth of Language. ‘Growth’ is surely a multiple entendre here, referring not only to ontogeny, but also to language change, as in historical modification to linguistic structure, and also to phylogenetic development in the species. The words ‘life’ and ‘growth’ imply a dynamism, a richness, and a

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2 Tomasello (1999; 2005) argues that recognizing conspecifics as intentional agents is itself a form of social cognition.

3 He goes on to write: “He who has to turn at once to the hard work of life may add to the first childish store little besides the technical expressions belonging to his own narrow vocation; he, on the other hand, who devotes years to the sole work of getting himself educated, and continues to draw in knowledge through the rest of his life, appropriates constantly larger stores, and rises to higher styles of expression.” (25-6)
mutability about language that is simply absent from later treatments. In contrast, for example, to mid-20th Century ahistorical theories of language, Whitney’s theory of language, including his views on variation and change, are very much invested in historicism. “The whole state of things,” he writes, “is dependent on historical conditions, as concerns its continuance and changes.”

For Whitney, language and the acquisition of language are intrinsically linked to lived experience, thus the emphasis on life in the title. One aspect of the life of language, the experience of language, is development within the contexts provided by social life. This includes the community life that provides the backdrop for language development as well as the particular linguistic practices community life engenders. To the reader who sees this account as obvious – to a certain extent, it is. But what makes it compelling for the current discussion is that Whitney’s 19th Century account of language ontogeny stands in stark contrast to the theoretically dominant mid-20th Century account offered by Chomsky, in which language acquisition is a function of a hypothetical universal biological endowment that is only minimally related to the social life of the language-user. Whereas the child in Chomsky’s Universal Grammar learns language in spite his social embedding, the child in Whitney’s account can only acquire language because of it. Put simply, the social is a fully integrated part of a theory of language acquisition as far back as the late 19th Century.
In addition to acquisition, Whitney’s theory of diachronic change is more thoroughly and fundamentally dependent on the social than contemporary work on the subject, despite the fact that contemporary scholarship is more likely to be marked as ‘social,’ meaning, “not historical.” By ‘social,’ I do not mean to imply that Whitney’s work is particularly invested in the constellation of social forces, social problems, and social formations influencing language change that the term social might index today. By ‘social’ – a word rarely used in *Life and Growth* – I am referring to Whitney’s investments in language users who are embedded in the circumstances of their respective cultural moments. Language is fundamentally about language users and the situational needs for which they put language to use.

To wit, his writing on language change does not make use of a parsing between culture and an abstracted linguistic system. On the contrary, language for him is fundamentally historical; therefore, changes in culture naturally move with changes in language, and vice versa. “Political control, social superiority, superiority of culture—these are the leading causes which bring about change of speech.” (272) There is no need to posit, or emphasize, the difference between ‘social’ and ‘linguistic’ factors leading to language change; the social and the linguistic reside within one another. This is the case for structure, or phonetic form, what he calls “outer form,” as well as ‘meaning,’ what he calls “inner form.” In a chapter on etymology, Whitney offers a clearly functionalist account of change: “There are those still who hold that words get themselves attributed
to things by a kind of mysterious natural process, in which men have no part; that there are organic forces in speech itself which—by fermentation, or digestion, or crystallization, or something of the sort—produce new material and alter old...Take any individual bit of linguistic growth, and it is found and acknowledged to be the act of a human being, working toward definable ends under the government of recognizable motives, even though without any reflective consciousness of what he is accomplishing...” (145-6) He provides, for example, the word bishop, derived from the Greek episkopos, meaning ‘inspector’ or ‘overseer,’ according to the morphemes epi (‘at’) and skep (‘look’) in the context of the early Christian church. Through phonetic change, episkopos is rendered ‘bishop’ in English, bischof in German, obispo in Spanish, bispo in Portuguese, and so on. The referential meaning of the derivatives of episkopos is similarly changed. “The official who was, when first named, merely overseer of the interests of a little band of timid proselytes to a new and proscribed faith, half-expectant martyrs, has risen immensely in dignity and power...he has become a consecrated prelate...a kind of ecclesiastical prince, yet still wearing his old simple title.” (47)

There is nothing particularly unique about this account; indeed, the 18th and 19th Centuries witnessed a great proliferation of interest in etymology, as philologists pieced together the language families of the world, beginning with Uralic in 1780 and Indo-European not long after. In 1819, Jakob Grimm had already published the first volume of Deutsche Grammatik, which established a complete comparison of Germanic and its
correspondence relationships with other branches of Indo-European. Even the ancient Greeks were well aware of language change. The point is not that Whitney discovered truths about language change that had not before been established; the point is rather that his theory of language change thoroughly integrates language with its socially embedded uses. And this social/linguistic integration was not controversial. Whitney is attuned to language “users” and “their habits and preferences.” (50) And although nowhere does he claim that linguists should be collaborating with non-linguists over the problems of language change, he is keenly aware that a univalent focus on the linguistic ‘facts’ is a limited endeavor. “It must be carefully noted, indeed, that the reach of phonetics, its power to penetrate to the heart of its facts and account for them, is limited. There is always one element in linguistic change, which refuses scientific treatment: namely, the action of human will. The work is all done by human beings, adapting means to ends, under the impulse of motives and the guidance of habits which are the resultant of causes so multifarious and obscure that they elude recognition and defy estimate.” (emphasis added, 73)

The basic unit of the social for Whitney in the context of language change is the community. This may come as a surprise to some contemporary sociolinguists who believe the ‘speech community’ to have first been articulated as a construct in linguistics in the 1960s with the work of William Labov. Although Whitney’s view of language at times borders on [individual] instrumentalism, he continually situates the individual
within a social community who share linguistic practices and linguistic forms. On the subject of lexical attrition, for example, Whitney writes, “…the disappearance from before the attention of a community of the conceptions designated by certain words occasions the disappearance of those words. If anything that people once thought and talked about comes to concern them no longer, its phraseology goes into oblivion—unless, of course, it be preserved, as a memory of the past, by some of those means which culture supplies.” (99) Language, via a community comprised of socially situated individuals oriented to their own communicative and expressive needs, is an artifact of culture. As such, language is not understood by Whitney as existing prior to culture, outside of it, or alongside of it. Language is not orthogonal to culture, but constitutive of it. Whitney’s view of the social borders on functionalism – language accomplishes social tasks for individual speakers who share communitarian norms. This position aligns him more with 20th Century theorists such as Dell Hymes (1974) or M.A.K. Halliday (1973), for whom individuals, groups, and communities are important constructs, rather than Labov, for whom the speech community is the only unit of analysis. Despite his functionalist tendencies, Whitney, like Labov, insists that language change is a community-level phenomenon. He writes, for example, that “…it is not the individual, but the community, that makes and changes language…The community’s share in the work [of language-making] is dependent on and conditioned by the simple fact that language is not an individual possession, but a social.” (149) But unlike Labov, the
community is endowed with a certain functionalism: “It is… the mind of the community all the time at work beneath the framework of its old language, improving its instruments of expression by adapting them to new uses.” (110)

The domain of Whitney’s thinking on language most thoroughly influenced by the effects of society, that is, by the things that contemporary sociolinguistics recognizes as social factors, is the domain of language variation. His discussion of variation is strikingly similar, at least conceptually, to contemporary treatments of the subject in introductory linguistics and sociolinguistics textbooks, and in some respects, Whitney’s writing is more conceptually sophisticated. Many of our most basic assumptions about language variation, which we falsely attribute to the rise of American sociolinguistics in the 1960s, have in fact been a part of general linguistic theory for well over a century.

With respect to the question of linguistic heterogeneity, Whitney warns against overestimating “the uniformity of existing languages,” (154) and allows for variation in the “local and personal peculiarities of pronunciation and phraseology…” (154-5) Note that we still conceive of variation along two axes – the group and the individual. But his account is not limited to the general observation about group (local) and individual (personal) variation; he outlined many of the dimensions along which language is thought to vary by contemporary linguists. In addition to writing about the local forms resulting from regional variation, Whitney also allows for variation according to class, occupation, education, and age. In addition, the rudiments of what we would today call
‘gradient sociolinguistic stratification.’ “Every one of all these differences,” he writes, “is essentially dialectic: that is to say, they differ not at all in kind, but only in degree…”

(156)

The rudiments for a theory of language ideology are also evident in Whitney’s writing on language variation, particularly with respect to the complicated relationships between language, class, and race. He writes, “The science of language…has taught us that one man’s [sic] speech is just as much a language as another man’s [sic]; that even the most cultivated tongue that exists is only the dialect of a certain class in a certain locality…” (178) Moreover, he is keenly aware of the mutability of standard varieties and is keenly aware of the relationship between those mutable standard varieties and social class. If not iconoclastic, this view would be at least unusual in Whitney’s moment, provided that the views of the 18th Century and 19th Century prescriptive grammarians were still influential. “When the speech of the best speakers changes, those who do not conform have to be ranked in a lower class.” (156) Though his views on the social valuation of non-standard forms are not exactly clear, the theoretical move he makes – untethering particular forms of language from the class-based groups who use them – represents a progressive impulse on his part. The language / class relationship is, it should be noted, foundational to the contemporary study of language ideology, but yet, it is difficult to find a discussion of language ideology with citations that date before the 1960s.
Whitney’s writing on ‘race’ is equally compelling. His discussion goes beyond spelling out that “there is no necessary tie between race and language…” This is significant in itself given that linguistics has a long history of being complicit, rather than critical, of whatever view of race and ethnicity is popular in a given moment. Whitney follows up on the recognition that there is no necessary tie between language and race to tacitly challenge the prevailing taxonomy of race offered by ethnologists writing in his moment, citing a number of ‘races,’ including the Normans, the Celts, the Etruscans, whose languages have been replaced by others. The relationship between language and race is “not that of a physical characteristic…but only that of a transmitted institution.” (270) In contrast to his near-contemporaries, such as Otto Jesepersen (1921), who posit biological relationships between language and race, Whitney’s view of the relationship is definitively cultural.

The same thinking about the relationship between ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ that characterizes contemporary linguistics, and which serves as the underpinning for theory on language ideology, is articulated clearly by Whitney. Not much has been added to this view in the 145 years since Life and Growth was published. With respect to the meaning of ‘language’ and ‘dialect,’ he writes, “They are only two names for the same thing, as looked at from different points of view. Any body of expressions used by a community...for the purposes of communication and as the instrument of thought, is a
language…On the other hand, there is no tongue in the world to which we should not
with perfect freedom and perfect propriety apply the name of dialect…”

1.3.2 Leonard Bloomfield and 20th Century American structuralism

Like much scholarship throughout the history of linguistics, Leonard
Bloomfield’s masterful 1933 opus, Language, is remembered at times as a distant relic of
the structuralist past, cited more often for its name than its content. The work that fills
Language’s 500-plus pages has been consolidated into what we might now call “general
linguistics,” its core insights providing the basic schematization for countless
introductory linguistics textbooks, as Andreson (forthcoming) argues forcefully. Of the
many elisions in the historical consciousness of the discipline, a particularly striking one
is the great overlap between Bloomfield’s work on language variation and change and
contemporary thinking on the subject. I will focus on three areas within this overlap,
where Bloomfield’s thinking about language attends specifically to the social, including
a) the speech community, b) the social factors of language variation and change, and c)
language standardization and state-formation.

Language does give the thoroughgoing introduction to structural linguistics for
which it is best known, as the chapter titles make clear: “The Phoneme,” “Types of
Phonemes,” “Modifications,” “Phonetic Structure,” “Syntax,” “Morphology,”
“Morphological Types,” “Substitution,” and so on. Nevertheless, Language’s reach far
extends its structural reputation and much of Bloomfield’s work would be read in the contemporary context as ‘sociolinguistics.’ One domain of extreme import for Bloomfield is the ‘speech community,’ an important theoretical and methodological construct in contemporary sociolinguistics. The speech community was so important to Bloomfield, in fact, that he dedicated an entire chapter of Language to analyzing it, returning to it over and over throughout the course of the work. The prominence Bloomfield affords the speech community cannot be understated; it is, he writes, “the most important kind of social group.” (42)

The speech community in Bloomfield looks more or less like the speech community of the late 20th Century linguists. He is very clear that it is within the speech community that linguistic norms are acquired and reproduced, not within other social or cultural forms such as ‘the family.’ Bloomfield is strikingly clear on this point: “every child born acquires the habits of the speech community.” (29) Moreover, the speech community in Bloomfield would seem to cross-cut, rather than foreclose, displace, or be coterminous with other social or cultural formations, quite like the way the construct is articulated in contemporary scholarship. Social class, for example, produces “the most striking cleavage in our speech,” (45) but, at the same time, social class is not responsible for every difference in linguistic production. Because the speech community cross cuts

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4 Here I’m referring mainly to Labov. “It is true that we are concerned not so much with the individual as with the whole community.” (75)
other social formations in myriad ways, the speakers within any given community formation are not homogenous with respect to linguistic production. Bloomfield is aware of this and, in addition, makes room for idiolectal and stylistic variation within communities of speakers, writing that differences among speakers is, “partly a matter of bodily make-up⁵ and personal habit.” (45) It is, in my estimation, fair to say that the variationist conceptualization of the speech community is, simply, borrowed from Bloomfield.

Bloomfield is, of course, famous for proclaiming that language change can only be studied a posteriori. Surely one of the most important achievements of 20th Century linguistics is proving otherwise; that is, language change can be studied in-progress, as Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog showed in 1968 and as Labov confirmed in his 1963 study on Martha’s Vineyard. However, it would be quite problematic to dismiss the whole of Bloomfield’s writing on language change on the basis of this proclamation. It would also be a mistake to assume that, given his structuralist proclivities, Bloomfield’s work on language change is purely from the historical perspective. Rather, he recognizes quite explicitly the important link between synchronic variation and diachronic change, as is evident in the following passage from chapter three (“Speech Communities”) of Language:

⁵ By ‘bodily make-up,’ Bloomfield is likely referring to vocal-tract length, height of the speaker, etc.
The local dialects are of paramount importance to the linguist, not merely because their
great variety gives him work to do, but because the origin and history of the standard
and sub-standard types of speech can be understood only in the light of the local dialects.
Especially during the last decades, linguists have come to see that dialect geography
furnishes the key to many problems. (51)

Thus, dialect geography, the mythic disciplinary parent of modern
sociolinguistics, was of great interest to Bloomfield. He goes on to discuss dialect atlases,
isoglosses, and dialect areas, linking the methods of dialectology to the concerns of
language change. More importantly, however, Bloomfield makes the same distinction
between ‘social’ and ‘linguistic’ forces or conditions that get canonized as “internal
factors” and “external factors” in Labov’s volumes, *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume
One, Internal Factors* and *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume Two, Social Factors.*
Naturally, the scope of Labov’s volumes far exceeds the reach of *Language,* but the
impulse to separate ‘social’ factors influencing language change from ‘linguistic’ ones is
clearly present in Bloomfield. On this matter he writes, “…the spread of linguistic
features depends upon social conditions. The factors in this respect are doubtless
density of communication and the relative prestige of different social groups.” (345) In
addition, like Whitney some 50 years prior, Bloomfield is aware of the relationship
between social evaluation and linguistic form. Like the speech community and the
parsing of linguistic and social factors in diachronic change, the prestige construct is
usually attributed to a late 20th Century variationist. Trudgill’s 1978 study of English in
Norwich, England is the paper where contemporary linguists turn for definitions of
prestige, now understood to come in two principle forms, “overt prestige,” or
assimilation to standard forms, or “covert prestige,” assimilation to local or non-standard forms. But by 1933, Bloomfield had already written about the role of social evaluation and standardization in language variation and change and, unsurprisingly, had already described that relationship using the word, “prestige.” In Chapter 22, “Fluctuation in Forms,” Bloomfield writes, “The most powerful force of all in fluctuation works quite outside the linguist’s reach: the speaker favors the forms which he as heard from certain other speakers who, for some reason of prestige, influence his habits of speech.” (403) It must be added that the 20th Century variationists’ contribution was to show, in contrast to Whitney and Bloomfield, that social evaluation is not outside the linguist’s reach and that influence of social evaluation could be determined empirically.

What the contemporary socially curious language scholar would likely find most surprising when reading Bloomfield is neither his prescience on language change nor the thoroughness with which he theorizes the speech community, but his interest in language standardization, state formation, and language ideology. For reasons that I hope are clear by the end of this chapter, the narrativization of the history of the discipline typically does not proceed in ways that would allow for an early 20th Century structuralist to have been interested in the topics just enumerated. Nevertheless, Bloomfield seems more emotionally invested in these topics than any others and, moreover, his caustic assessment of grammarians and 18th Century authoritarianism is entirely copasetic with contemporary views on standardization. His interest in the
ideological concerns of language, and in particular language’s relationship to power, is evident from the outset of *Language* when, in a long list of historical advancements in the study of language ranging from the ancient Greeks to the Indo-Europeanists, he marks the 18th Century not as a century of progression but as one of disciplinary detumescence.

Consider this short passage from the first chapter of *Language*:

> In the eighteenth century, the spread of education led many dialect-speakers to learn the upper-class forms of speech. This gave the authoritarians their chance: they wrote normative grammars, in which they often ignored actual usage in favor of speculative notions. Both the belief in ‘authority’ and some of the fanciful rules still prevail in our schools. (7)

Long before Lippi-Green (1997) theorized the ideological production and gate-keeping effects of modern institutions such as education, popular media, and news media, Bloomfield, had already written generally about the effects of these institutions on language change. Paying attention to the steadily increasing historical standardization of the American dialects (485), Bloomfield engages a topic about which contemporary sociolinguists working on language variation and change have relatively little to say: state formation. In addition to noting the effects of political boundaries on language (54), which is more or less common knowledge, Bloomfield provides a general but more thorough outline of the development of the ideological construction of language ‘correctness’ through the apparatus of the state. Modern states and modern languages develop in parallel with the state leveraging the power of the variety it has legitimated the one and only ‘standard.’ Using the example of Serbo-Croatian, Bloomfield writes that one way states constitute themselves as independent nations is
through the establishment of a national language. The effect of state intervention on language is increasing homogenization and regional and non-standard varieties are displaced by the standards. This process is aided by popular discourses of ‘correctness,’ which are circulated by teachers and more generally by systems of education.

Bloomfield comes short of calling naming this process as ideological, but he is nonetheless quite clear about the ideological effects of the discourse:

The background of our popular ideas about language is the fanciful doctrine of the eighteenth-century ‘grammarians.’ This doctrine, still prevalent in our schools, brands all manner of forms as ‘incorrect,’ regardless of fact. Having heard the term ‘incorrect’ applied to variants which bear no undesirable connotation, the speaker grows diffident and is ready to suspect almost any speech form of ‘incorrectness. (496)

From this assessment, Bloomfield calls for a more progressive educational policy than that which gets articulated in the critical conversation about language and standardization today, advocating an approach based on teaching literacy rather than a standard variety per se.

It would be misleading to imply in this discussion that Bloomfield was in some way singular in his recognition of language’s social embedding, social consequences, and political possibilities. There is a great deal of overlap between Bloomfield and

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6 “The modern state, then, possesses a standard language...As soon as a speech-group attains or seeks political independence, or even asserts its cultural peculiarity, it works at setting up a standard language...The modern standard languages, which prevail within the bounds of an entire nation, supersede the provincial types. These standard languages become more and more uniform as time goes on.” (483)
Whitney with respect to the social forces involved in language change, for example, and it was only a decade or so after the publication of *Language* that Max Weinreich is credited with the aphorism, “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy.” I do not wish to imply that the sociality I am attempting to excavate from the historical record is in any way limited to the archive that I have selected. The ubiquity of the social, in fact, is the point of this historiographic effort.

1.3.3 B.F. Skinner and the socially embedded speaker

I turn to B.F. Skinner’s *Verbal Behavior* as an example of a fully theorized program in linguistic functionalism. Though there are certainly functionalist impulses in Whitney, and Bloomfield, it is Skinner who refuses most dramatically the separation between language and the use of language. Linguists may take issue with the inclusion of Skinner in my archive, as his impact on linguistics is regarded as nil. However, I’m compelled to use Skinner in this discussion for two reasons. The first is that I understand the mobilization of linguistic structure in culturally conventionalized ways to be a social practice unto itself. The second is that the historical sequence of events taking place in intellectual life at the time of *Verbal Behavior* and Chomsky’s subsequent repudiation of it are the fulcrum of the historiographic argument I’m attempt to put

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7 Weinreich is frequently credited for the aphorism, which he originally wrote in Yiddish, but he acknowledges that he learned the saying elsewhere.

8 “The meaning consists of the important things with which the speech-utterance is connected, namely the practical events.” (27)
together. Despite being poorly known by linguists, Skinner is of great historical value to the current discussion. In this section, I will focus only on the socially rich, functionalist approach to linguistic theory that Skinner provides.

Skinner is foremost invested in the relationship between meaning and practice, which we all know he considers to be ‘behavior.’ ‘Behavior’ happens to be a vexed term in our current intellectual moment and, as such, the contemporary reader of *Verbal Behavior* might suggest that the book be renamed *Verbal Practices*, which would eliminate the taboo of ‘behavior’ while simultaneously introducing the cache of ‘practice.’ In effect, it is the practice of social-cultural engagement (speech, writing, gesture, bodily stance) that is of interest to Skinner. Within the context of a certain lexicon, one could say that what Skinner was actually interested in were sociolinguistic practices, in which case one could recommend a second name change, to *Sociolinguistic Practices*. The point of this somewhat cynical discussion is not necessarily to recuperate *Verbal Behavior* for the contemporary sociolinguist or humanities language scholar, but instead to render intelligible the theoretical impetus for his functionalist program. Since it is the general approach that I’m interested in, I’ll provide a basic outline of *VB*, rather than focus on a few of its social investments.

Predicting the rise of ‘information’ as an intellectual category, Skinner writes, “one unfortunate consequence is the belief that speech has an independent existence apart from the behavior of the speaker. Words are regarded as tools or instruments,
analogous to the tokens, counters, or signal flags sometimes employed for verbal purposes.” (7) One of the things that makes VB highly readable is its many examples, including the following example illustrating Skinner’s point about linguistic instrumentalism: “We have no more reason to say that a man ‘uses the word water’ in asking for a drink than to say that he ‘uses a reach’ in taking the offered glass.” (7) Therefore, language is not functionally different from other forms of socially embedded comportments. This means that if language could not be spoken verbally, “the problems of verbal behavior would remain.” (17) This is profound, as it moves the focus from decontextualized form to socially embedded meaning. Before proceeding further with Skinner, I should point out to the skeptical reader that this functionalist sentiment is evident also in Bloomfield, whose account of linguistic stimulus / response is more crude and general than Skinner’s, but is nevertheless present in Language. Like Skinner’s ‘water’ example, Bloomfield gives the child who wants his doll. Saying ‘doll’ results in the child’s parents giving him the doll. The receipt of the doll is “an additional stimulus” in Bloomfield (30), or “reinforcement” in Skinner. The mistake would be to take Skinner’s account as being about stimulus / response; it is not, but the impulse to connect social conditions to conventionalized language use is present in both Skinner and Bloomfield.

The basic unit of linguistic behavior is the ‘operant,’ which is a verbal response to its functionally related independent variables, or context. The emphasis – and the
location of meaning for the language user – is the social conditions that produce the operant (response, dependent variable). Operants have conditional uses in the context of what Skinner calls “verbal communities,” which orient speakers toward local linguistic norms, maintained through social evaluation. (26) The verbal community construct, similar in many ways to Bloomfield’s speech community, is not inflexible – Skinner allowed for inevitable modifications to verbal behavior stemming from changes in the verbal environment. Changes in individual practices, based on changes in the demands of verbal communities as well as changes that take place “in the reinforcing practices of the community as a whole” lead to broad modifications in verbal behavior. Note that this amounts to a socially functionalist account of language change, not completely dissimilar from that offered by Whitney. Language change is the effect of what we might call local, socio-cultural change based on the needs and practices of culturally embedded language users.

Provided that the impetus for verbal behavior is the set of social conditions that produce a conventionalized (or unconventionalized) operant, Skinner warns against approaches that focus only on the dependent variable, naming “word counts” in particular. (27) One particular type of operant is the ‘mand,’ which is reinforced by its

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9 “…meaning is not a property of behavior as such but of the conditions under which behavior occurs.” (13-4)

10 “Verbal behavior is shaped and sustained by a verbal environment – by people who respond to behavior in certain ways because of the practices of the group of which they are members.” (226)
functional consequences (command, demand, etc.) and names its own reinforcements, or consequences. Mands require a “total speech episode,” (36) which is a useful conceptualization, as a total speech episode is broad enough to consider the details of setting, power differences between speaker and listener, all the way up to the social conditions that constitute speakers in culturally determined ways.

Another theoretically productive Skinnerean operant is the autoclitic, which names a behavior that in some way depends on other verbal behavior, anchoring the speaker in “a place in which a number of variables come together in a unique confluence to yield an equally unique achievement.” (313) The autoclitic could, for example, describe to an interlocutor the strength or state of an operant (e.g. I guess, I estimate, I believe) or inform the interlocutor of the type of operant that joins it (I see in I see it is going to rain). (315) Language, then, is an active part of the verbal environment in which it occurs. It does not report or communicate some other level of comportment; it co-constructs the reality of its own utterance.

It is not my intention to claim that Skinner devised the perfect social theory of language use. What I am claiming is that Skinner set up a theoretical program in which language behavior was seen as fundamentally social. It is on the grounds of this social functionalism that Chomsky launched his generative program, which has shaped the way linguistics has valued and theorized social analysis for over a half century.
1.3.4 Noam Chomsky and the evacuation of the social from American linguistics

Though the specific theoretical investments in the social are distinct in each case, what all of the preceding accounts share is a commitment to understanding the fundamental role of language in the social lives of its users. This is an exceedingly general statement to make about the archive that I’ve selected, for what Whitney, Sapir, Bloomfield, and Skinner have to say about the relationship between the linguistic and the social covers a very broad array of theoretical concerns. So while Skinner’s highly functionalist view of language as a type of social comportment that achieves certain social-psychological ends is shared conceptually by Whitney, Bloomfield, and to a lesser extent Sapir, functionalism is by no means the *raison d’etre* of their attention to the social life of language. One could continue to identify at great length the points of similarity and departure on the social/linguistic relationship within this archive, but the point is that nowhere in the archive is language dispossessed of the social. One finds in the history of linguistics, instead, a rich social past – from Whitney’s social account of language acquisition to Skinner’s social-functionalist account of contextually embedded language use. Thus, what I’ve attempted to sketch in the preceding sections is what I consider to be both a longstanding engagement and a fundamental prioritization of the social/linguistic relationship.
It is tempting to posit a trajectory of increasing functionalism in the history of American linguistics, leading up to Skinner’s thoroughly functionalist theory, but I believe such a trajectory would be false. The intellectual climate of the late 1950s had, however, made space for a radically non-formalist theory of language whose concerns were not explicitly ‘social’ in terms of what we might associate with sociology, but whose philosophical orientation to language is one in which language only makes sense as a fully integrated dimension of the behavior of language users. Skinner’s behaviorism, what I have been calling functionalist, is simply not interested in the formalist concerns that had dominated linguistics at least since the Indo-Europeanists. One could say, perhaps misleadingly, that *Verbal Behavior* is, thus, the 20th Century work most invested in the social, at least insofar as the social can be indexed by language use.

Then came the backlash, ushered in by Noam Chomsky in his review of *Verbal Behavior* and the introduction of the generative program and Universal Grammar, all anchored firmly in Cartesian philosophy. Chomsky’s rebuttal of Skinner and his debut onto the American linguistics scene has more to do with the way contemporary sociolinguistics understands the social, I argue, than the entire history of American linguistics prior to the Cartesian turn. Somehow, the historical record – and its emphasis on the social life of language – got lost in the obsession with Universal Grammar. As a result, the ‘critical’ response offered to the generative program by William Labov and his variationist approach to sociolinguistics came to be seen as the only viable alternative to
Chomsky. If Chomsky was the mind, Labov was the social. The two were posed as oppositional, dichotomous, the two approaches to language study, never mind the history of language study dating to Panini, the Greeks, the Roman rhetoricians, and so on. The real hat trick, though, was convincing linguists that variationism was revolutionary, in the Kunian sense when, in reality, its underlying philosophical orientation was toward linguistic formalism. Hope for a social linguistics was tied to an approach that mobilized the social to answer the same set of questions as the approach it was ostensibly critiquing.

While Chomsky’s approach was not necessarily innovative, the effects of it were dramatic. In an essay written in 1968, Chomsky wrote that linguistics was actually “a branch of cognitive psychology,” mocking the dogmatism of status quo psychology (i.e. behaviorism) for positing little s’s and little r’s (stimulus and response) in the brain. He wrote that computer technology and the sound spectrograph, which held great promise for the empirical study of language, would contribute to “more of the same.” Rather than behaviorism, mathematics, spectrography, and computer technology (all critiqued in the 1968 essay), Chomsky advocates a complete and total repudiation of any focus on language use, which he describes thusly:

It has, I believe, become quite clear that if we are ever to understand how language is used or acquired, then we must abstract for separate and independent study a cognitive system, a system of knowledge and belief, that develops in early childhood and that interacts with many other factors to determine the kinds of behavior that we observe; to introduce a technical term, we must isolate and study the system of linguistic competence that underlies behavior but that is not realized in any direct or simple way in behavior. (4)
The approach he advocates is made possible by a turn to what he calls “the century of genius,” the 17th Century, in which Cartesian dualism (separation of mind and body) promises to refocus the study of language on the mind, which Chomsky claims was “prematurely abandoned.”

With language now squarely located in the mind (read: not the brain), generativism – the belief in the capability of the human mind to generate new thoughts that could be expressed in creative ways – was made possible. (8) Invoking Descartes’ claim that language is unique to humans (and universal in humans), Chomsky describes what he means by “creative use of language.”

1. normal language is innovative (“denied in the behaviorist period of linguistics”)
2. free from the control of stimuli, either external or internal (this freedom from control is why language can serve as a vehicle for thought)
3. appropriateness to the situation (11)

“Creativity” was a mechanism for shutting down functionalist or ‘behaviorist’ approaches, which Chomsky read mistakenly as not allowing for creativity since every utterance (‘response’) was supposedly produced top-down by a stimulus. In other words, creativity was another way of consolidating language within a mentalist framework. The central concern of linguistics was no longer the use of language or even language itself, but the mysterious human mind. The problem of the human mind,
“cannot be talked out of existence by invoking ‘habit’ or ‘conditioning’ or ‘natural selection.’” (11) Curiously, even as the object of study became the mind, and even as linguistics was deemed a branch of cognitive psychology, language study was moved further away from the disciplines with the most to say about human cognition. On the problems of the human mind, Chomsky writes, “Neither physics nor biology nor psychology gives us any clue as to how to deal with these matters.” (12)

Generative linguistics was built not only on a critique of behaviorism, but also of structuralism, the former being developed in “self-conscious” opposition to the descriptive tradition in which the role of the “grammarian” (structural linguist?) was to record and organize data – “a kind of natural history.” (14) Thus, the generative approach forecloses not only the theoretical possibilities of social analysis, but also the empirical ones, favoring abstract mentalism over material history of language. Further rejecting the descriptivist tradition, Chomsky argues that structuralism has failed because its analysis is limited to “surface structure.” (20) This is critique is only possible having first posited the abstract, “deep structure,” investigation of which became possible only through the generative approach given deep structure’s location in the human mind.

The Cartesian turn not only left linguistics without a viable descriptive framework and a theoretical apparatus rooted in language, it also successfully removed the social from the discipline. Whereas Whitney gave a very rich account of the social
environment of the language learner, Chomsky’s language learner is impeded by its social environment. Whereas Bloomfield made progress on the problem of diachronic change by considering the social influences on language evolution, there is no consideration of such social influences in Chomsky because language change is wholly absent from the generative program. Whereas language was a fundamental part of the experience of culture in Skinner, experience, especially corporeal experience, is orthogonal to Universal Grammar. The point is not that every intellectual project should necessarily cover the same conceptual or theoretical terrain, but rather that the forceful dismissals made by Chomsky – and the hegemony of Universal Grammar that came in the wake of those dismissals – had totalizing effects on the discipline. One of those effects was the evacuation of the social from linguistics. The effect of that evacuation that is of interest here is the ongoing false dichotomization – in narratives of the history of the discipline – of generative linguistics, on the one hand, and the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s on the other.


“What types of knowledge are you trying to disqualify when you say that you are a science? What speaking subject, what discursive subject, what subject of experience and knowledge are you trying to minorize when you begin to say: ‘I speak this discourse, I am speaking a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist.’” Foucault 1967, 10

What I have realized in reading the historical record – even the sliver of it that I have managed to mobilize for this project in the past couple of years – is that Labovian
sociolinguistics only makes sense theoretically when put in conversation with Chomsky.

The narrative of the Labovian revolution or the variationist revolution or the sociolinguistic revolution is, in my view, a gross distortion of the history of the discipline in which that revolution allegedly took place. This is important in its own right, but it is also important for the argument I’m attempting to sew here. While it is true that Labov reintroduces the social to linguistics following its evacuation during the Cartesian turn, he does so in a much more limited way than is commonly thought. The widespread misunderstanding of Labov’s social impact, I believe, must be due to the promise of ending the hegemony of the Chomskyean program or in the possibility of research projects previously foreclosed by the evacuation of the social from language within generativism. Whatever the cause of the misunderstanding, Labov is at times quite clear about what he means by social. He writes that the concern of his work is with:

> the study of language structure and evolution within the social context of the speech community. The linguistic topics to be considered here cover the area usually named ‘general linguistics,’ dealing with phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The theoretical questions to be raised will also fall into the category of general linguistics. We will be concerned with the forms of linguistic rules, their combination into systems, the coexistence of several systems, and the evolution of these rules and systems with time. If there were no need to contrast this work with the study of language out of its social context, I would prefer to say that this was simply linguistics. (1972a, 184)

He repeats the orientation even more plainly in 1975, when he writes that sociolinguistics is concerned with, “the general study of the structure of language.” (77)

Thus, Labov’s crowning achievement is moving language from the mind (generativism)
to the speech community, but placing language in the domain of the social does not mean letting go of structural formalism, as is quite clear from the passage above.

Variationism’s orientation to the social, then, is one designed to facilitate questions of structural linguistics and the study of language change – not to open up language to a new set of questions concerning the social and certainly not to constitute a new discipline. The structuralist orientation to the use of the social was set, if not in 1966, than most certainly in 1968 in Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog’s paper on language change, in which social structure is mobilized as a means of illuminating linguistic structure in an effort to answer questions about language change (i.e., diachrony) raised by Saussure, Bloomfield, Paul, and others. Figueroa puts it another way in her description of variationism: “Explanation for linguistic phenomena such as language change may be social, but this does not then require the sociological study of language change.” (1994, 70)

Variationism can be said to have inherited the same formalist epistemological framework from its linguistic predecessors in the structuralist tradition. Accordingly, variationism is the study of language in its social context, but it is not the study of language use or the study of the cultural or social meaning of language. Unlike the structuralists and generativists who dismiss the social outright, variationists make use of the social by articulating a correlative relationship between linguistic structure and social structure. This work has proceeded by starting with social categories taken
mainly from sociology – age, class, ethnicity, gender, nativity, etc. – and statistically mapping linguistic variables onto them. Variationism has introduced to sociolinguistic theory indispincible concepts: the sociolinguistic variable, the speech community, the study of stylistic variation, an emphasis on gradient phenomena instead of categorical phenomena. Seminal studies such as Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley (1967), Cedergren (1973), Trudgill (1974), Lavandera (1975), Modaressi (1978), Feagin (1979), Oliveira (1983), Milroy (1980), Poplack (1982), Horvath (1985), Fridland (1998), Boberg (2004), Baranowski (2006) and many, many others have established important patterns of linguistic variation, without which no sociolinguistic theory of any kind would be possible. In addition, the validity of the findings from variationist work is impressive: the same patterns of sociolinguistic stratification and stylistic stratification have been attested time and again in diverse locations (U.S. cities, Rio de Janeiro, Panama City, Montreal, Cairo, etc.) in numerous languages. As a result of this work, we know a great deal about the correlational relationship between social scientific categories and linguistic variation and, further, we know a good deal about the relationship between linguistic variation and linguistic change. The virtue of variationism is summed up by Eckert (2005): “[variationistm] established a regular and replicable pattern of socioeconomic stratification of variables, in which the use of non-standard, and geographically and ethnically distinctive variants, correlate inversely with socioeconomic status.” (2)
The problem is that variationism is not designed or intended to do all the things it is taken to do, and it certainly was never intended to constitute the entire theoretical apparatus of a discipline that it didn’t even claim for itself. On the question of theory, Labov says explicitly, “I do not believe that we need at this point a new ‘theory of language’; rather, we need a new way of doing linguistics that will yield decisive solutions.” (1972a, 259) If a new theory of language was not needed, one has to wonder if Labov was advocating that Universal Grammar be taken as the default, or if no theory was in effect useful. Labov’s interest was clearly in methodology, not theory. With respect to the question of methodology, variationist methods are designed for a very specific structuralist project, but have been extended somewhat uncritically to other types of sociolinguistics, which has produced a sort of theoretical schizophrenia in which research design, methods, and interpretation are epistemologically and theoretically incoherent (see Briggs 1986 and Milroy 1987 for critical discussions of sociolinguistic methods). Thus, the most problematic theoretical move is equating variationism with the whole of sociolinguistic theory. This equation produces elisions in the theoretical terrain of the discipline, ranging from multilingualism (since variationism remains

11 Labov’s relationship to theory is complicated. I feel compelled to provide a line from the preceding page of Labov 1972a, where he is clearly at odds with the generative program for reducing language to an abstraction: “Linguists did take the somewhat unusual step of redefining the field so that the everyday use of language in the community would be placed outside of linguistics proper—to be called speech, not language. Rather than worry about the difficulties of dealing with this material, linguists found it quite unnecessary, on theoretical grounds, to account for it; indeed, it was argued that a linguist should not be concerned with the facts of speech.” (258)
largely monolingual in focus), the study of the linguistic individual (since variationism is staunchly group-oriented), and functionalist questions about language use and social meaning (since variationism is consistently formalist).

Chomsky, who in 1968 writes, “It seems to me that the arguments advanced against the legitimacy of the approach have little force...and that its basic assumptions are tacitly adopted even by those who strenuously reject them.” (my emphasis, 175) Here Chomsky was absolutely prescient, for today the theoretical linguistic backdrop to sociolinguistic practice (and some forms of sociolinguistic theory) is Universal Grammar, and we have just seen that Labov may have explicitly endorsed this himself. This is to say that the work of sociolinguistics more or less proceeds unimpeded in practice by UG, and indeed is in most cases orthogonal to UG, but sociolinguistics still seems to accept the basic theoretical premise of UG, even while critiquing its general orientation to language, its methods, etc. The result is a bizarre dissonance – sociolinguistic theory should be fundamentally at odds with the basic theoretical framework of UG, not, as Chomsky said, tacitly accepting of it. A critique of UG from the perspective of theoretical sociolinguistics has yet to be written. The incommensurability remains unarticulated because, in fact, the projects, though different, are epistemologically related.

The earliest variationist studies were, despite their empiricism, tacit engagements with transformational grammar. Given the historical context, this engagement makes good sense. Labov’s *Language in the Inner City* (1972a) and Wolfram’s *Sociolinguistic*
Aspects of Assimilation (1973) are both early attempts at positing variable rules. The variable rule phenomenon was an attempt at applying rules of transformational grammar to dialect data. Work such as Wolfram’s and Labov’s are important for bringing a certain legitimacy to the study of language variation – there was, following them, no way that variationists could be accused of being unable to do ‘real linguistics.’ And perhaps more importantly, the application of generative rules to stigmatized varieties (African American English in the case of Labov and Puerto Rican English in the case of Wolfram) forcefully illustrated the fact the same linguistic principles operating in “standard” varieties were also operational in non-standard ones. As much as I admire the engagement with transformational grammar in its moment, I also admire the abandonment of it once that engagement was realized that variable rules were not theoretically or practically productive. But the variable rule phenomenon lives on through VARBRUL, the statistical program long used in variationist sociolinguistics, which resulted from Cedergren & Sankoff’s (1974) theoretical engagement with Chomsky’s competence and performance. Their paper, which was published in Language, takes up Chomsky’s competence/ performance dichotomy and conceives of linguistic variation as the statistical manifestation of competence. They model competence in conventional generative terms but rather than positing optional rules, as the transformational model would have done, they instead posit statistical probabilities
for these structures. They acknowledge that generativism cannot account for variation without adapting the obligatory/optional rule formulation.

Thus, the critique in Cedegren and Sankoff is not of generative linguistic theory, but of optionality: “The label ‘optional’ fails to convey any information as to how the elements of the structural description of a rule favor or constrain its operation. Rather, use of this label implies that all such information is foreign to the competence of the native speaker.” (333) The theoretical move, then, is to move variation to the domain of competence, thus elevating it from the throw-away domain of performance and making it a legitimate object of study within generativism. Variability is then conceptualized as an element of linguistic structure, following Labov, and this makes it available to generative rule writing; the variable rule (mentioned above) is thus posited. And the authors are very clear that the variable rules are part of individual grammar: “The variable rules developed by Labov should, like other rules of generative grammar, be interpreted as part of individual competence.” (335) [emphasis added] In their conclusion, the Cedergren & Sankoff write that, “The full importance of variable rules can be appreciated only from a certain paradigmatic standpoint, one which constitutes a slight but distinct shift from most generative theory.” (352) In the end, probabilities are conceived of as a part of competence (captured by variable rules) and frequencies are a part of performance (353).
While the variable rule phenomenon is all but forgotten, and while Cedergren & Sankoff’s theoretical intervention is only found as a vestige in VARBRUL, sociolinguists, and variationists in particular, are still today working on new interfaces with the generative project. The current engagements are primarily with Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 1993), which is used in phonology but more recently in syntax, and in the incorporation of variationist data into generative syntactic frameworks. This work is by no means marginal within variation studies. Blackwell’s *Handbook of Language Variation and Change* (Chambers, Trudgill, Schilling-Estes 2002), edited by three prominent sociolinguists, contains two papers that are distinctively and unabashedly Chomskyan. The first (Antilla 2002) is called ‘Variation and Phonological Theory’ and is essentially an account of OT and variation. In order to point out the enduring influence of generativism – even in sociolinguistics – I will provide a close reading of the other Chomskyan paper in the *Handbook*, titled ‘Variation and Syntactic Theory,’ (Henry 2002).

Henry’s chapter begins thusly: “In sociolinguistics, language is seen as inherently variable, and much work has been concerned with identifying the conditioning factors – both linguistic and social – that determine that variation. One might say that if language was not variable, there would be no sociolinguistics.” (267) This statement gave me great pause, for several reasons, not the least of which was that this is found in a handbook whose target audience is comprised mostly of sociolinguists. It is, of course, not the case that sociolinguistics is synonymous with variation, but what is more telling is that
without variation not only would there not be sociolinguistics, there also would not be language. No matter how sympathetic Henry ends up being toward variationism, she puts us in a theoretical paradox from the outset and the reader is, implicitly, asked to reason, contrary to their own field’s theoretical disposition, that a language without variation is possible.

While Henry does note that it is “surprising” that variationism has not impacted theoretical syntax more deeply, she claims that this is due to differences in the way that the two fields collect their data. It would seem to me, however, that data collection is a difference that follows from much deeper theoretical differentiation between the fields. While I do contend that Chomsky was correct when he said that even his most ardent critics tacitly accept the basic premise of Universal Grammar – this applies to many sociolinguists – the ostensible theoretical starting points are nevertheless antithetical to one another. When William Labov proclaimed that the linguistic variable was itself a linguistic structure and, further, that this structure was in part socially derived, the field of sociolinguistics also proclaimed itself as at odds with generativism, which holds that linguistic structure is a function of the principles and parameters of an autonomous, innate faculty of language. While sociolinguistics has not lived up to the potential of its own original anti-generative proclamation, the indifference paid to language variation by theoretical syntacticians is not a question of methods of data collection alone.
The opportunity that linking the linguistic variable to social structure made possible – the possibility of a social sociolinguistics offered in ‘The social motivation of a sound change’ – was not taken. The disciplinary project started by Labov, potentially a critique of Chomsky, ended up in many ways reinscribing Chomsky, leaving linguistics with an etiolated view of the social. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) recognized the simultaneous opening up and shutting down that Labov’s work set into play:

Those who, wishing to break with linguistic abstractions, try to establish statistically the social factors of linguistic competence (measured by this or that phonological, lexical or syntactic index) are only going half-way: they are in fact forgetting that the different factors measured in a particular market situation – that created by the inquiry – could, in a different situation, have very different relative weights, and that what is important therefore is to determine how the explanatory weights of the different factors which determine competence vary according to the market situation. (72)

This critique is not intended in any way to be a dismissal of variationist paradigm; I myself work within it in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. The point I am stressing is that by the 1960s, linguistics in the U.S. had taken a major turn to anti-social theory. The critical response made to that turn in linguistic theory, issued by Labov, was successful in part because it consolidated part of what it was ostensibly critiquing. A consequence of this consolidation was a devaluation of theory attending specifically to the social. Within an under-theorized social framework, an under-theorized concept of identity emerged.
1.5 The Problem of Identity

So far I have argued that the field narrates its own history in a way that problematically sets Chomskyan generativism in opposition to the Labovian variationist framework. This false dichotomy was brought about by the evacuation of the social from linguistic theory by Chomsky beginning in the late 1950s. This evacuation produced an erasure of linguistic theories of society prior to the Cartesian turn from the historical consciousness. Using a small archive ranging from William Dwight Whitney to B.F. Skinner, I provided a critical history of pre-Cartesian linguistic theory in order to show that although a fully articulated theory of language and the social had not been attempted prior to Chomsky, the social was nevertheless a vibrant and robust dimension of linguistic thinking in that era. The introduction by Labov of a “new” social approach into the socially evacuated linguistic landscape resulted in the belief that the atheoretical variationist paradigm was the only viable way of linking language with society. I argued that because this paradigm was formalist in nature, its possibilities for theorizing the social were already limited. This limitation resulted in an oversimplified identity construct, what I call ‘identity of condition,’ which was based roughly on the general social scientific model of the time.
1.5.1 Social theory and interdisciplinarity in sociolinguistics ¹²

Exhaustion with this top-down construct, coupled with challenges to its general epistemological framework from broader intellectual movements, including Post-structuralism, resulted in a shift in emphasis to the use of language in the ‘construction’ of identity in, among other frameworks, practice-based accounts of language use. For example, social theories of social practice and social action (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, Wenger 1998, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) have been especially influential in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, including in work on ‘language and identity.’ Again, the interest in social theory outside of linguistics must be related to the realization on the part of sociolinguists that linguistic variation is as valuable to social theory as it is to linguistic theory and, further, that linguistic variation is socially meaningful in the lives of its users. Coupland (2007, 86) argues,

it has become increasingly obvious that the sociolinguistic structures that matter for speakers in their social lives are not simply the describable statistical patterns of speech co-varying with class and situation. They are the ideological structures that imbue language variation with social meaning, and often with social disadvantage.

This realization has pushed some sociolinguists to turn to social theory produced in disciplines outside of linguistics. Some recent dissertations have been decidedly inter-disciplinary, engaging mostly with sociology (e.g., Dodsworth 2005, Mallinson 2006), while others work primarily within linguistics but dedicate much of the space to social

analysis (e.g., Podesva 2006, Rose 2006). Coupland (86) notices this trend as well, writing, “…sociolinguistics is increasingly well positioned to engage with ideological debates in social theory.” However, as Mallinson (2009, 1035) observes, “the disciplinary divide…between sociologists and sociolinguists remains current.” This, she notes, is largely due to the fact that learning more than one field well is time consuming.

Whether the recent tendency for young scholars in linguistics to engage with cross-disciplinary social theory is a sign of a broader shift in the discipline or an ephemeral trend remains to be seen. In either case, however, there are already signs of some push back. One particularly striking example comes from Thomas (2007, 216) in a description of sociophonetics:

“In recent years, though, a strong movement toward sociological issues such as power and identity has materialized within sociolinguistics, especially among younger sociolinguists. The sociological focus dominates some topics, such as language and gender, especially thoroughly, as recent collections (e.g. Coates 1998, Hall and Bucholtz 1995) attest. While these issues are unquestionably important from a sociological standpoint, their influence will inevitably draw sociolinguistics farther from other branches of linguistics. Sociolinguistics thus faces the same sort of threat that led to the demise of dialect geography in North America, in that dialect geography became increasingly concerned with cultural geography issues…during the mid-twentieth century and lost sight of its role as a means of testing linguistic theories. Sociophonetics – or phonetic sociolinguistics – represents a path into the mainstream of linguistics. Whether sociolinguistics will exploit or squander this opening remains to be seen.

1.5.2 Identity and theory

This brings me to the final part of the argument: the problem of identity. What is wrong with the impulse to understand the deployment of particular linguistic variables as being a function of some aspect of speaker identity? The short answer is ‘nothing.’
Identity surely plays an important role in the way people speak. This is not in question, and many empirical studies in sociolinguistics have examined the effect of identity on language use (e.g., Kiesling 1998, Mendoza-Denton 2008, Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, Schilling-Estes 1998). Identity, however, is but one piece of a much larger field in which language users – *speaking subjects* – are produced. The conflation of identity with subjectivity, and the reliance on identity as the dominant theoretical construct results in the exclusion everything that lies in excess of identity. The theoretical intervention that this work hopes to make is to articulate a framework in which language and the social are fundamentally, not correlationally, connected. If language and the social inhabit one another, if the constitution of language is fundamentally social (a view long held in linguistics), and if the social is fundamentally produced through language (a view articulated in Poststructural theory), what follows is a series of questions about the effects of these arrangements for the user of language. If children develop socially and linguistically in an environment that mobilizes language for socialization, and the mechanisms of the social to instantiate language, it seems that the possibilities of the performance of language, that is, the use of language, must be vastly more complicated (and interesting) than what sociolinguistic theory of identity – the hermeneutics of identity- would have us to accept.

Both of the mechanisms I introduced earlier for linking identity to language – identity of condition and identity of choice – accomplish the same sort of theoretical
work, despite their ostensibly different orientations to the speaker, given that both are bound to the same identitarian epistemological framework. What follows is a list of ‘problems’ with identity. Every item in the list is a generalization and for every generalization, there are counter-examples. What I am attempting to do with the list is outline the theoretical disadvantages of identity, which I will follow up on more completely in Chapter 2. Specifically, identity is an incomplete way of theorizing the relationship between the linguistic and the social because,

1. Identity is one piece of subjectivity, a term I will introduce formally in the following chapter. Identity forces the reduction of complex speaking subjects to singular or ‘intersecting’ identitarian dimensions of subjectivity. That which lies in excess of articulations of identity is untheorized.

2. Traditionally, identity is context independent and more or less immutable. Thus, language users within any research category are thought to inhabit their identity categories irrespective of the context of their articulation. In contrast, subjectivity is dialectic and context dependent. Subjectivity allows that identities be multiple, contextual, imbricated, dialectical, and mutable over time. Understanding language as a function of one identity at one point vitiates the social richness of human subjectivity and human language.

3. Identity often is reduced to difference. While it may account for a certain set of differences between jocks and burnouts and vineyarders and non-vineyarders or
New Yorkers and Detroiters with respect to use of a particular sociolinguistic variable, it doesn’t necessarily account for what is in common, or for what is not captured by the methods that examine ‘identity’ in the first place. When identity is reduced to difference, the difference is calculated based on distance from an unmarked subject.

4. Identity is based on averages. Identity is thought to be revealed through a set of linguistic practices that can be statistically correlated to group categories, either social scientific-based, so-called “top-down” categories (identity of condition: ‘gender,’ ‘age,’ ‘ethnicity,’ ‘nativity’) or ethnographically-based, the so-called “bottom-up categories” (identity of choice: ‘nerds,’ ‘jocks,’ ‘gang girls’). Cameron (1990) provides a useful critique of what she calls the “language reflects society myth” in sociolinguistics, the stock account of which is as follows:

…there exist social categories, structures, divisions, attitudes and identities which are marked or encoded or expressed in language use. By correlating patterns of linguistic variation with these social or demographic features, we have given a sufficient account of them. (The account may also be supplemented with crudely functionalist ideas – that speakers ‘use’ language to express their social identity, for instance – or with a slightly less crude model in terms of group ‘norms’ at both macro- and micro-levels.)

5. The process(es) through which particular linguistic variables acquire their local meanings and the process(es) through which those variables get incorporated into a larger semiotic representational field are not known. To the extent that broader social factors, sometimes referred to as “macro forces,” are thought to
relate to local meanings, systems of representation, and linguistic practices, the order of the terms has yet to be worked out. That is, the relationship between the local and the non-local is yet to be theorized. The emphasis on local meaning has resulted in the untethering of local identities from the broader historical and cultural forces that constitute them.

6. Identity overestimates agency. Subjectivity recognizes that ostensibly positive articulations of identity may result from non-agentive events. Much of the recent work in linguistics involving social theory has been concerned with social practice, and speakers ‘doing’ things with language, where ‘doing’ is synonymous with ‘agency.’ Socio-cultural approaches to language and identity, likewise, ascribe as agentive the many changes in footing and ebbs and flows of identity that take place in normal interaction, many times without regard for the means through which speakers are constituted in the fields of meaning associated with those identities in the first place.

7. The assumption that language use proceeds from a identity, conceived as either core and stable or mutable and mobile, produces unnecessary discrete constructs. Accommodation, disaccommodation, crossing, dialect performance, communities of practice, etc., are not needed as independent constructs when the theoretical scaffolding allows for socially embedded speaking subjects. Within a
framework of subjectivity, complexity within the speaker is the norm, not the exception.

8. Identity reinscribes the belief in authentic language. The object of linguistic theory and analysis has been a moving target and it has frequently been motivated by belief in what ‘real’ language is. The dialectologists searched far and wide for relic forms, looking for the authentic dialect. Similarly, the sociolinguistics, following Labov, began their search for the ‘vernacular,’ believe that it was what best represented authentic language. The project of searching for the authentic language has been moved from large-scale survey studies to small scale local studies or studies of small social groups or communities of practice.

In the next chapter, I elaborate on the problem of identity as it pertains to linguistics but, more generally, I explore critiques to identity issued within contemporary theory. Through a rigorous engagement with feminist theory, where identity and subjectivity have been foundational constructs, I introduce Post-Structural theory of subject formation. The concepts introduced at the end of Chapter 2 inform the analysis provided throughout the rest of the dissertation.
2. Can the subject speak? Linguistics and theory in the wake of the linguistic turn

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects.
-Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power

2.1 Introduction

Within the whole of the humanities and interpretive social sciences, there are likely very few sites that remain uninfluenced by the poststructuralist notion of language. It would seem odd, if not ironic, that one noticeable holdout to the influence of language would be the discipline whose explicit object of study is Language itself. One might observe something peculiar about the refusal of those disciplines whom have proudly made the linguistic turn to apprehend “linguistic” beyond its most casual and obvious synonym: language. What I’m suggesting is a gap between those who take language to be a conventionalized system of structures and signs used to facilitate social intercourse between humans and those who take language to be discourse at the level of culture. How did these understandings of language develop independently of one another, despite the many rich sites of theoretical overlap? More to the point, how did it come to pass that the most critical conversation taking place in the humanities over the past fifteen years managed not to take place in the discipline cited as its origin? What is the source of this elision? I would like suggest a couple of possibilities. First, that linguistics – the oft-cited source of Foucault’s inspiration, the ostensible home of Structuralism, and
dare I say, the imagined epicenter of the linguistic turn – has rendered itself irrelevant to
the humanities and social sciences by clinging to some version of its Cartesian vision, on
the one hand, and an unfortunate ideological, ‘scientific’ self-image on the other. I would
also suggest, secondly, that the gap has as much to do with a reluctance on the part of
the humanities and social sciences to devote much intellectual energy to the study of
language beyond its hugely important yet limited manifestations in literature, rhetoric,
cultural discourse, etc. Regardless of the source of the knowledge gap, it is not
controversial to make the claim that linguistics, on whole, has resisted the linguistic turn
and, similarly, the disciplines that have made the linguistic turn have resisted
interfacing with linguistics.

But my objective in this chapter is not to locate or expose the source of the
detachment between linguistics and the linguistic turn, or any of its disciplinary
instantiations. Instead, my aim is to integrate the critical conversation about subject
formation and subjectivity into linguistics, with the hope that this project will be useful
not only to linguists but scholars working in a wide range of related disciplines. I should
note that the conversation around subject formation has entered linguistics in a very
limited capacity through the field of language and sexuality, with Cameron and Kulick
(2003) offering a critique of identity based largely in psychoanalysis. I work through
Cameron and Kulick’ argument later in this chapter, but my own approach does not
engage significantly with psychoanalysis, given the difficulties it poses for empirical investigation, as Mendoza-Denton (2002, 475) notes.

My own aim – a thoroughgoing integration into linguistics of the conversation around subject formation and subjectivity – entails unpacking what ‘language’ means to both audiences, though the use of language outside of linguistics will be weighted more heavily. The mode by which the integration of a theory of subject formation will take place is through a sustained, critical engagement with “identity,” particularly as it gets articulated in the coalition of fields that might together be called sociolinguistics.

The central argument is this: Identity has an important relationship with language, as sociolinguists have productively described over the past 45 years. Nevertheless, identity is but one sliver of the more broadly encompassing composition of human subjectivity, which I take to be the complex aggregation of ontology (self-identification) and interpellation (identification by others), each of which is shaped by innumerable social forces and relationships of power, as has been described in prior social theory (West and Zimmerman 1987; Foucault 1983; Kulick 1992, etc.). The methodo-theoretical orientation of linguistics to language and the social problematically reduces complex speaking subjects to oversimplified articulations of identity. This is true regardless of whether the categories of identity are assumed a priori or are ‘discovered’ in the course of research. Despite the theoretical benefits of increasing emphasis on local, historicized manifestations of identity in work on the language /
identity interface, new problems have arisen, foremost being the reductive equation of
the whole of identity with its ontological dimension. Put differently, the scholarly move
in method toward local, ethnographically described identity formations is paralleled by
a move toward individual agency. The (re)discovery by sociolinguists that individuals
do things with language – including ‘producing’ their own identities – has come at the
great expense of a related reality: language does things to individuals as well. It is at this
juncture where poststructuralist theory of the subject is most promising.

The general reduction of complex speaking subjects to identificatory articulations
is the result of historical movements from within linguistics, described in chapter 1, that
equate the social with Cartesian / formalist approaches, the fulcrum of which is
‘identity.’ This equation is problematic for a number of reasons, outlined at the end of
the first chapter, which I will distill into three points here. First, the emphasis on identity
observes the rich social, historical, political, and cultural contexts and processes that
produce speaking subjects and lie in excess of identity. Second, this practice reinscribes
the problematic linguistic feature / social category logics, supposedly common in large
task variationist or ‘second-wave’ studies (Eckert 2005), that sociolinguists tried to
overcome with the turn to local identity in ‘third-wave’ studies. That is, although the
identity-of-condition (‘second wave’) and identity-of-choice (‘third wave’) frameworks
have slightly different orientations to identity, they ultimately describe two sides of the
same identitarian coin, which, taken together, still do not capture the social and
linguistic breadth of speaking subjects. Finally, the methodo-theoretical practice associated with the hermeneutics of identity treats identity as the cause rather than the effect. That is, identity is posited as the reason for linguistic practice rather than as the result of broader cultural and historical movements that produce identities and the systems of representation that materialize them, including linguistic practice. Social, linguistic, and material practices, as well as the identities that these practices instantiate and reproduce, are the effects of discourse. This is not to say that individuals or social groups have no choice about which practices, including linguistic practices, they make use of. It is to say that one level of analysis – the first level of analysis, discourse – is missing. This pertains both to the methodological approach and the analytic focus. The logics by which identity is the starting point are evident in work from sociolinguistics that struggles to connect ‘local’ identities with the broader socio-historical processes that produced them. As social theory has elucidated clearly, social categories (‘macro’ or ‘micro,’ ‘global’ or ‘local’) do not exist outside of culture, history, and ideology. Therefore, starting with identity, or its reflection, manifestation, or deployment in language, is to start with the surface, the endpoint, the final movement in the complex relationship between the social and the linguistic.

It is my belief that there is little else to be said about the surface of this relationship; it is time to move deeper. I propose a conceptual overhaul in the way we think about the language / social relationship. This entails replacing the current
epistemological framework – bound up as it is with Cartesianism, a modernist vision of science, and linguistic formalism – with an epistemological framework rooted in poststructuralist theory of the subject. Not only does this provide us with a more holistic, socially rich view of the social-linguistic relationship, it also avoids the political pitfalls inherent in the current framework. These pitfalls include the reinscription of the Enlightenment subject, participation and reproduction in sciencism, and general complicity with neo-liberal politics.

I will argue that the complex relationships between language and the social – and the language users produced by those relationships – exceed the capacity for identity to name and account for them. I argued in the last chapter that historical movements taking place within linguistics with respect to the way the social is theorized produced as their effect the problem of identity I am working through here. Because this problem is historically entrenched and tied to a broader epistemological framework that maintains it, I contend that it cannot be solved from the inside. Put differently, the problem of identity cannot be resolved with appeals to identitarianism (including standpoint theory, intersectionality theory, etc.). I will propose in the current chapter a resolution from the outside – the incorporation of poststructuralist theory of the subject. This incorporation from the outside connects the gap between linguistics and the linguistic turn, putting previously under-connected disciplines into the same critical conversation. Moreover, it pushes linguistics into new methodological and theoretical
territory, ending the potentially endless description of the same important but superficial relationship (‘language’ and ‘identity’). With respect to cultural studies, this incorporation makes thinking about language, including discourse in the non-Foucauldian sense and linguistic structure, a real possibility, opening up new domains of analysis and grounding theory in a new textual form (language use).

2.2 The Scope of Chapter 2

The aim of the current chapter is to elaborate a workable theory of subject formation for linguists and humanities scholars that attends at once to ‘language’ as currently understood in the humanistic disciplines (i.e., ‘discourse,’ ‘culture’) and to ‘language’ as understood in linguistics (i.e., ‘linguistic structure’). In section 2.3, I illustrate the utility of poststructuralist theory by working through a broad arc of feminist theory with endpoints on both sides of the linguistic turn. Specifically, I detail how the feminist imaginary developed through an engagement with the radical intervention made by poststructuralism. As I go through this arc, I also attempt to bring out historical points of connection between theory and linguistics, which I hope strengthens the argument that there rich and meaningful ways of putting scholars interested in language into the same conversation. In section 2.3.1, I look at second-wave feminist theory before poststructuralism as means of later illustrating a contrast between the types of knowledge projects that engage poststructuralist theory and those that do not. In 2.3.2, I introduce the work of Michel Foucault, paying attention to his thinking on
‘power’ and ‘discourse,’ which have been influential concepts in poststructuralist theory of subject formation. In 2.3.3, I describe feminist theory in the wake of poststructuralism, focusing mainly on the work of Judith Butler. Following that tracing, I work through the specific mechanisms of subject formation in section 2.4 and define key terms, such as subject position, subjectivity, epistemological subject, political identity, assigned identity, and ontological identity in 2.4.1. In order to make the explanation less abstract, I use racial formation as an example to illustrate the broader subject formation. In 2.4.2, I describe the way that the conversation around subject formation has already entered linguistics, through the field of language and sexuality. I conclude the chapter in section 2.5.

2.3 Elaborating Poststructuralism through Feminism

Although there are numerous and more straightforward ways to go about explicating poststructuralist theory of subject formation, I have chosen to do so by working through the ‘canon’ of feminist theory. I have chosen to work in this direction not only because feminist theory itself has been one site of extraordinary fecundity with respect to the broader conversation on subject formation, but also because the arc of feminist thought traverses moments before and moments after the linguistic turn in theory. This arc is useful to trace, as it illustrates the specific problems poststructuralism sought to address and how it went about addressing them. In addition, the history of feminist theory runs parallel to other theoretical traditions, including specific
engagements with Marx, Freud, and Foucault. Psychoanalysis and Marxism, in particular, have long histories with feminist theory, resulting in an interesting and enduring theoretical debate about the analytic value of ‘material life’ versus ‘psychic life.’ This debate becomes relevant, too, in the discussion of subject formation. Some of these traditions will be familiar to linguists, particularly sociolinguists with training in social theory, but in either case, it is my hope that these engagements will make this discussion intelligible to a wide audience, including a non-feminist one. In addition, I have chosen to take on poststructuralist theory through feminism in order to demonstrate the richness of interdisciplinarity projects, as I mentioned at the outset of the first chapter. It is my commitment to this sort of interdisciplinarity that makes me greatly opposed to the much simpler possibility of briefly quoting from Foucault and briefly quoting from Butler and moving on.

Before I move to the discussion in the sections below about the influence of poststructuralist theory in feminist theory, I should say something more general about poststructuralist itself. Readers unfamiliar with this tradition in theory are likely more familiar with the more popular, even ubiquitous term ‘postmodernism.’ Although both poststructuralism and post-modernism roughly index the same broader shift in culture and thought away from the values and aesthetics of a particular historical era (namely, modernity since the Age of Enlightenment), each term marks different domains within that historical trajectory. ‘Postmodernism’ functions as a sort of umbrella term under
whose aegis are literature, architecture, and the arts in general. Think Frank Lloyd Wright (modernism) versus Frank Gehry (postmodernism). Poststructuralism, on the other hand, is most often associated with the work of Michel Foucault and refers specifically to the transition in intellectualism away from the Structuralist era. Think Saussure (structuralism) versus Derrida (poststructuralism).

The current section includes three parts, ‘feminist theory before language,’ and ‘feminist theory after language,’ bounded by a subsection on the work of Michel Foucault and the linguistic turn in theory. This parsing – ‘before’ and ‘after’ – is problematic for a number of reasons, the first of which being that the linguistic turn did not inflect feminist thought in one discrete moment. As such, the terms ‘before’ and ‘after’ are specious and are used only heuristically. Similarly, it is not the case that everything ‘after’ the influence of poststructuralism was necessarily poststructural, or even interested in the subject or subject formation. Feminist theory is far less dogmatic than the term ‘after’ would imply. Moreover, as with any temporal parsing, this one is marked with its own anachronisms. Of these, the most glaring is Monique Wittig’s 1981 essay “One is Not Born a Woman,” which antedates the turn to language in theory but

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1 I have linked Foucault’s name to poststructuralism, but the reader will find that Foucault is often referred to as a structuralist. I can identify three reasons for this. First, Foucault’s early works were published in the 1960s, well before there was a broader poststructural movement. Second, Foucault is said to have been inspired by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the figure most often associated with the Structuralist movement. Finally, one finds in the body of Foucault’s work an enormous shift in perspective between ‘early’ and ‘late’ periods. Foucault’s work on the subject and his work on sexuality, which are most closely linked to Poststructuralism, come from his later period.
nonetheless presages some of poststructuralism’s most important moves. Nearly a full decade before the publication of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), the textual emblem of poststructuralism for a generation of scholars, Wittig had already made the ‘Butlarian’ refusal of an essentialized female subject and, further, had already recognized the political role that the discursive category ‘woman’ played in the maintenance of heterosexuality. To wit: “A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the mark imposed by the oppressor: the ‘myth of woman,’ plus its material effects and manifestations in the appropriated consciousness and bodies of women. Thus, this mark does not preexist oppression…” (Wittig, 266) The reader should not be misled by the term ‘materialist feminist approach,’ for the argument that Wittig is presenting is one about language, as in *discourse*. What she reveals as ‘the mark’ of oppression is discursively produced as ‘origin’ of oppression in culture. This is a quintessentially poststructural argument. My point in bringing in Wittig is not to taxonomize her, but to flesh out the point that the arc I want to describe is hardly a linear one.

I have yet to say what it is about the collusion of the Structuralist project and Enlightenment values that poststructuralist theory is attempting to overcome. Needless to say, an entire intellectual movement does not rest on a single issue alone, but for the purpose of the current discussion, I would like to focus only on the transformation in thinking on the subject. Poststructuralism, regardless of its theoretical engagement
(with feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory) or object of analysis (the material, the psychic, the social), is characterized by its refusal to accept a prediscursive subject. To put it in a slightly different lexicon, to refuse a prediscursive subject is to accept that subjects are constituted in language, through *discourse*. Linguists will be familiar with ‘discourse’ in the context of a large and diversified body of work collectively referred to as ‘discourse analysis,’ which roughly coheres around structural and social aspects of conversation and similar types of language. Names familiar to linguists in this field include Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Deborah Schiffrin. Critical Discourse Analysis is a related field known in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology that includes work by figures such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. This latter field is very distantly related to another constellation, at times also referred to as ‘Discourse Analysis,’ from which much of Poststructural theory is derived. Figures associated with this version of Discourse Analysis include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, and Julia Kristeva. For the latter group, discourse analysis denotes a method for thinking about the broadly circulating cultural tropes that structure what we know as ‘real’ in given historical moment. Correspondingly, ‘discourse,’ in this sense, does not refer to or name any text or mode of speech in particular. Foucault (1994, 124) describes it thusly: “Discourse—the mere fact of speaking, of employing words, of using the words of others (even if it means returning them), words that the others understand and accept (and possibly, return from their
—this fact is in itself a force. Discourse is, with respect to the relation of forces, not merely a surface of inscription, but something that brings about effects.”

Although Foucault is known to have been inspired, like Levi-Strauss, by Saussurian linguistics, he resists the impulse to reduce language to either structure or content. Davidson (2003, xix), describing an unpublished lecture given by Foucault in 1968, finds reference to linguistics. “Foucault, invoking among others the name of J.L. Austin,² argued that the description of a statement was not complete when one had defined the linguistic structure of the statement, that the analysis of discourse could not be reduced to the combination of elements according to linguistic rules, that therefore, [citing Foucault] ‘discourse is something that necessarily extends beyond language.’” Discourse for Foucault, like speech acts for Austin, is about production, creation, and action. The most succinct account I have read of Foucault’s view of language is by Halperin (1995):

For one thing, Foucault’s example teaches us to analyze discourse strategically, not in terms of what it says but in terms of what it does and how it works. That does not mean that we learn from Foucault to treat the content of particular discourses as uninteresting or irrelevant…; it does mean that we learn from him not to allow the truth or falsity of particular propositions to distract us from the power-effects they produce or the manner in which they are deployed within particular systems of discursive and institutional practice. (30-1)

² J.L. Austin has, arguably, been as important to social theorists as he has been to linguists. How to Do Things with Words (1975) laid out the scheme of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, influential to Foucault, and performative speech acts, influential to Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1992).
This use of ‘discourse’ is critical to the current discussion, as Poststructural theory posits that subjects are produced in part by the discourses that constitute knowledge or ‘the real’ in a given historical moment. Foucault names historical temporalities characterized by the same discourses ‘epistemes,’ which are roughly synonymous with ‘ages,’ ‘eras,’ or ‘epochs.’ Discursively produced subjects then go on to animate the discourses that produce them and, as such, there is a constant interplay between discourses and subjects. This will be unpacked fully in section 2.3.2, below.

To what does the term ‘the subject’ refer? Linguistic anthropologists Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, whose work on language and sexuality I will discuss later in this chapter (section 2.4), provide a concise description of “epistemological subject,” as used by Judith Butler. “The term ‘epistemological’ in Butler’s formulation refers to long-established Western ways of thinking about subjects and their relation to the world. An epistemological subject’ is a subject that is thought to have a kind of stable existence prior to and outside the cultural field that encompasses it. It is an ‘I’ that in some sense can choose among different discourses and determine what best corresponds with its (already somehow established) sense of self. It is an ‘I’ that identity politics assumes needs to be in place in order for political action to be taken.” (2003, 104) The Poststructural refusal of a prediscursive subject, then, is doubly motivated. First, there can be no subject prior to discourse, even in spite of all the material, psychic, and cultural factors that also contribute to the constitution of subjects, as materiality, psychic
life, and culture themselves never exist outside of language. Second, to accept a universal subject posited prior to any particular discursive formation is to risk complicity with the defaults subject who emerged from the humanist tradition associated with the Age of Enlightenment. Wiegman names the universal subject as the “straight, white, monied male.” (1995, 6) With this in mind, I will consider the question of the subject in the context of feminist theory.

2.3.1 Feminism before ‘language’

There was once a time when feminism had a stable subject. In the period that we now call ‘second-wave,’ sometime from around 1968 to sometime in the 1980s, feminism’s stakes were squarely grounded in the category of ‘woman’ or, at least, in women. Early feminist and feminist theoretic work aggregated around the issue of the origins of women’s oppression and the array of issues believed to have contributed to women’s inferiority were consolidated under the term ‘patriarchy.’ This work had a

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3 Humanism and the Enlightenment are commonly thought to be bound up with one another, as they both come out of the 18th Century. Foucault warns against conflating humanism and Enlightenment. In his essay, “What is Enlightenment?,” a critical reading of Kant’s 1784 response to the question Was ist Aufklärung? in the periodical Berlinische Monatschrift, Foucault writes, “…I am inclined to see Enlightenment and humanism in a state of tension rather than identity… If the question of man, of the human species, of the humanist, was important throughout the eighteenth century, this is very rarely, I believe, because the Enlightenment considered itself a humanism.” (314)

4 The term ‘first wave feminism’ marks the period of feminist activism between the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. In the U.S. context, first wave feminism cohered around the issue of women’s suffrage. Women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton Susan B. Anthony delivered compelling arguments for the vote in 1948 at the now legendary Seneca Falls Convention in Seneca, New York. Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication on the Rights of Women (1792) was an even earlier articulation of women’s equality, argued on the basis of women’s rationality.
particularly emancipatory agenda, and saw theory as a means of solving the inadequacy of the social world. The earliest texts sought recognition and political visibility for women and a space to express the anger resulting from gender inequality. This project required that ‘woman’ be the subject of its theory.

The thrust of early second wave texts – to document and account for women’s oppression – was made possible only when certain assumptions were in place. Chief among those was the belief in women, in their realness. In order that women be oppressed, they first had to exist as “women.” The theoretical explanations posited to account for oppression were diverse and variegated, following from differences between feminist scholars with respect to issues such as reproduction, biological difference, and sexuality, all cohering around the question of the origins of patriarchy. This diversity in theory followed, not preceded, the belief in women and their oppression. One particular text that became a classic for American second-wave feminists, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*⁵ (1949), took seriously the subjugation of women, arguing that men’s lack of reproductive responsibility allowed them to define themselves as subject. This is not to say that Beauvoir did not allow a female subject; she did, but that subject was secondary to a default masculine. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir makes this clear: “Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being… She is defined and differentiated

⁵ Originally published in French as *Le Deuxième Sexe*. 
with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the
inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the
Other.” (13)

The particular articulation of women’s oppression that Beauvoir provides – the
condition of women, their otherness and secondary status, is thoroughly ahistorical. She
writes, for example, that unlike the “American Negros or the Jews” (14), “the
proletarians,” or the “Indo-Chinese,” women “are women in virtue of their anatomy and
physiology. Throughout history they have always been subordinated to men, and hence
their dependency is not the result of a historical event or social change—it was not
something that occurred.” (15) Women were taken at face value. The effects of their
historical subordination were taken as the beginning. Nothing preceded women’s
subordination because women, as women, were already subordinate. This is due, in
part, to the specific thesis about women’s reproductive capacity, but what I want to
underscore is that the thesis is only itself possible because the female subject was already
known. The female subject was knowable because the temporalities of history had been
flattened and the ebbs and flows of meaning and representation were reduced. The
female subject was already known; there was no before apart from the male subject
against whom the female subject was derived.

A particularly potent and enduring example of early attempts to find a totalizing,
universal explanation for the conditions of women’s oppression was Gayle Rubin’s 1975
essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” the essay responsible for the sex/gender system framework that became part of the standard logics of the social sciences (including linguistics) through at least the 1990s. In Rubin’s words, the sex/gender system “is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.” (28) Gender, then, is the sum of the social relations built upon the raw materials of biological sex. The popular articulation of the sex/gender system outside of the context of ‘Traffic in Women’ is ‘sex equals biology, gender equals society.’

What is relevant for the current discussion, though, is Rubin’s engagement with Structuralism. I must first pause, however, to readdress the issue of chronology. I have stated that the temporal arc I am charting is rather anachronistic, but an additional qualification is that the temporalities are complicated by the lag between French feminism, the work of Foucault and Levi-Strauss, and the translation of both into English. I have marked Rubin, for instance, as a pre-poststructuralist – this is true in a certain sense – but because she worked in France, she was influenced heavily by poststructuralist thought before there was such a thing in the U.S., which is where I ground my historical arc. Again, the entire discussion is a heuristic, of sorts, designed to illustrate the type of question I am interested in posing to linguistics.
It is the case that ‘Traffic in Women’ is known for its engagements with theoretical heavy hitters including Marx and Freud, but the essay, and Rubin’s main thesis, rely most heavily on Lévi-Strauss, whose work in structural anthropology allows her to move women’s oppression from an immutable characteristic of the female subject (de Beauvoir) to a set of specific cultural and material relations in which women find themselves trapped. The impulse to theorize ‘woman’ in terms of social relations is a particularly Marxian move, but the repetition and distillation of those relations into social structure is, clearly, a structuralist impulse. She introduces the problem by citing Marx: “What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other. A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations…” (Marx 1971, 28). Extrapolating from Marx, Rubin poses the problem thusly: “What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations…” (28) The particular set of relations relevant to the question of women’s oppression in Rubin’s analysis has to do with the exchange of women in kinship. For this project, she turns to Lévi-Strauss’s* The Elementary Structures of Kinship, an attempt to theorize cultural

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* Structural linguistics is subtextually present in Rubin’s thinking, as the genealogy she follows (via Levi-Strauss) can be traced to Saussure. In 1963’s *Structural Anthropology*, Levi-Strauss describes the structuralist project as he sees it in linguistics as an analogy for social structure. “From words the linguist
organization based on procreation and marriage. “It is a description of society which does not assume an abstract, genderless subject. On the contrary, the human subject in Lévi-Strauss’s work is always either male or female, and the divergent social destinies of the two sexes can therefore be traced. Since Lévi-Strauss sees the essence of kinship systems to lie in an exchange of women between men, he constructs an implicit theory of sex oppression.” (35) Women’s oppression, then, is bound to social systems, rather than to biology, a promising realization for early second-wave scholars as, presumably, social structure could be changed, while biology could not. A particularly striking example of a feminist project that assumes an a priori, female subject is the work of Catherine MacKinnon, a feminist legal scholar whose work has been cited broadly in legal theory as well as in jurisprudence, including by the Canadian Supreme Court. Best known for her work on sexuality and her anti-pornography, anti-prostitution positions, MacKinnon has written broadly on feminism

extracts the phonetic reality of the phoneme; and from the phoneme he extracts the logical reality of distinctive features. And when he has found in several languages the same phonemes or the use of the same pairs of oppositions, he does not compare individually distinct entities. It is the same phoneme, the same element, which will show at this new level the basic identity of empirically different entities.” (20) The general framework for his work on kinship is set forth here. He is particularly inspired by linguistic structuralism’s emphasis on relations between discrete terms and its ability to organize potentially unlimited relationships. In this formulation, sound production is to linguistics what interpersonal [kinship] relations are to anthropology.

Rubin does, in fact, provide a ‘solution’ for the problem of the exchange of women: “Cultural evolution provides us with the opportunity to seize control of the means of sexuality, reproduction, and socialization, and to make conscious decisions to liberate human sexual life from the archaic relations which deform it. Ultimately, a thoroughgoing feminist revolution would liberate more than women. It would liberate forms of sexual expression, and it would liberate human personality from the straightjacket of gender.” (52)
and the state. Her work is useful to the current discussion as it exposes the possibilities and consequences of knowing an epistemological subject before discourse including, amongst many others, complicity with liberal political philosophy and emancipatory outcomes limited to the constraints of the state. Her work also raises a number of questions about agency and subjectivity in the context of liberal, structuralist, or pre-discursive frameworks. What I hope to show with MacKinnon, as a way of making the broader point about the subject and discourse, is that the problems, methods, theory, and applications of a feminist project that assumes, for example, ‘woman’ as the subject of its cause, are limited from the outset to the field of representation complicit with and responsible for the production of the subject being assumed.

In “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory,” (1982), MacKinnon is interested in moving the question that animated the early second wave moment – the question of the origins of patriarchy – away from ‘origins’ and toward proof of women’s oppression as women. It is the accumulation of evidence of women’s subordination that allows MacKinnon to give to feminism the epistemological perspective to know women and to know their perspective. The evidence for oppression of women comes back full circle and effectively ‘proves’ the subject, locking it into a semantic field in which the subject and her oppression define one another. That is, the effects of women’s oppression become the evidence needed to reinstate women as the subject of that very oppression. This internal circularity is possible only when prima facie
evidence is mobilized on behalf of an *a priori* subject. One result of these logics is that the solution (to the problem defined within the terms of these logics) is possible through the state apparatus, as the state is as neutral as the subject and the evidence of her oppression. They are in complicity with one another. The effect of the resolution by the state is the reinscription of the subject as subject and evidence as evidence for the subject. In other words, the problems associated with the subject already known get ‘worked out’ through an apparatus that participated in the production of the subject (and the social ills that haunt her) in the first place. For example, MacKinnon (1982, 1997) claims that gender, including ‘femininity,’ follows from sexuality.8 Sexuality is “a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced on women…” (1997) Sexuality, then, can said to be always-already oppressive to women in light of the fact that it sets the terms for an asymmetrical system of gender. MacKinnon is, thus, able to consider the arborescence of oppressive forms of sexuality—patriarchy dwells within pornography, prostitution, and all forms of heterosexuality, which are already inscribed in the terms of masculinity.9

As a result, there can be no such thing as ‘sexual liberation’ or ‘sexual freedom,’ because women qua women are already subjugated by sexuality. As a further

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8 The full thesis is this: “Sexuality, then, is a form of power. Gender, as socially constructed, embodies it, not the reverse. Women and men are divided by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is the linchpin of gender inequality.” (533)

9 The literal formulation of MacKinnon’s framework is found in this line from “Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State” (1982): “Man fucks woman; subject verb object.” (541)
consequence, pornography and prostitution call into question, not the meaning of victimization or sexual oppression, but the meaning of ‘woman’ itself. “As women’s experience [with pornography and prostitution] blurs the lines between deviance and normalcy, it obliterates the distinction between abuses of women and the social definition of what a woman is.” (532) Pornography and prostitution are, along with rape, incest, etc., abuses of sexuality; therefore, women could not participate in them volitionally, as sexuality is already-always oppressive to women, even as it constitutes them as women through gender, sexuality’s effect. If there were any doubt about what women are for MacKinnon, she eliminates it by writing, “For feminism, asking whether there is, socially, a female sexuality is the same as asking whether women exist.” (534)

Having these logics fully worked out, MacKinnon is able to argue on behalf of women by leveraging women’s point of view, which is already known, as the subject and the various ways the subject gets defined, are also already known. Women’s experience, though, is epistemological, not experiential as in the context of Standpoint feminism,10 which emphasizes women’s role in knowing, in having a point of view and ontological position that dissolves, or at least exposes, forms of oppression. The experience of a standpoint is not the experience mobilized by MacKinnon, which is, instead, the “experience” known by an a priori subject. “Through consciousness raising,(173,797),(619,898)

10 For a more complete description of the positions and aims of standpoint feminism, see the work of Nancy Hartsock and Patricia Hill-Collins.
women grasp the collective reality of women’s condition from within the perspective of that experience, not from outside it. The claim that a sexual politics exists and is socially fundamental is grounded in the claim of feminism to women’s perspective, not from it. Its claim to women’s perspective is its claim to truth.” (536) As a result of men’s top-down oppression of women in MacKinnon’s account, women’s agentive response is limited to ‘discovering’ the condition of their position as a means of changing it. This should not be confused with discovering one’s subjectivity, however, as the experience of ‘woman’ is epistemologically singular. “Women’s acceptance of their condition does not contradict its fundamental unacceptability if women have little choice but to become persons who freely choose women’s roles.” (542) That agency is limited at first to recognition of condition in MacKinnon’s account should not be taken as equivalent to Butler’s (2004) injunction to find agency in recognition of the constraints of determinism, as ‘condition’ in MacKinnon and ‘constraints’ in Butler mean different things.

‘Determinism’ in Butler is based on a Foucauldian notion of power (which will be discussed in the following section), whereas ‘condition’ in MacKinnon refers specifically to the oppression of women by a gender produced by the already-always oppressive male sexuality. To put this in the context of the discussion on subject formation, subjectivity (of individuals) collapses with subject position (of social structure, of discourse, etc.) in MacKinnon’s account. This collapse represents an extreme form of structuralism.
I would like to conclude this discussion by briefly considering one notable feminist debate from the late second wave era that I think epitomizes a particular type of pre-linguistic turn thinking, named retrospectively the “equality / difference debate.” The tension that gave rise to the schism was the result of disagreements between feminists oriented toward liberal political philosophy and feminists who challenged liberalism on the grounds that it represented a default, masculine point of view. Typically, the argument for equality (‘sameness’) is seen as emerging from the liberal political tradition that values individual liberty over group rights. Conversely, the difference perspective challenged the normalcy of the values associated with the equality perspective. Despite their differences, both ‘sides’ of the debate, sometimes called ‘sameness’ and ‘difference,’ were united in an epistemological framework that took ‘woman’ as the subject of feminism and equated ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ with their particular historical articulations during the moment of the debate.

Young (1985) notes that the equality perspective, which she calls humanist feminism, “defines gender difference as accidental to humanity” and writes that proponents of this perspective advocate judging all “by the standards according to which men have judged one another: courage, rationality, strength, cunning, quick wittedness.” (174). This is indeed the argument put forth by Wollstonecraft (1792) in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, a text emblematic of contemporary equality feminism. For her, the solution is not to reassess the standards or call in to question masculine
normativity, but rather to “make women rational creatures and free citizens” by educating them alongside men in public schools. (184) In other words, women should acquiesce to a view of rationality and virtue traditionally associated with masculinity. Similarly, in foregrounding self-sovereignty, personal merit, and individuality, Cady Stanton (1892) argues for an equality predicated, implicitly, on sameness. Like Wollstonecraft, Cady Stanton is less interested in critiquing masculinity or praising femininity than in reasserting the import of a core set of liberal values that should be made available to both men and women.

For some equality feminists, femininity itself is cast as inhibiting, in contrast to more liberating masculinity. For example, Wollstonecraft characterized eighteenth-century femininity as rather pernicious because of its emphasis on beauty, “unnatural delicacy,” and intellectual weakness. Though Wollstonecraft does not go as far as advocating a rejection of roles typically associated with femininity (mother, wife, etc.), she does seem to see femininity as a factor leading to women’s continued subordination. Likewise, Young (1985), citing *The Second Sex*, writes “in Beauvoir’s account, femininity often produces mutilated or deformed persons.” (174). Femininity, at least in Beauvoir’s terms, is not only limiting but also corruptive; it leaves women subject to objectification and a “mere life of maintenance.” (175) In sum, equality feminism proposes that women’s equality should be argued on the grounds of sameness.
In contrast, the difference perspective contends that the traits of masculinity that become normative in the equality paradigm should be subject to more scrutiny by feminists. These values, after all, are the same values that justify the subordination of women and other minorities and are responsible for many of the world’s social, environmental, and political problems. Young, in appropriating the voice of the difference perspective, writes that “masculine values exalt death, violence, competition, selfishness, a repression of the body, sexuality, and affectivity.” (176) Accordingly, core feminine values such as cooperation, patience, and compassion are centralized and become the basis of the feminine standard in the difference program. Rather than being characterized by lack of access to masculine virtues and their various manifestations, difference feminists contend that women’s oppression is instead a function of the overall devaluation of women’s perspectives, experiences, and feminine virtues in general.

Gilligan’s In a Different Voice (1982) epitomizes this difference perspective and has, indeed, become the emblematic of the argument. Her work draws heavily on Nancy Chodorow, whose work I will briefly gloss here. For Chodorow, gender is largely a psychological attribute, one that is for the most part universal and that develops as males and females differentially experience childhood, particularly in relation to their parents. Her psychoanalytic approach to gender asserts that femininity or “feminine personality” evolves from the mutually dependent mother-daughter relationship. Conversely, masculinity emerges from the mother’s emphasis on the son’s masculine
opposition to herself (even when there is none) that should lead the son to a reidentification with the father who is, in most cases, conspicuously absent. As a result of the father’s absence, the son is left to define his masculinity in negative terms; i.e., as what “female gender” is not. In Chodorow’s view, gendering is work done primarily in the family by the mother. The crucial sex difference is that boys, lacking an affective relationship with their father, internalize aspects of a masculine role, while girls acquire gender through very personal identification with the mother and her values. The ramifications of this psychological gender are numerous: women feel guilt for things unrelated to them, women are defined relationally to men; men lack a sense of social security and are insecure and defensive, etc. The family is a crucial site for gender development and the mother’s role is undoubtedly crucial.

Gilligan claims that psychologists have relied exclusively on masculine experience in their historical understanding of morality and in doing so, conceived of women as being morally underdeveloped or even morally deviant. Gilligan’s proposal is actually quite revolutionary—instead of encouraging women to acquiesce to masculine normativity (“equality” approach) and contemplate moral decisions like men, she instead advocates a more holistic paradigm shift, proposing a woman-centered view of morality that doesn’t take masculinity as the starting point. Gilligan writes, “my research suggests that men and women may speak different languages” and claims that “in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care…” (173) She suggests
that this more contextual analysis allows psychologists (and presumably feminists) to
“arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience which sees the truth of
separation and attachment in the lives of women and men and recognizes how these
truths are carried by different modes of language and thought.”

While the equality program locates women’s oppression in the continual denial
of access to the public sphere and masculine traits, difference feminism, in contrast,
argues that women’s oppression is a result of silencing what Gilligan calls, “a different
voice,” and being held to unjust masculine standards. Correspondingly, the difference
perspective, in theory, asserts a more radical approach to its theory of social justice,
insisting that the assumption of masculine normativity should be criticized and
reevaluated and, moreover, that the traits and virtues that underpin and perpetuate
masculinity as a system of power should be called into question. In sum, equality
feminism accepts the underlying social structure predicated on liberal values and
contests the gendering of the structure, while difference feminism contests the
underlying social structure itself in addition to its concomitant hierarchies and the
gendering of those hierarchies.

The preceding section, tangential as it may seem, is intended, not to provide the
most thorough account of the history of feminism and feminist theory, but to organize a
particular contrast. This is the contrast between knowledge projects cohering around a
prior, ontological subject, and those for whom a prior subject is not known.
2.3.2 Michel Foucault and the linguistic turn

Eventually the interest in the origins and history of patriarchy ebbed and was replaced by some with an interest in the history of women. This push was about re-populating history with women who were said to be ‘absent’ or ‘erased.’ In the context of U.S. universities, the political result of the interest in women was the creation and proliferation of “women and…” courses, such as ‘women and literature,’ ‘women and science,’ ‘women and history,’ and so on. The intellectual and political impetus was to rescue women from an ostensibly historical narrative, to put them back into a story where they had all along been. By the late 1980s, however, the academic feminist imaginary had already started to rigorously question its investments in women, the category of women, and academic realism more generally. This move was influenced, at least in part, by the work of Michel Foucault, whose canon had nearly entirely been translated to English from its original French by the early 1980s. Feminist theory had already been grappling with Marx for some time and there remained serious questions about the politics of gender within a strictly material framework. Further, Marx’s promise of a single, all-encompassing emancipation looked evermore elusive in light of the expansion of global capitalism and neo-liberal politics. Similarly, feminist engagement with Freud was useful for providing a mechanism for the internalization and repetition of gender and sexuality, but was less useful for its emancipatory promise. Foucault offered methods – archaeology and genealogy – that radically altered, or at
least complicated, the way scholars across the disciplines thought about social structure, time, history, identity, human subjectivity, and language. Genealogy for Foucault was about telling the history of a given moment (i.e., the present) in a way that puts it in a different light. Foucault posed genealogy against ‘science,’ which is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Marxism and psychoanalysis were once understood to be scientific disciplines. Of the relationship between genealogy and science, Foucault has this to say: “Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power-hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is, then, a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to suppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse.” (Society Must Be Defended, 10) Thus, Foucault’s work allowed feminism to work around the dogma and the failures associated with traditional Marxism and psychoanalysis, not only by providing a method, but also by providing a new way to think about the present. In addition, it also opened up the possibility of a refreshing new way of thinking about gender and politics. In particular, feminist scholars were drawn to the following elements of Foucault’s thinking:

a) The subject is produced. Subject formation was powerful because it provided a way out of the various determinisms and essentialisms that punctuated earlier emancipatory projects. That is, if subjects are produced rather than already determined, social change becomes possible through social intervention.
b) *Power is discursive, not just material.*

c) *Power is not held; it circulates.*

Foucault’s thinking, varied and diverse as it was over the arc of his life, generally cohered around the history of the production of the subject, or what he sometimes called “the history of subjectivity.” The broadest level of subject production – the constellation of historical and cultural movements in a particular episteme – is called *subjectivization.* It must be pointed out that although the history of the production of the subject was central in Foucault’s, material and psychic modes of analysis were not, as has been claimed by his critics, forgotten. Instead, material and psychic frames were brought in line with history, discourse, and power. Bringing the various vectors that produce subjects into one analytic required that Foucault theorize power in a radically different way from Marx and other social theorists.

Though he repeatedly said he was not interested in writing a theory of power, Foucault was profoundly interested in thinking power differently from its usual, top-down connotation. The goal was to understand power in the context of subjectivization; that is, the way that relations of power condition and produce subjects. The result is that power, in a Foucauldian perspective, is radically different from the common, pre-Enlightenment model of monarchical power. Rather than being a ‘thing’ or a possession, power for Foucault is about relations. He is adamant that power does not ‘act’ directly on others, but rather, on the actions of others, correspondingly, distinguishes it from
violence, which is the exercise of force on someone else. In an essay called, ‘Subject and Power,’ Foucault puts it thusly:

It [power] operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (341)

Nonetheless, power is not free-floating, undetached from social structure, or superficial. Although Foucault’s view of power is frequently caricatured by some as ‘free-floating,’ he is actually quite clear that power is always bound to structure.

Evidence of this is abundant in ‘Power and the Subject.’ For instance: “Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures.” (emphasis added, 340) He makes this point more forcefully later in the same essay:

“Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above ‘society’ whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of.” (343)

Unlike Marx, Foucault considers power to be suffused throughout the social body rather than ‘held’ at the top by an elite few. The effects of this are productive in at least three ways. First, every relationship of power produces systems of differentiation whereby subjects are rendered different from one another. Possible forms of differentiation include juridical or traditional differences in status or privilege, economic differences, and “differing positions within the processes of production, linguistic or
cultural differences, differences in know-how and competence...” (344) In addition to subjective differentiation, power suffused throughout the social body also produces the possibility of freedom. The sort of freedom that Foucault is thinking is not, however, emancipatory in the Marxian sense. Instead, freedom and power are conditions of one another; they are in constant interplay and are never mutually exclusive. Power is only exercised upon subjects who are ‘free,’ where freedom is conceived as “faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available.” (342) The interlocking of ‘power’ and ‘freedom’ is theoretically useful, as it dissolves the unproductive and false dichotomy between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ that dominates and limits much of the social sciences. This is theoretically possible because both power and freedom are embedded in a broader framework of subjectivization in which both condition subjects. That is, when the chronology of power and freedom is not implicational (power yields freedom; freedom from power), they cease being oppositional to one another, instead becoming locked in constant interplay. Thus, freedom is at the same time everywhere available and never fully possible, in the sense of a ‘final emancipation.’ Finally, power is productive in its mutability. As it ebbs and flows, as the contours of freedom and power constantly reshape one another, and as power reaches its outer limits and is again stabilized, it produces new possibilities for its

11 “It would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape. Accordingly, every intensification or extension of power relations intended to wholly suppress these points of insubordination can only bring the exercise of power up against its outer limits.” (347)
own consolidation and its own undoing. I would again like to cite Halperin (1995, 18-19) at length, who describes how subjects are produced from relations of power.

The kind of power Foucault is interested in, then, far from enslaving its objects, constructs them as subjective agents and preserves them in their autonomy, so as to invest them all the more completely. Liberal power does not simply prohibit; it does not directly terrorize. It normalizes, “responsibilizes,” and disciplines. The state no longer needs to frighten or coerce its subjects into proper behavior: it can safely leave them to make their own choices in the allegedly sacrosanct private sphere of personal freedom which they now inhabit, because with in that sphere they freely and spontaneously police both their own conduct and the conduct of others and so “earn,” by demonstrating the capacity to exercise them, the various rights assigned by the state’s civil institutions exclusively to law-abiding citizens possessed of sound minds and bodies.

It is thus through power that individuals take themselves to be individuals. This is counterintuitive or inconceivable in repressive or sovereignty forms of power whose ostensible aims are to limit individuals and restrict their action. In Foucault, the mechanisms of individualization are themselves what Foucault calls ‘techniques of power.’ Individuals are therefore ‘free’ to be themselves, but the freedom to individualize constitutes them in deterministic ways, as individualization is modulated by techniques of control, forms of disciplinarity, and epistemic discourses that produce the possibilities of ‘normal’ being in any given moment. Within a Foucauldian analytics, then, it makes little sense to study, for instance, ostensibly agentive ‘acts of identity’ as true forms of agency, as identity choices are themselves the effects of power. In his lecture to the Collège de France on 14 January, 1976, Foucault had this to say about power and the individual: “...power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them. It is therefore, I think, a mistake to think of the individual as a sort of elementary
nucleus, a primitive atom or some multiple, inert matter to which power is applied, or which is struck by a power that subordinates or destroys individuals. In actual fact, one of the first effects of power is that it allows bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires to be identified and constituted as something individual. The individual is not, in other words, power’s opposite number; the individual is one of power’s first effects. The individual is in fact a power-effect, and at the same time, and to the extent that he is a power-effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individual it has constituted.” (Society Must Be Defended, 2003, 29-30). As a political project, then, individualization qua identity is problematic. Likewise, the ‘discovery’ of identity by science as a starting point or endpoint (for any cultural comportment or form of representation) is problematic for the same reason. Foucault speculates in “Subject and Power” about what a political project that understands “identity” as an effect of power might be charged with doing. “The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.” (336)

I would like to provide a couple of examples from Foucault’s work of the types of power that he studied. Although he never formally schematizes forms of power, over
the course of his scholarship, it is possible to discern a number of historically contingent forms of power that, in their episteme, play a part in subjectivization. In general, these forms of power can be grouped together under the rubric of “governmentality.” One of these is “the pastorate,” a form of power characteristic of modernity, which came about toward the end of the Roman Empire as a result of the introduction of Christianity. Foucault claims that rather than introducing new prohibitions on sexuality (such as monogamy, which Foucault claims was already in place at the time of Christianity), Christianity instead introduced specific techniques and procedures concerned with truth and the production of truth that regulated individuals, producing them as subjects predisposed to surveillance of the self and self-control. One technique was the confession, which compelled individuals to seek salvation, confess their interior subjectivities, and continually monitor their own behavior. Like a shepherd over his flock, pastoral power sought to attend to each person individually, in contrast to the state, which sought to centralize and consolidate its own power. In its interest in the success and prosperity of those individuals under its aegis, pastoral power can be said to be beneficial rather than triumphant, even sacrificial. Through the disciplinary techniques associated with pastoral power, Christianity constituted a form of subjectivity in the subjects it produced that was concerned with its own temptations and  

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weaknesses. “Flesh, the subjectivity itself of the body, Christian flesh, sexuality taken inside this subjectivity, inside this subjection of the individual to himself, is the premier effect of the introduction of pastoral power... So it did not prohibit and refuse [sexuality], but put in place a mechanism of power and control that was, at the same time, a mechanism of knowledge, of knowledge of individuals, of knowledge over individuals, but also of knowledge by individuals over themselves and with respect to themselves.” (1978, 126).

A second example of power important in Foucault’s thinking on subjectivization is biopower, which involves influence over both individual bodies and a collective social body, or population of bodies. In the final part of History of Sexuality, Volume 1, Foucault describes the processes through which ‘sex’ became a political technology of life that disciplined bodies and regulated populations. In the 17th Century, this new form of power emerged, cohering around two poles; one, the body as a machine and, two, the ‘species body,’ which came later. Most of Foucault’s writing deals with the second pole – the emergence of the species body and the concomitant rise of ‘population’ in the cultural imaginary and the politics of population that it made possible. Forms of biopolitics focusing on the discipline of the individual body were put to use by institutions at every level of the social body, including the family, the military, administrative bodies, etc. In particular, Foucault refers to “infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or
psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body. But it also gave rise as well to comprehensive measures, statistical assessments, and interventions aimed at the entire social body or at groups taken as a whole.” (145-6)

More than in History of Sexuality, Volume 1, Foucault’s lectures in the mid-1970s at the Collège de France were explicit about the role of the state in crafting and deploying biopower as well as the state’s particular interest in man-as-species. Biology was for the first time in history, according to Foucault, represented in politics, as the obsessions and concerns of living shifted from ‘death’ to ‘life.’ Biopower, much like the pastorate, is not about taking life but rather giving and sustaining life and the result was the proliferation of policy and state institutions charged with intervening in life. Among them were, health insurance, old-age pensions, rules on hygiene, and so on. Importantly, the impulse to gain power through interventions in human life developed in concert with the sciences and modern medicine, the result of which was the intertwining of these knowledge domains with the state apparatus. Therefore, the “neutral” institutions, apparatuses, and practices of the state and other historical cultural forms encourage life at the same time that they increase power over that life. Halperin (1995) makes a similar point. “In one book after another, but most of all in The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, Foucault attempts to show that the separation of public and private, of power and knowledge, which is characteristic of modern liberal societies, has not limited (as it is often supposed to have done) the operative field of power but instead has functioned
strategically to extend the reach of power and to multiply techniques of social control.”

(19)

Aside from ‘power,’ and its attending constructs (governmentality, discipline) and textual examples (the pastorate, biopower), I would like to detail one more area of Foucault’s work that bares on subject formation, discourse. It is important to emphasize that ‘power’ and ‘discourse’ are not unrelated; Foucault is clear that every instantiation of discourse is equally an instantiation or melding of power (i.e., discourse does not just reflect power). Further, forms of power work in conjunction with historical discourses, together contributing to the subjectivization that I’m ultimately interested in thinking about here. Foucault looks at the way that the interplay between discourse and power produces subject positions within the contexts of a variety of fields. In *Madness and Civilization*, for example, his interest is not in documenting the practices and meanings associated with madness, nor in providing a strictly historical account of the rise of madness, but is instead about the processes by which madness was incorporated into medical and scientific discourses, ultimately evolving in opposition to reason. That is, the interest is in the way madness was discursively situated in a matrix of relations including reason, knowledge, and rationality. Foucault takes the same approach to ‘discourse’ in *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, which offers a particularly holistic look at subject formation, paying explicit attention to the direct effects of power and discourse in the formation on historical subjectivity. By tying the rise of ‘sexuality’ as an
independent form of knowledge to specific historical and discursive processes, Foucault is able to extricate it from the matrix of relations that produce sexuality as ‘real.’ This is important since the philosophical and political problem that he is interested in engaging with – the disciplinization of certain ‘sexual types,’ subjects named by their sexual practices – is only a problem in the first place because of the historical articulation of sexuality in realist terms. With respect to the specific question of subjectivization, part of the project is to expose how subjects of sexuality resulted from the incorporation of sexuality into “the real” as discursive effects of those historical movements. Halperin (1995) discusses the political effects of Foucault’s method, which resist “positivist epistemologies that constitute sexuality as a (or as the) real thing, an objective natural phenomenon to be known by the mind. Foucault’s own discursive counterpractice seeks to remove sexuality from among the objects of knowledge and thereby to deauthorize those branches of expertise grounded in a scientific or quasi-scientific understanding of it…” (41-2)

The obsession with talk about sex and an affinity for categorization and taxonomy that characterized the Jenna area led to the proliferation of sexual figures, roughly, around the 18th Century. That is, sexual types came to exist as sexual practices became a powerful means of subjectivization. Foucault describes the process thusly: “The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an
indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his
total composition was unaffected by his sexuality…The sodomite had been a temporary
aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (43) Whereas before there existed a
range of sexual practices that were not central to the formation of subjects, there now
exist figures who are constituted wholly by their sexual practice, or what we may now
call, sexuality. Thus, sex was transformed from what one does, to what one is. Sex, or
sexuality, was now a mode of identification within the field of representation that
constituted ‘the real.’ As Halperin points out, the discursive formations are not neutral
with respect to one another. “Homosexual,’ like ‘woman,’ is not a name that refers to a
natural kind of thing; it’s a discursive, and homophobic, construction that has come to
be misrecognized as an object under the epistemological regime known as realism.” (45)
“Homosexual” can itself be a homophobic formation because of its ranking vis other
formations and their respective distances from heterosexual, monogamous marriage
which, as Foucault describes, was by no means new to the 18th century, but which
became the only culturally acceptable form of sexual expression.

These discourses of sexual differentiation and identification met, too, with the
rise of medical knowledge and scientific obsession taking place from the 16th Century
onward and, consequently, the sexual discourses themselves became medicalized and
laden with scientific knowledge. Not surprisingly, the sexual subjects most distant from
the sexual ideal underwent discursive pathologization. This pathologizing is a critical
part of this epistemology of sexuality, for it is not merely that sexual practice became a vector through which identity and subjecthood were constituted, but that these formations were hierarchized both morally and legally. Foucault writes, “Strange as it may seem, the Western world knew, and had known for thousands of years, a form of medicine which rested upon an understanding of illness whose fundamental categories were not organized in terms of the normal and the pathological.” What emerged was a sexuality organized not around discrete acts of pleasure, but around what Foucault calls \textit{scientia sexualis}—sexual science: the medicinal, the institutional, the scientific. The effects were numerous and cascading, with ripple effects taking place throughout the social body.\textsuperscript{13}

What is useful about Foucault’s work in general for Poststructuralist theory of subject formation is the way that it disavows the obviousness of the categories by which contemporary subjects come are named and resists the binarization of structure / agency, for in Foucault’s work, both power and the subject are forever locked in discourse. Because power is diffuse and widely distributed rather than contained locally, agency can be cobbled out by the subject. The agentive component of Foucault is

\textsuperscript{13} Foucault is particularly interested in the effects on children and the family, which he discusses at length in \textit{History of Sexuality}. For example: “The separation of grown-ups and children, the polarity established between the parents’ bedroom and that of the children…the strict instructions as to the care of nursing infants, the attention focused on infantile sexuality, the supposed dangers of masturbation…the methods of surveillance suggested to parents: all this made the family…a complicated network, saturated with multiple, fragmentary, and mobile sexualities.” (46)
of course always constrained by discourse, but is never categorically absent. It is also, at least in part, due to Foucault that poststructuralists exhibit a certain amount of skepticism about the term ‘identity,’ which is sometimes taken to be a production of the contingent, disciplinary practices that Foucault describes, and which is problematically taken by the social sciences to be prior to the subject.

2.3.3 Feminism after ‘language’

As poststructuralist theory became more generally influential, the feminist analytic lens began to move away from ‘woman’ as the natural subject of feminism and toward the cultural, historical, and epistemological production of the category of woman. The feminist imaginary was captured, more generally, by an interest in social formation and, in particular, the ways that social formations produce the categories that we believe exist outside of formation. In the wake of the linguistic turn in theory, it was possible, in new ways, for feminists to wonder what sort of subjects they would want to produce if they could influence the processes of production. This question was possible only because ‘nature,’ foundationalism, and other forms of essentialism had been rendered irrelevant by poststructuralism’s insistence that subjects were produced by power and discourse. Second-wave feminism, along with Marxism and psychoanalysis, was born at the height of modernist intellectualism. The turn to language helped feminists work past the problems of that era.
The work of Judith Butler, and in particular the iconic text *Gender Trouble*, epitomize feminist theory influenced by poststructuralist theory. Butler’s radical intervention in feminism and philosophy is carried out through engagements with a variety of fields, including psychoanalysis, phenomenology, feminism, and linguistics. With respect to linguistics, Butler, like Foucault, is inspired by the work of J.L. Austin, which provides a means for her to emphasize the primacy of language without simultaneously foreclosing context. This is important for her project for two reasons: she argues, first, that compulsory heterosexuality is embedded in the structure language and, second, that heterosexuality and gender are constituted and made “real” through their repetition in language. To develop the latter, she relies on Austin’s distinction between *performative* and *constative* utterances, the latter being a contextual locution that can be judged as true or false, the former being an illocutionary action that produces some non-linguistic effect. Take, for example, the difference between “Her estate is large” (constative) versus “I bequeath you her estate” (performative). Austin provides Butler a particular mechanism for the instantiation of heterosexuality in language, exemplified by the illocution, “I do,” where ‘do’ is a performative utterance that instantiates and repeats the [performative] performance of gender and, ipso facto, heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, then, through the mechanism of heteronormative gender, is accomplished through its constant performative repetition. Though Butler has been read (including by many sociolinguists who have latched on to *Gender Trouble*) as
suggesting that gender is a performance, it should be stressed that a reading more in line
with the rest of her project is not that gender is a performance, but that it is
performative. The confusion is the result of the example she uses to illustrate
performativity: drag, which itself being a literal performance is easily transposable with
performative. The point of ‘drag’ was to expose gender as a performative (in the
Austinian sense) imitation, a doing. Language, performativity, and imitation are key
concepts deployed by Butler in “the subjectless critique,” an attempt to work around the
assumed subject, which is assumed in psychoanalysis, second-wave feminism,
phenomenology, and Marxism.

Feminists, as I described in section 2.3.1, generally took the subject to be already
gendered and the subjectless critique engages with two separate feminist ontologies of
the subject. The first is related to Beauvoir’s The Second Sex in which the female subject
exists but is secondary. The second is related to Irigaray’s Sex Which is Not One, which
offers a tracing of phallocentrism in which women are not representable; the subject is
always-already masculine. Butler’s move is to think against the feminist tradition of the
subject, irrespective of ontology. Dispensing with a predetermined subject makes
possible a rethinking of the terms of sex, gender, and sexuality and their attendant
politics. Specifically, the lack of subject before language allows Butler implement a
Foucauldin analysis of sex, that is, to theorize sex and gender as discursive productions.
“Foucault points out that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they
But subsequently come to represent...But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures.” (1990, 4) At least one major difference between Butler and Foucault stands to be explained. Whereas Foucault understood power relations to be non-specific, Butler, in contrast, is adamant that gender, as a form of power, produces specific effects and is, thus, a specific form of power.

I now would like to briefly gloss the main argument in *Gender Trouble* here, focusing on two aspects in particular: first, the subversion of the terms of compulsory heterosexuality that rely on an essentialized, prediscursive biological sex (and heterosexuality) and second, the political possibilities made possible by dispensing with the subject. By leveraging the metaphor of drag, Butler exposes “heterosexualized genders” as a product accomplished only through interminable imitation, thus establishing as fiction the “authenticity” of heterosexuality itself. In an argument very closely aligned with Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Butler claims that, “if it were not for the notion of the homosexual as copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as origin.” In revealing the co-construction of the sexual categories, Butler is able to transpose the order of the terms and dethrone heterosexuality as natural. By troubling the ontology of the gendered subject and by rewriting the terms of its formation; that is, by imitating or parodying gender, Butler is able to expose the “illusions of continuity between sex, gender, and desire.” The ontology of the subject and the naturalness of
heterosexuality are predicated on the assumption that biological sex exists prior to its social effects (gender) and, similarly, that gender is expressed in sexuality. In contrast, if gender, constituted through performative repetitions (note: not repetitions of performance), produces as its effect the naturalness of biological sex or, put differently, if biological sex is upheld as ‘real’ only via the means of its presumed effect, then biological sex, like heterosexuality, can be said to be the copy rather than the original. In a move that forces feminist thought in a new direction, Butler teases the causes of gender apart from its effects and as a result, biological sex ceases to be the cause of gender, as it was broadly assumed to be across the humanities and social sciences. With no starting point, with nothing existing prior to the performance, with nothing that antecedes the discursive, the subject cannot be said to exist prior to its own action. This episteme, for Butler, is also a “site of political play” where the legitimacy and presumed causality of the bio-sex/gender/sexuality logic is undermined. Unwilling to reject wholesale the regulatory identity categories created by and within the discourses of the subject, Judith Butler instead argues in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1990) that the identity categories produced from within realism can be transmogrified, refigured as a critical response to the regimes the categories themselves were constituted to uphold. This move is accomplished by Butler’s careful rethinking of the terms of the sex/gender/sexuality triumvirate within the logic of compulsory heterosexuality.
In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* where Butler argues against positing a stable subject of feminist theory (woman), she writes, “It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of ‘women’ that simply needs to be filled with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete. The assumption of its essential incompleteness permits the category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings.” Thus, Butler resists the proliferation of identity categories to make up for the exclusions that ‘woman’ as the stable subject of feminist thought would imply, but she stops short of discarding identity altogether, seeming okay with it as a descriptive feature of a set of experiences conditioned by regulatory practices rather than “a normative ideal.” (23) The effect of this discussion is that it forces us to think about identity as practice, or what Butler calls, ‘performance.’ Thus, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” (33) It is also politically useful in that it displaces the logics by which identity is measurable in degrees of difference from a universal subject. So, to make gender trouble is not to work outside of the masculinist, heterosexist discourses in which gender identities cohere, but rather to mobilize the categories in the illustration of gender’s, and indeed, identity’s, illusion.

As I described at the outset of this chapter, feminists hardly united around the promise of poststructuralism, and much of the pushback came has come from the social
sciences, including many sociologists, who claim that a discursive framework ignores
the question of materiality. I would like to address this particular critique of
poststructuralist theory, as it is the one I hear most often, by describing a debate
between Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser published in *Social Text* in 1997. Their debate
brings to light tensions that cohere around the question of language and the material in
contemporary Left critique. As both Butler and Fraser make clear, these tensions are
bound up in larger issues facing leftist politics, which concern the value and applicative
utility of poststructuralism and the marginalization of sexuality in Marxist theory, both
historically and currently. Thus, the material, it seems, has become a site through which
larger debates about the general value of poststructuralism (vis other theoretical
traditions, mainly Marxism) can acquire purchase. Marxists want to know how a
“systematic understanding of social and economic modes of production” can be
obtained without a sustained analysis of the material and, conversely, poststructuralists
want to know how the left can move past its own myopic view of historical conditions
by continuing to attend only to the question of capital.

Butler’s essay, “Merely Cultural,” usefully lays out the terms through which the
knowledge production of the cultural left is figured as “factionalizing, identitarian, and
particularistic” and dismissed as “identity politics" or “merely cultural” by other leftist
scholars. Butler, of course, resists the claim that new left movements are reducible to

14 For a thorough-going discussion of the politics of identity, see Wendy Brown’s *States of Injury.*
identitarianism and contends that calls for a return to a united Marxism are motivated, on the one hand, by intellectual egoism (“implicit presumption…that Poststructuralism has thwarted Marxism”) and, on the other hand, by a false dichotomy between the material and the cultural. Further, she rejects the view of the cultural left as a paradigm of thought interested in proliferating new political movements as such, arguing that it is instead the structure of the academy itself that produces the splintering by which sexuality, gender, race, and class are institutionally partitioned as objects of study. The most marginal of these objects, as Butler sees it, is sexuality, as queer theory, for the orthodox left, is the epitome of the “merely cultural.” Here Butler is able to take Fraser to task for arguing that the struggle for “homosexuals” is a question of recognition rather than the material. To bring the material and the cultural into a single frame, Butler leverages socialist feminism, the sexual division of labor, the production of gender as a mode of sexual regulation, the gendered production of subjects for the benefit capitalism, and the heterosexual family, claiming that not only is sexuality rooted in the material, it produces it. The cultural and the material are, thus, brought into focus: when “culture” is the vector through which sexuality is regulated for the benefit of capitalism, its supposed divestiture from the material is undone.

For her part, Fraser claims that the question of recognition is already a question of the material, since cultural norms that are the basis of (mis)recognition are institutionalized. However, despite allowing the material and the cultural to share the
same space, she nevertheless insists on the *indirectness* of the material consequences of misrecognition for homosexuals. She writes that, “[sexuality] structures neither the social division of labor nor the mode of exploitation of labor power in capitalist society.” This is a matter of perspective, as Butler, in *Gender Trouble* and elsewhere, has shown that the homosexual makes possible the heterosexual, which structures the family, which functions as a site of gender reproduction and, thus, the social division of labor that Fraser claims is unrelated to homosexuality.

Thus, while feminism before language focused on the female subject and the origins of patriarchy within the sex/gender system, feminism after language is concerned with removing sex, gender, and sexuality from realist epistemologies and re-theorizing them in a poststructural-discursive framework. It is not my intention to lionize Butler, for surely her work instantiates its own problems.

### 2.4 Toward a Theory of Subject Formation

The theoretical impact of the displacement of the subject must be incalculable, but despite agreement about the subject prior to and following language, there is no concensus about what to do with identity, subjectivity, and agency in the wake of the linguistic turn. Differing approaches, for instance, make differing amounts of room for agency; some accounts use “identity” and “subjectivity” more or less interchangeably, while for others those terms do different sorts of theoretical work. The theoretical and disciplinary pathways for thinking about subjectivity and identity are, thus, numerous.
2.4.1 Subjectivity and identity

What is the relationship between subjectivity and identity? Rabinow describes subjectivity, simply, as a “multidimensional relationship (to others, to things, and to ourselves).” This relationship is always structurally situated, shaped by the contours of history and culture, and internalized by the subjects it constitutes. Bounded within subjectivity is identity, which I take to be “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us,” as Bettie (2003) defines it. “Identity” has several valences that I should unpack.

1. Political identity. The oppressive categories of identity associated with political liberalism. These categories present themselves as stable, immutable, and ahistorical. As such, they form the basis of liberal ‘diversity,’ ‘equal opportunity,’ and ‘inclusion’ political projects. As I will describe below, identity categories can be agentively reinterpreted.

2. Identity as assignment. Subjects are already always assigned an identity, irrespective of whether or not they can articulate that assignment or are even conscious of it. The moment where the ideology of assignment meets recognition (and thus, internalization) by the subject is what Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (1971) called “interpellation.”

3. Identity as ontology. An individual subject’s conscious or non-conscious mode of identification based on how he/she understands the conditions of
his/her possibility. This form of identity is popularly referred to as “personal identity” or, simply, “identity.”

“Identity” is complex because it is so dense and at the same time so diffuse that it is difficult to even understand what we mean. This impossibility is a function of that fact that “identity” is an open term into which mutable, yet socially meaningful, historically and culturally bound material can dwell. I do not mean to suggest that ‘identity’ is linguistically, materially, or socially vacuous; to the contrary, it is rich with meaning and context and the richness of identity derives from the fact that identities are as Wiegman suggests, “not meta-physical, timeless categories of being” that “point not to ontologies but to historical specificities and contingencies.” (1995, 6) It is thus the historical and contingent aspects of identity that makes it so complex. How does power and subjectivization shape the possibilities of identity? To illustrate the complex interplay between subjectivity and identity, I will discuss “racial identity,” paying attention to both ontological identification and the assignment of interpellation.

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) provide a theory of racial formation is a useful starting point in thinking about how subjects are racialized. It is not clear to me to what extant, if any, Omi and Winant are influenced by poststructuralist theory or by Foucault. Nevertheless, I refer to ‘racial formation’ here because it fits within the discursive framework I am setting up.
Racial formation is productive because, unlike earlier conceptualizations of race from within sociology (ethnicity approaches, including the Chicago School and the work of Robert E. Park; class or market based approaches; and nation based approaches) racial formation connects race as social structure to race as cultural representation through ‘racial projects.’ As a mediating link, a racial projects is “… simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning.” (56) Thus, racial formation is a process, irreducible to structure or culture, through which the meaningful categories of race in a particular moment come into being, are transformed, or erased. The process of racial formation links the discursive practices of race – the everyday, normative experience of race – with the institutional, structurally embedded meanings of race. The importance of the linkage that Omi and Winant set up cannot be understated because it refuses the facile reduction of race to a particular structural modality (such as class) or cultural representation (such as language), or to structure or representation generally. Racial formation also resists theorizing structure and representation ahistorically and, as such, is deeply committed to the project of mapping the racial evolution that began in the 15th Century. Winant (2001) attends to the historical formation of ‘race’ more closely. Global racial formation is
the result of the joint production of the imperial conquest project, the implementation of an international economic system through the expansion of capitalism, and the articulation and globalization of Enlightenment thinking. Race was thus “invented” and engaged as “an organizational principle…a structure that has constructed and reconstructed world society.” (19)

Because race is organized around practice and structure and embedded in a material history of inequality, the possibilities of “racial identity” must also be linked thusly. Therefore, racial identity is neither only a function of assignment nor only a function of ontology – racial identity is necessarily comprised of both, though the distribution of the assigned and ontological components of identity is not the same for all racial subjects. This is a crucial point. Racial identity is for some subjects nearly all assignment, categorical ascription. Racial minorities lack the privilege of having managerial control over their racial identities because their identities are already ascribed. Their bodies speak the name of determined racial identities prior to the possibility of ontological identification. The racialized colonial subject is the epitome of racial assignment. Frantz Fanon (1952) writes, “A Malagasy is a Malagasy; or rather he is not a Malagasy, but he lives his ‘Malagasyhood.’ If he is a Malagasy it is because of the white man; and if, at a certain point in his history, has been made to ask the question whether he is a man, it’s because his reality as a man has been challenged. In other words, I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man
discriminates against me, turns me into a colonized subject, robs me of any value or
originality, tells me I am a parasite in the world, etc.” (78) The racialized colonial subject
is, thus, already constituted. The identitarian dimension of colonial racial identity, as
Fanon describes, is limited to the attitudes of the colonial subject to his/her
overdetermined assignment. “The problem of colonization…comprises not only the
intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man’s [sic] attitude toward
these conditions.” (65)

It should not be assumed that for those subjects who lack a conscious, ontological
form of racial identity, that the assigned dimension is somehow historically, materially,
or socially equal for all subjects. Ascribed status is variable in its racial ascriptions
because race is imbricated with gender, sexuality, class, etc., as theorists such as Hill-
Collins (2000), McClintock (1995) and Wiegman (1995) have shown. The colonialist
project that began the modern invention of race from which contemporary racial
identities draw meaning was not gender neutral. McClintock argues, for instance, that
colonized women had the double burden of managing pre-imperial sexism from within
the community as well as the external imperialism that left them disempowered
laborers, concubines, mothers, and slaves. Contemporary meanings of race, in addition,
are always already gendered meanings. Munoz suggests that, “Although the various
processes of identification are fraught, those subjects who are hailed by more than one
minority identity component have an especially arduous time of it.” (8) By “hailing,” Muñoz is referring to Althusser’s “interpellation.”

The possibilities of racial identification for white subjects include the possibility of non-identification. To put it in Charles Mills’ (1997) contractarian terms, white subjects are written into the “racial contract” in such a way that they need not recognize or think about race as a historically determined set of effects. The material possibilities of individual identification are seen as based on merit, not on historical constitution. Unlike black subjects, whites, in general, need not wonder about what material benefits they may now have had their ancestors not been slaves\(^{15}\). Racial identification for white subjects may be equivalent to being “normal Americans.” Alternatively, whites with traceable ethnic genealogies may identify with what Waters (1990) calls “symbolic ethnicity.” (92) The ethnic whites in her study could invoke ethnic identity in situationally appropriate moments and could pick and choose with little constraint which elements of ethnicity they chose to identify with.

Identity, then, is part of an oppressive regime of history at the same time that it is a source of great pleasure for some who inhabit it. The extent to which a particular subject experiences pleasure or oppression as a result of identity is the result of both subjectivization and the subject’s experience. To make this description more

\[^{15}\text{Mills estimates the total amount of diverted income from unpaid slave labor from 1790 to 1860 with compound interest to be “more than the entire wealth of the United States.” (39)}\]
complicated, identity – its meanings, its practices, its material culture – can be appropriated in ways that resist the formations from which it draws. That is, identity can have anti-identitarian political uses. As a result of the mutability of ideology that sustains identity, the content of particular forms of identity can move even while identity forms appear stable. Zerilli (1998) is useful here in thinking about identity’s reliance on its own permeability. “Male/female (sex) and man/woman (gender) belong to a system of reference in which, paradoxical as it sounds, their stability derives from their contingency and relative plasticity. I am calling attention to the fact that language is not only stable but also amazingly tolerant.” (453) Both the permeability of language in constituting identity and the potential for tremendous movement of content in and out of ostensibly stable identity categories open up the possibility for the agentive use of oppressive identity formations. I have already discussed the ways that Butler is useful for thinking about the political possibilities of identity; that is, the use of the ideological and material content of identity against itself. In addition, Jose Muñoz (1999) elaborates one way in which subjects can escape the bind of embracing or rejecting identity formations.

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (31)

Thus, it cannot be said that there are only ratified and unratified identities, or even that vectors of identity intersect one another in a proliferating array of new
categories, but that identity is about making meaning in personally satisfying ways out of the regime of identity constituted by power through history. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the racialized subject is categorically agentless in dealing with her/his assignment. By resisting the logics of identity as either essentialized or constructed, Munoz’s theory of disidentification opens up the possibility of racial identification as an identitarian survival strategy. He writes:

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this working on and against strategy is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.

Subjectivity, like identity, can be confusing because of the multiple, nuanced ways that it is deployed in theory. Nevertheless, the conversation around subject formation provides a rich lexicon that allows for the differentiation of what is a complicated domain. Identity, as I have described previously, is a temporary attachment to subject position, or what Wiegman calls “historical specificities and contingencies.” (1995, 6) Subjectivization is the collection of processes – historical, cultural, material, and
psychic, through which individuals are rendered subjects. Subject position is the term in this lexicon with the most structural valence. Intersectionality theory and Feminist Standpoint theory are examples of attempts to theorize identity (or inequality, difference, and allied concepts) from subject positions, the social-structural position occupied by a subject who is Black + woman + non-English-speaking, for example. Subject positions are historically mutable since the terms that constitute them are themselves unstable, though they are less fluid in a particular historical moment than other terms in the conversation, including identity and subjectivity.

Though I will not incorporate it at great length here, theory of subjectivity, especially in queer theory, is greatly influenced by psychoanalysis, Lacan in particular. For a discussion of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the context of language use, see Cameron and Kulick (2003). The subject must be able to represent his or her subjectivity somehow, and psychoanalysis provides a mechanism for the internalization of the exterior forces that shape subjectivization. Viego (2007) glosses Lacan’s theory of subjectivization:

When the human organism inscribes itself in language it becomes a subject of language, and as a result of this inscription every determination of the subject will be by necessity indeterminate. Lacan understands the inscription of the subject in language as constituting a loss, a loss of a hypothesized fullness prior to the impact of language… (15)

Viego’s own project in Dead Subjects is to call attention to the tendency to conceive of ethnic-racialized subjectivity as whole, complete, and transparent; it is through those notions, he argues, that racist discourse thrives. It is not, he cautions, only through the material history of loss that ethnic-racialized subjectivity is constituted but
also through the loss that attends all subjects through their inscription in language. In “mourning the loss of loss,” that is, in insisting that ethnic subjects undergo the same psychic loss as other subjects in their inscription in language, Viego seems to suggest that there are layers of subjectivity – possibilities of ontological identification – that override the material, cultural, and historical consequences of race. Viego’s critique is useful because it underscores the excesses of subjectivity; just as subjects exceed their identity, they also exceed to a certain extent the forces that produced the subject positions that they inhabit.

2.4.2 Subjectivity, identity, and language

I have argued that because poststructuralist theory and language are closely aligned, it seems odd that linguistics would be so minimally invested contributing to or incorporating elements of its ongoing development. Connecting poststructuralist theory of the subject with linguistic theory is, in fact, the aim of this dissertation. There is, however, at least one conversation where linguistics and poststructuralism have already met: the language and sexuality debate. In 2003, linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick published a book called *Language and Sexuality* that issued a critique of the identity paradigm in the study of language and sexuality. They argued that work in linguistics on sexuality tended to reduce sexuality to sexual identity or ‘sexual orientation.’ Their proposal was open up the study of sexuality in linguistics by studying sexuality through the prism of ‘desire’ rather than identity. A
year later, Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004) published a response paper called “Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research” in the journal *Language in Society* in which they critiqued the call for a turn to desire and defended the use of identity. This debate is quite central to the project I am trying to elaborate in this dissertation. I will say from the outset that my own position intersects both Cameron and Kulick and Bucholtz and Hall but does not align entirely with either.

In the introduction to *Language and Sexuality*, the authors contend that the commitment to the identity paradigm is the result of identity politics. “The focus on language and identity that is so marked among politically committed scholars today is one reflex of the turn to a particular form of ‘identity politics’ in the late 1980s and 1990s. By identity politics we mean, roughly, a kind of politics where claims are grounded and validated with reference to the shared experience of those who identify as members of a particular group.” (xii) Owing much to poststructuralism, their critique focuses on the way that emphasis on identity, both through the proliferation of identity categories and interest in “identity construction,” has foreclosed other ways of thinking about language and sexuality. Specifically, the narrow focus on identity, they argue, evacuates sex from sexuality, reduces sexual identity to the positive aspects of identification, and ignores power. The result is that the field of language and sexuality has been committed to finding “a language of our own” for sexual types that is symmetrical with other group-level varieties (ethnic dialects, regional varieties, etc.) This is evident in the number of
studies that examine the ways that gay men use discourse patterns to signal gay identity
and studies that search for phonetic characteristics that identify gay voices.

Bound within their argument is a sustained engagement with feminist theory,
the politics of sexuality, and identity politics in general. They connect language and
sexuality to early second-wave feminism through the field of language and gender,
which is closely aligned with language and sexuality. “Since that field [language and
gender] which emerged in the early 1970s, drew its theoretical apparatus from feminism,
it is not surprising that its treatment of sexuality or sexual identity reflected the analyses
which were current among feminists at that time.” (47) In addition, they outline four
phases of research on language and sexuality, which they claim run in parallel to co

Four phases of research on language and sexuality:

1. 1920s-40s: ‘Language of homosexuality’ focuses on vocabulary and gender
   inversion

2. 1950s-60s: Homosexuality is conceived of as a social identity rather than
   pathology; scholars, mainly themselves gay and lesbian identified, begin
   studying the language of gays and lesbians as such.

3. 1970s-mid 90s: Homosexuality is framed as an oppressed minority identity
   similar to ethnic and racial identities. Influenced by African American English
   and women’s language, scholars claim there is a ‘Gayspeak.’
4. 1990s-present: Queer critique of gay politics. “Some researchers shift their enquiry from looking at how gay and lesbian identity is reflected through language, to investigating the ways in which those identities are materialized through language” and “focus shifts from seeing identity as the source of particular forms of language, to seeing identity as the effect of specific semiotic practices.” (76)

With particular respect to sexuality and language, Cameron and Kulick advocate moving the epistemological framework from identity to desire, especially the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, for whom desire is fundamentally linguistic and social. They also gloss theoretical approaches to desire offered by Freud (desire and the unconscious), Deleuze and Guattari (non-sexual desire), and Foucault (desire and power). “Identity still tends to suggest a kind of conscious claim-staking by a subject who knows exactly who s/he is, or wants to be…” (138)

For their part, Bucholtz and Hall would seem to agree with Cameron and Kulick’s critique of a theoretical program focused on categorical identity formations that ignores power and subjectivity. They authors argue that Cameron and Kulick set up a straw man argument: “The reduction of the field of language and sexuality to ‘gay and lesbian language’ allows critics to misrepresent linguistic research on minority sexual identities as being preoccupied with the search for a ‘linguistic code’…” (474) For them, the identity paradigm is already informed by recent developments in social theory that
account for “social subjectivity,” (472) and therefore, no epistemological shift is needed within the field of language and sexuality.

Bucholtz and Hall advocate a framework for the sociocultural study of language and identity that understands identity in terms of its social practices rather than “essence” (478). The elaborate their disciplinary and theoretical vision for this framework thusly: “Sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and socially oriented discourse analysis emphasize that language is the mediating level between structures of power and human agency. Language is a primary vehicle by which cultural ideologies circulate, it is a central site of social practice, and it is a crucial means for producing sociocultural identities.” (492) Further, because what they call “sociocultural identity” is based in social practice, researchers in a variety of allied disciplines are able to focus on the principles of variability and indexicality in those practices that are distinctly linguistic.

“…regardless of how we want to classify any given set of socially meaningful linguistic practices—as ‘registers,’ ‘styles,’ ‘varieties,’ ‘dialects,’ or ‘languages’—indexicality works the same way: In every case, language users both draw on and create conventionalized associations between linguistic form and social meaning to construct their own and others’ identities.” (478)

The conversation I am hoping to integrate into linguistics maps neither onto the positions articulated by Bucholtz and Hall nor Cameron and Kulick. It is by no means my intention to dispense of identity. In the terms of the conversation I am putting forth, such a move would be intellectually untenable, as identity is an unyielding constituent of subjectivity. By the same token, it is also not my intention to turn identity completely
over to social practice, as identity practices are part of a bundle of cultural effects of subject formation and historical constititution.

2.5 Conclusion

Linguists have, for many good reasons, been interested in the relationship between language and identity. Following a period where language was seen as simply reflecting dimensions of assigned identities, the vast majority of recent research that explores this relationship has focused on the ways that individuals construct identities using language. Countless studies have investigated the linguistic practices of various identity-based groups, arguing that those identities are, in part, constructed by their inhabitants, who deploy linguistic features imbued with ‘local’ or ‘group’ meanings that represent those groups. This has been born out empirically, and work done in this area is theoretically useful, as it has shown that the meaning of language and language variation is far more mutable than previously thought. It has shown that they ways speakers fashion themselves plays not a peripheral role in language variation, but a fundamental one. However, when individuals are ‘constructing identity’ they are doing so with culturally and historically contingent materials. The identity formations (categories or otherwise) that individuals inhabit, oppose, ignore, etc. are made of meanings, ideologies, and materials that pre-exist any individual “agentive” deployment of language that locally constructs or represents those formations. For instance, nerd girls can embrace nerdiness, and may use, on their own volition, a variety
of linguistic elements (variation, discourse styles, etc.) to signal, or ‘index,’ their nerd identities. What is missing is that the trope of nerdiness pre-existed them; the category of nerd came before their “choice” to dwell within it.

The sociocultural study of language and identity has also forced linguists to grapple with the question of agency and language. This is long overdue, as mid and late 20th century linguistics severely limited or discarded culture, opting for speakers whose language, variable only in its imperfection, is biologically determined or speakers whose language, variable in its perfection, are socially determined. We are now at a moment, however, when ‘agency’ is overused and undertheorized. I have argued that moving the epistemological framework to subject formation and away from identity helps balance the agentive dimension of ‘identity construction,’ as discursive subjects are never solely inscribed through acts of identity at the individual level. As I have attempted to illustrate by tracing poststructuralist theory of the subject within feminist theory, identities are superficial, not in the sense that they do not matter, but in the sense that they are on top, the outer layer. Identity may be the cause for a speaker to deploy a particular linguistic feature or engage in a particular linguistic practice, but the identity itself is already an effect. In the case of feminism, the critical move was from studying women to studying the processes that produce the possibility of women. This is what I am hoping to open up in linguistics. We can study the surface, the identities that are the products of subjectivization, but those identities will always proliferate in accordance
with the unfolding of human social history. In contrast, linguists can think more broadly about the way language produces subjects and subjectivities including, but not limited to, identity. There may well be utility in ongoing description of the relationship of the effect of subjectivization to language, just as there surely is much utility in the ongoing description of regional dialect variation, for example. For a social theory of language, however, I contend that we need to understand more. That is why I propose a turn to speaking subjects.
3. Volatile vowels and racialized subjects: A case study in articulations of self

3.1 Introduction

So far I have been concerned with two major issues: 1) the transformation of linguistics from a socially and culturally based project into a discipline with a limited capacity to speak about culture, and 2) the effect of that limitation on the ability to theorize the critical relationship between language and its users. Within late 20th century and contemporary American social approaches to linguistics, an oversimplified form of identity has been the dominant way of theorizing this relationship. I have proposed turning to poststructuralist theory of subject formation to provide a more theoretically complete way of examining this relationship. This move helps linguistics avoid the problem of identity outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, while at the same time retaining identity as a dimension of social formation. For cultural studies and allied fields, the incorporation of linguistic analysis opens up a new domain for textual analysis while at the same time helping to anchor social theory in important dimensions of the human experience, such as linguistic practice.

As a case study, the current chapter is concerned with using the linguistic and social facts of Maria’s story to elucidate the theoretical project I have begun to set forth in Chapters 1 and 2. As such, this chapter is somewhat self-contained; it distills the historiographic / theoretical project and places it in the context of one girl’s personal story, a complex social narrative in which language not only tells, but also imprints the
nuances of subject formation into its very structure. It is through the complexities of this story that I hope to bring several disparate views of language – cultural discourse, narrative discourse, and linguistic structure – into a single framework. Because my commitment to interdisciplinarity requires that I assume no specialized disciplinary-specific knowledges, I take great care in unpacking a range of ideas – methodological and theoretical – that will be completely unfamiliar to non-linguists.

3.2 The Scope of Chapter 3

In section 3.3, I will introduce “Maria” (a pseudonym) and provide an outline of her story. This section is as valuable to the project at hand as the linguistic analysis and the theoretical intervention I make with it because, in a sense, Maria’s story is a performance of this intervention in theory: language exceeds the sum of its structures, including those that co-vary with social factors, and the possibilities of language exceed the capacity of identity to account for them. Maria’s language is the language that it is because of subjectivity (including identity and all the processes of subjectivization), and her subjectivity is the subjectivity that it is because of language. Maria’s story underscores the dialectic between language and subjectivity. That is, the story of Maria’s subjectivity is incomplete without thinking about language, and the story of her language is incomplete without thinking about her subjectivity, which in this writing assumes the form of “a story.”
3.3 “Maria’s” Story

The data examined here come from a three-year case study of a speaker, “Maria,” (a pseudonym) a now 16 year-old Mexican American who immigrated to Raleigh, North Carolina from Mexico City in 2000 at the age of 8. She came to Raleigh, the capital city, to live with her parents from whom she was estranged for over two years, a situation that is increasingly common throughout the Southeast. At the time of my first interview with Maria in January, 2003 she was ten years old, had lived in North Carolina for about two years, living in an insular Spanish-speaking Mexican American community, and was attending a predominantly white, English-speaking elementary school in a nearby suburb of Raleigh. Despite living in a Mexican American community, Maria was only one of two Latino students in her class, and one of only a handful of Latino students in her entire school. At the time of a second interview with Maria, she was 14 years old and lived in an emerging, ethnically mixed community comprised predominantly of working class African Americans, whites, and Latino immigrants, mainly of Mexican and Central American origin. In contrast to her all-white suburban elementary school, Maria’s current middle school is approximately 50% African American, 30% Latino, and 20% white and ethnic other.

When I was introduced to Maria and her family in 2003, I began my research by collecting traditional sociolinguistic interviews in Spanish and English, but as I became more integrated into the local community, the research began to take a more
ethnographic turn. I was able to attend quinceañeras, bautizos, school plays, comidas, and holiday fiestas, some of which were recorded or filmed.

At the time of the first data collection in 2003, Maria had by-and-large acquired the English of her classroom cohort from the suburban elementary school—mainly white children whose parents had moved to central North Carolina from northern Midland, Western, and New England states. This is not a variety of English commonly associated with the South and as such, is very much associated with the suburb of Maria’s school, which itself is understood locally as non-Southern. In December 2005, about three years after conducting the first interview with Maria, I was invited to attend a party thrown by Maria’s parents to celebrate the purchase of their first home in the United States, in the new, ethnically mixed neighborhood I described previously. There, I noticed that Maria had acquired, not only a new style of dress—tight jeans with rips and magic marker insignia, ‘baby phat’ accessories, and large hoop earrings—and a new hairstyle, but also what seemed to be an entirely new ‘dialect.’ For the first time since meeting Maria, she sounded, impressionistically, more, rather than less, Latina and for the first time in my presence, she referred to herself as ‘Mexican.’ This self-reference, as much as her new linguistic and aesthetic styles, was interesting to me, as I had the impression that in prior moments Maria had sought to distance herself from Mexican culture. One clue to this distancing was the habitual assertion that she had forgotten
Spanish. It was this literal embodiment of difference and the attendant metamorphosis in language that are the genesis of the analysis presented in this chapter.

The data used in this case study come from the two time periods described above: my first interview with Maria from January 2003, which will be referred to as “T1,” and an interview conducted about three years later in December, 2005, which will be called “T2.”

**3.4 Conducting Linguistic Analysis for Non-Linguists**

**3.4.1 Variables and Variants**

So far I have discussed the term “variable” and the related term “sociolinguistic variable” in the first chapter, but I have not yet discussed a) how abstract sociolinguistic variables relate to their actual linguistic realizations (variants) or b) why this specific terminology matters to the bigger issue at hand, language and subject formation. In a seminal paper describing a new framework for the study of language change, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968), attempt to open up language structure to include variation, or alternation between forms that can be substituted for one another without changing “meaning.” The aim was to make language theoretically heterogeneous in accordance with the empirical heterogeneity already established by the dialectologists, among many others, for the purposes of articulating a theory of language change. Such a theory was not possible, they argued, so long as formal rules of language were thought
to yield invariant structures, as a precursor to language change is language variation.

They describe the theoretical project this way:

The heterogeneous character of the linguistic systems discussed so far is the product of combinations, alternations, or mosaics of distinct, jointly available subsystems. Each of these subsystems is conceived as a coherent, integral body of rules of the categorical, Neogrammariantype; the only additional theoretical apparatus needed is a set of rules stating the conditions for alternation.” (165, emphasis added)

The mechanism they introduce to introduce variability into the system is the linguistic variable: “To account for such intimate variation, it is necessary to introduce another concept into the mode of orderly heterogeneity which we are developing here: the linguistic variable—a variable element within the system controlled by a single rule.” (167)

Since then, much attention has been given to the linguistic variable. Wolfram (1993, 195) points out that scrutinizing the variable is an important endeavor in light of linguistics’ concern with the identification and description of linguistic units and the relationship among such units. Therein, he describes two ways the variable has been historically theorized in sociolinguistics. Under the first conception, the variable served mainly sociolinguistic ends, designed “to reveal the most clear-cut pattern of social and linguistic co-variation.” (197) This moment was superseded by a second conceptualization of the variable, brought about, as Wolfram describes, by the advent of

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1 The Neogrammarians are a 19th century school of German linguists who, among other things, argued that in a diachronic sound change, all words containing the sound in question would be equally affected, given the right phonetic environments. This principle about the regularity of sound change is known as the “Neogrammarian hypothesis,” and stands in contrast to “lexical diffusion” position (Wang 1969), which argues that sound change proceeds lexical item by lexical item. See Labov (1994) for a lengthy discussion of these positions.
the variable rule, which I discussed in the first chapter. Studies that made use of variable rules (Labov 1969; Cedergren and Sankoff 1974; Sankoff 1978, among many others) did so with an emphasis primarily on the linguistic constraints of variability. It did not dispense with the notion that some constraints on variation were sociological, but it had the effect of moving the inquiry from co-variation alone to the complex patterning between variables, variants, and subvariants. Wolfram comments on this effect:

In adopting a linguistic basis as the starting point for this rule...the ‘variable’ departed from its original definition in which the linguistic relationship of the variants to each other was irrelevant...The revised version was linguistically-based, as it was confined to linguistic rules that were enhanced by linguistic and social constraints on variability. In this definition, social constraints were simply added to linguistically-principled factors influencing variation. (197-8)

Taking up the issue of the variable as a theoretical construct, Wolfram provides a useful explanation of the relationship between the variable and variant. “The linguistic variable, as used in language variation studies, is itself an abstraction; it is made up of a class of variants – varying items that exist in a structurally-defined set of some type. In a sense, the relationship of the variable to its variants may be likened to some class linguistic relationships, such as that between a morpheme and its allomorphs or a phoneme and its allophones…” (195) Chambers (2003, 18) adds that, unlike the allophones of phonemes, it is not always possible to predict which variant of a sociolinguistic variable will be realized. While allophonic realizations are predictable (thereby forming one of the major thrusts of phonology), “the occurrence of one or another of the variants may thus correlate with some linguistic factor in the
environment, but as a probability rather than a necessity.” (18) For example, Wolfram (1974) determined in his study of Puerto Rican and African American males in East Harlem that the ‘th’ sound, as in the word tooth (represented phonetically as [θ]) could manifest in speech as one of a number of different phonetic realizations. These included [f], [t], [s], and [ø] (no phonetic realization), in addition to [θ]. The variable, then, was the sound /θ/ and the variants of the variable were the sounds [f, t, s, ø, θ]. For several of the variants, additional subvariants were also possible. Regardless of the status as variant or subvariant, the relationship between the variable and its possible phonetic realizations is the same: variants of a variable are conditioned, but not determined, by the linguistic-structural context as well as the social-structural context.

Why, then, does linguistic (sociolinguistic) patterning matter for the study of language and society? What, exactly, is social about variables and their variants? That is to ask, what is social about variability in language? The short answer is ‘everything’ since language is already-always social. Beyond that, language structure – certain grammatical, morphological, and phonological forms of language – vary systematically according to who uses them. That systematic variation is not arbitrary; it matches up strikingly with other sociocultural divisions. For instance, Wolfram (1974) found that although Puerto Ricans in the northern American cities have taken up many features of African American English, those Puerto Rican speakers who have closer contact with African Americans have higher frequencies of the features of African American English
used widely by Puerto Ricans, as well as some features of African American English not found in the speech of Puerto Ricans with little African American contact.

This relationship should be of great interest to humanities scholars and social scientists interested in subject formation, social structure and human agency, as there is no better illustration of the relationship between the forces of culture and the individual than language. To put it crudely, language variation is, in a sense, a microcosm of subject formation itself. Speakers of a given language are constituted differently from one another, having more or less access to prestige structures, as the result of historically contingent social and cultural divisions, but yet, a speaker’s language is never fully determined. In addition to demonstrating extraordinary creativity with language, speakers have some scope to modify their manner of language use, including linguistic structure, though, as I hope to show in this chapter, such modifications do not come without their costs.

Labov himself once seemed interested in the question of constitution and the linguistic possibilities of the individual in light of historical constitution. Although he his work went in other directions, there is a fleeting reference to subject formation from *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* where he takes a deterministic perspective. In the introduction, he writes, “…it can be argued that the individual does not exist as a linguistic entity…But the individuals we study are conceived of as the product of their social histories and social memberships.” (1966/2006, 5, emphasis added) Although
Labov abandoned the question of subject formation, it comes up, if orthogonally, in other quarters. Of the social theorists of broad interest to the humanities and social sciences, it is Bourdieu who, in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), attends most explicitly to language variation by making a critical engagement with Labov and taking up the question of the relationship between linguistic structure, social interaction, and social structure. He writes “…the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered.)” (1991, 61) I would suggest that Bourdieu is not using ‘discourse’ in the Foucauldian sense, but rather in the context of linguistic interaction, which includes linguistic structure. My point is this: neither the terms variable / variant, nor the other “scientific” language used by linguists should deter humanities and social science scholars from attending to language and language variation, which I hope to show to be valuable ways of thinking about subject formation.

### 3.4.2 Acoustic Phonetics

Ever since Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972) introduced instrumental techniques to sociolinguistics, acoustic analysis of speech has been an enduring part of sociolinguistic methodology. Spectrographic science has proved useful to scholars working within a variety of fields in linguistics. Instrumental techniques were originally brought to sociolinguistics to assist in the study of sound change, as Thomas (2000, 369) points out. Most of the work on sound change and dialect variation has been based on vowels and changes in formant structure, following the work of Labov et al (1972).
Several scholars (Docherty and Foulkes 1999; Thomas 2001, 171) have observed that sociolinguists’ interest in changes in formant structure has been at the expense of other uses of instrumental techniques. On the other hand, acoustic analysis cannot answer every question, nor is it methodologically appropriate for every sort of linguistic analysis. Lindblom (1980), for instance, notes that acoustic analysis is useful only insofar as it reflects linguistically relevant material. In any case, the incorporation of acoustic methods from phonetics into sociolinguistic analysis has become so prolific as to have constituted an independent field of inquiry, called “sociophonetics.” The first attested use of ‘sociophonetics’ as a label for this field is from 1991, Esling’s “Sociophonetic Variation in Vancouver,” although sociophonetic analysis had already been robust for several decades prior to this use. I suspect that one reason why sociophonetics can be understood as a field of inquiry rather than a set of methods is because of the specialized training required to conduct acoustic analysis. In this section I will describe some of the basic tenants of acoustic analysis that I hope will make the results discussed later in this chapter intelligible.

Instrumental techniques borrowed from phonetics are used to take measurements of a variety of acoustic properties of speech that help (socio)linguists track sound change over time and analyze forms of variation at any point in time. The sound spectrograph is the primary instrument used for speech analysis in contemporary linguistics. The sound spectrograph provides a visual image of speech by analyzing the
acoustic signal – or series of sound waves – emitted from the vocal tract during speech. The physical science behind the sound spectrograph is relatively simple, and I will provide a brief description of it here. Air ascending from the lungs via the trachea reaches the larynx, the organ sometimes called the “vocal box” colloquially, which contains the glottis and the vocal folds, oftentimes called “vocal chords” colloquially. The vocal folds themselves are two pliable pieces of tissue that stretch horizontally across glottis and which may fully cover the glottis, trapping expired air behind them, or remain open over the glottis, allowing air to pass through by freely. The glottis is simply the aperture in the larynx through which expired air passes. When the vocal folds close over the glottis, air from the lungs (via the trachea) builds up behind them, causing air pressure to increase. Eventually, the increase in air pressure causes the vocal folds to blow apart and, if expired air continues to flow, the vocal folds will be set into vibration, which is process of opening and closing. Each time the vocal folds blow open during a cycle of vibration, a small puff of air is emitted into the pharynx, the cavity just above the larynx. This small puff of air is the beginning of a sound wave. Vibrating vocal folds (called “voicing”) constitute the primary sound source for speech. A full cycle of vocal fold vibration – air pressure build up, opening, closing – can occur in excess of 100 repetitions per second. The rate of vocal fold vibration, measured in cycles-per-second, or Hertz (Hz), is called the fundamental frequency. The perceptual correlate of fundamental frequency is pitch.
A complex sound wave, comprised of component simple, sinusoidal waves begins at the sound source, the glottis. Sound waves are nothing more than fluctuations in the pressure of the medium in which they travel; typically the medium for speech is air. A wave propagates through its medium as (air) molecules move closer together and then farther apart. In fact, a sound wave is made up of compression (higher than normal air pressure) and rarefaction (lower than normal air pressure). (Johnson 2003, 5) The complex wave emitted from the vocal folds, however, does not itself constitute linguistic sound. The wave must first be filtered, which happens as it passes through the supra-glottal vocal tract. As an acoustic filter, the vocal tract amplifies some components of the sound source, and dampens others. (Johnson 2003, 85) This is possible because the vocal tract, like all forms of matter, has natural resonant frequencies. When harmonics of the sound source have the same or almost the same frequency of the resonant frequency of the vocal tract, those harmonics are amplified. Frequencies of the sound source not corresponding to a particular resonant frequency are damped. There are many resonant frequencies in the vocal tract, and the matter of which resonant frequencies will effect a complex wave and which will not depends on the shape of the vocal tract during a particular utterance. That is, the vocal apparatus, including the vocal organs, modulates the complex wave emitted by the sound source through articulation. Thus, articulation and acoustics are two sides of the same coin. To put it differently, the positioning of the vocal organs determines the shape of the vocal tract, which serves as an acoustic filter.
The acoustic filter determines the quality of the sound (i.e. whether the sound is [e] or [æ] or any other sound). The speech – also called the acoustic signal – is the product of both the sound source (glottis) and the sound filter (modulated vocal tract).

The natural resonant frequencies of the vocal tract that result in the amplification and damping of component frequencies of the sound source wave are called formants and can be measured by the sound spectrograph. Formant measurements are important because they indicate the “shape” or structure of a particular sound and, thus, contribute important information about the way an individual is speaking at any given time. The sound spectrograph represents speech data visually in several forms. Figure 1 depicts two such forms, along with relevant acoustic information such as pitch and formant frequency. The top half of the figure is called a waveform, which an image of a sound wave that depicts time on the x-axis and amplitude, which we perceive as loudness, on the y-axis. Each of the vertical blue lines indicates a glottal pulse, or the moment in the cycle of vocal fold vibration at which puffs of air escape from opened vocal folds. The bottom half of the figure is a more complex representation of the utterance called a spectrograph. It depicts the same information as the waveform, but in a format that allows for the presentation of additional acoustic information. Like the waveform, the spectrograph depicts time on the x-axis and as such, you can “read” the spectrograph from left to right, from the start to the end of a particular utterance. The y-axis depicts frequency and amplitude is depicted by the relative darkness of the shape, where darker
portions have greater amplitudes (in decibels). Each of the red dots on the spectrogram corresponds to a formant. The reader will notice that these dots form more or less horizontal lines over the time course of the $x$-axis. These lines correspond to specific formants, each one of which provides important acoustic information about the structure of the sound. The formants with the lowest frequencies (i.e. the dots constituting the line closest to the bottom of the figure) are called the first formant, abbreviated F1. The formants with the next highest frequency are called the second formant, or F2, and so on. The first two formants are the most important for the analysis of most linguistic sounds, including most vowels, as this is usually enough information to disambiguate the quality of one sound from another. Specifically, the first formant corresponds to the “height” of a sound within the oral cavity. With respect to vowels, a higher frequency first formant corresponds to a low vowel, such as /a/ (the vowel sound in *pot*) and a lower frequency first formant to a high vowel, such as /i/ (the vowel sound in *Pete*). The second formant corresponds to the “backness” of a sound within the oral cavity (i.e., produced more toward the teeth or more toward the velum). A sound with a high frequency second formant corresponds to a front vowel, such as /i/, while a sound with a lower frequency second formant corresponds to a back vowel, such as /a/. (Note that vowels are characteristically described by their height and position on the front/back dimension in the oral cavity.)
3.5 The Variable Elements in Maria’s Speech

In this section, I will introduce the linguistic features I analyzed based on recordings of Maria’s speech. All of the features are phonetic ones, meaning they are particular sounds in Maria’s English, and three of them are vowel sounds. As I introduce these features, I will also continue to unpack the basic linguistic theory that renders as variables language sounds such as the ones I investigate here. This unpacking will likely seem tedious to readers in linguistics, but I think it will facilitate the type of disciplinary conjunction I am imagining.
Based on impressionistic observation of differences in production between the two periods, I selected four variables for linguistic analysis. Three of those variables, all vowels, are commonly referred to as “segmental” features in linguistics. The term ‘linguistic segment’ is roughly synonymous with ‘linguistic structure,’ and refers to the combinatorial, meaning-making constituents of a particular linguistic unit. For example, the word ‘pot’ contains three linguistic segments: the sounds /p/, /a/, and /t/. These segments are also called “phonemes,” which means simply that they are meaningful linguistic speech sounds. It goes without saying that not every linguistic sound exists in every one of the world’s 5,000-7,000 languages, and even when a particular sound is shared between two given languages, it may play different sorts of structural and cognitive work, as I will discuss below. All of this is to suggest, simply, that the analysis of the segments in the sections that follow is highly particularistic and I am not attempting to make any cross-linguistic claims whatsoever. The three segmental features I investigate, which I will explain in greater detail below, include the vowel sound /u/, as in the vowel of the word ‘food,’ and two variants of the vowel sound /æ/, as in the vowel of the word ‘cat.’ I will introduce each of the variables in the sections that follow.

3.5.1 Pre-Nasal and Non-Pre-Nasal Allophones of /æ/

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2 It also bears mention that the current emphasis is on speech, not orthography; that is, in the case of “pot,” the interest is in the sounds, not the letters, or “graphemes,” ‘p,’ ‘o,’ or ‘t.’
In spoken language, some sounds that speakers perceive as equivalent and that may be represented the same way in writing actually have different phonetic realizations that native speakers of a language might not readily be aware of. Differing variants of a particular sound perceived by language users as “the same” are called allophones. Sounds have allophonic variants as a result of phonetic context, also called phonetic environment. That is, sound segments frequently assume the phonetic characteristics of neighboring sounds, or, alternatively, the phonetic characteristics of neighboring sounds prohibit the realization of a particular phonetic quality of the sound in question. In short, neighboring sounds tend to bear some influence on one another, and sometimes this results in the regularized appearance of allophonic variants in specific phonetic environments. This is so because human articulation does not function by producing a series of concatenated, discrete sound segments. That is, we do not speak words the same way we write them. Coarticulation, the “overlap” of articulatory gestures, characterizes each and every utterance. Therefore, while a native speaker of American English will likely have the same mental representation of the sound /p/ for the words ‘pit’ and ‘spit,’ the acoustic and articulatory characteristics are actually different. The /p/ in ‘pit’ is produced with a puff of air, called aspiration, while the phonetic context of ‘spit’ prohibits such aspiration. These two variants, [pʰ] and [p], are allophones which, for speakers of American English, are collapsed into a single mental representation, /p/.
I will now return to the second and third segmental variables under investigation, which are allophones of the phoneme of /æ/, the vowel sound in the word “cat.” In most varieties of English in North America, the phoneme /æ/ is realized differently depending on whether or not the following sound is classified as a “nasal consonant.” (Kurath and McDavid 1961; Labov, Ashe, and Boberg 2006; Thomas 2001) Before I can discuss how the pre-nasal versus non-pre-nasal context matters, I should first give a short background on nasality. I have already explained how the relationship between phonemes and allophones depends in part on phonetic environment; what follows is a description of a particular instance of this relationship: the effect of a nasal sound on its neighboring vowels.

The nasal consonants of modern English are /n/ as in the word *sand*, /m/ as in the word *Sam*, and /ŋ/ as in the word *sang*. Each of these differs from one another only in place of articulation. For /n/, the tip of the tongue raises to the alveolar ridge, just behind the upper teeth. The sound /m/ is produced by bringing the upper and lower lip into contact, and the sound /ŋ/ is made by contact between the back of the tongue and the velum, or soft palate. All consonant sounds are characterized by some articulatory closure in the supraglottal region of the vocal tract (this is the region above the glottis, comprising the length of the vocal tract from the pharynx all the way to the lips). For a given consonant, the flow of air and acoustic energy may be completely obstructed, as for the sound [t], or partially obstructed, as for the sound [s]; it is this obstruction that
differentiates consonants physically from vowels, for which the shape of the vocal tract is modulated, but not obstructed. Nasal consonants are classified as such because the primary acoustic resonance chamber is the nasal cavity rather than the oral cavity, which serves as the primary resonance chamber for all non-nasal sounds. Air from the lungs and acoustic energy from the larynx pass into the nasal cavity via the velopharyngeal port, which opens as a result of the lowering of the velum, or soft palate. In contrast, the velopharyngeal port is closed off for oral (non-nasal) sounds, causing air and acoustic energy to pass into the oral cavity. The velopharyngeal port remains open, cutting off airflow to the oral cavity, for approximately 200-250 milliseconds (Stevens 2001, 487), during which time the vocal folds continue to vibrate. The combined closure of the oral cavity with sustained vocal fold vibration produces the sound we perceive as “nasal,” known as a nasal murmur.

Two other points must be added to the situation I have just described in order to fully explain how certain dialects of English have ended up with an allophonic split based on the pre-nasal / non-pre-nasal phonetic context. The first point involves the relationship between a) the acoustic energy produced by the vibrating vocal folds during the period of the nasal murmur and b) the nasal and oral chambers. I have stated that during the period of the closure of the oral cavity, the acoustic energy flows via the velopharyngeal port into the nasal cavity. This is only partially true, as it is also the case that even a “closed” oral cavity, now a side branch of the primary acoustic pathway, still
absorbs acoustic energy. (Johnson 2003, 154) This is particularly true for nasals with front places of articulation, such as [m] and [n]. Secondly, acoustic coupling occurs in the nasal cavity a few milliseconds prior to the oral closure and for an even shorter interval following the release of the constriction. As a result of both of these, the sound resonating from the oral (and nasal) cavities during these periods is characteristically nasal. (Stevens 2001, 490) In addition, the shape of the vocal tract (corresponding to a particular vowel sound) prior and following a nasal consonant also affects the degree, or amount, of velopharyngeal port opening. Clumeck (1975) has shown, for instance, that the velopharyngeal port is more open for the production of a non-nasal low vowel than for a non-nasal high vowel, where the terms “low” and “high” refer to the position of the tongue in the oral cavity. This means that a vowel such as /æ/ may be more susceptible to the acoustic effects of nasalization than a vowel such as /i/.

These points have important consequences for the vowels that follow and precede nasal consonants. For instance, nasalization can result in acoustic effects on neighboring vowels that would appear to be the result of articulation (i.e. tongue movement) in non-nasal environments. House (1957) and Krakow et al. (1998) have shown that nasalization can effect acoustic structure of neighboring vowels in specific ways, including lowering the first formant (F1) and raising the second formant (F2). Wright (1975, 1986) has shown that nasalized vowels are perceived higher than their non-nasal counterparts (i.e. produced with a higher tongue position in the oral cavity).
The factors leading to the relationship between nasal sounds and adjacent vowels that I have just described are responsible for an allophonic split that characterizes the majority of varieties of North American English. This split is the difference in production between the /æ/ sound in pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal phonetic contexts. As Labov, Ashe, and Boberg (2006), Thomas (2001), and others have shown, /æ/ is characteristically “raised,” or “tensed” in pre-nasal contexts, such that the vowel of ‘ham’ has a different acoustic structure than the vowel sound in ‘hat.’ In general, however, it is thought that Mexican American, Chicano, and Latino varieties of English resist this allophonic split by not raising /æ/ in the pre-nasal context (Thomas, 2001). For example, in a study I conducted with Erik Thomas and Libby Coggshall investigating the possible influence of African American and Anglo varieties of English on Mexican American varieties, we found that speakers of Mexican American English produced significantly lowered forms of /æ/ in the pre-nasal context. We collected data from two communities, a longstanding Mexican American community in South Texas, and an incipient, immigrant Mexican American community in central North Carolina. We performed a detailed acoustic analysis of the speech of each individual speaker in the study, which included white, non-Chicano English speaking Americans from the respective contiguous communities in Texas and North Carolina. Figure 2 depicts our findings for the vowel quality (height) of non-pre-nasal /æ/, where the x-axis shows year of birth and the y-axis shows a score for vowel height based on normalized values of the
first formant in Hertz. Higher scores on the $y$-axis indicate more raised quality, lower scores more lowered quality. Each point on the graph represents the mean production of non-pre-nasal ash for an individual speaker.

![Graph showing normalized non-pre-nasal /æ/ in two communities.](image)

**Figure 2: Normalized Non-Pre-Nasal /æ/ in Two Communities**

In the non-pre-nasal context, we found a great deal of overlap for speakers of Mexican American and non-Mexican American varieties of English. This overlap held for both the North Carolina and Texas communities. In contrast, we found an almost categorical split between Mexican American and non-Mexican American English for the pre-nasal context, with speakers of the Mexican American varieties producing more
lowered quality vowels than the speakers of the non-Mexican American varieties, as depicted in Figure 3, below.

![Figure 3: Normalized Pre-Nasal /æ/ in Two Communities](image)

I would like to make the point that /æ/ is generally susceptible to variation in varieties of English spoken by Latinos in the United States, and the documented patterns of variation do not always hinge on the allophonic split I have just described. In her study of native and non-native speakers of Chicano English in Southern California, Fought (2003) found /æ/-backing to correlate significantly with sex and gang affiliation, with women and non-gang members backing more than men and gang-members. /æ/-
backing, where the word *black* sounds something like *block* is generally characteristic of white Californians, and as such, female and non-gang affiliated speakers of Chicano English are moving in concert with that pattern. (131) Fought also examined /æ/-raising and found that it correlated positively with sex, where men favored the raised variant, while women did not (133). Peñalosa (1980, 119-121) reports on a merger between /æ/ and /a/, the first sound in the word *father*. Godínez and Maddieson (1985, 52) find /æ/ to be backed slightly more by Chicano English monolinguals than by those speakers who are bilingual in Spanish. They also report that /æ/ is higher for bilinguals than for “General California English.” (56) Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia (1985, 45) find that although a phonemic contrast is preserved between /æ/ and /e/, the vowel sound in *egg*, in Chicano English, it is distributed differently than in non-Chicano varieties, such that ‘bat’ may sound like ‘bet’ and ‘back’ may sound like ‘beck.’ Conversely, /ɛ/ may be realized as /æ/ in pre-liquid environments, such that ‘bell’ may sound like ‘ball’ and ‘elevator’ may sound like ‘al-evator.’

### 3.5.2 Speech Rhythm

The final variable is prosodic rhythm. Unlike the preceding segmental variables, prosody is said to be suprasegmental, meaning that it occurs across linguistic segments. Speech rhythm, like intonation and other suprasegmentals, cannot be meaningfully located on one and only one linguistic structure; instead, many connected segments are needed in order to observe suprasegmental linguistic features. Until relatively recently,
speech rhythm eluded acoustic analysis, leaving scholars to continue classifying languages categorically as either stress-timed, syllable-timed, or mora-timed. Pike (1945) first coined the terms stress-timing and syllable-timing to describe the rhythmic patterns of the languages he studied, Spanish and English, respectively. Abercrombie (1967) formalized the distinction made by Pike, and as Thomas and Carter (2006) note, this distinction has held, both as a definition and a point of contention, ever since. The account offered by Pike and Abercrombie, based largely on Indo-European languages, considers syllable-timed those languages for which every syllable has more or less the same duration and stress-timed those languages for which every syllabic foot (the combination of a stressed and an unstressed syllable) to have more or less the same duration. Eventually, however, numerous studies found that syllable durations differ greatly in the so-called syllable-timed languages and, further, that inter-stress duration does not differ greatly between stress- and syllable-timed languages. (e.g., Roach, 1982; Wenk and Wiolland, 1982; Dauer, 1983; Borzone de Manrique and Signorini, 1983). The most forceful critique of the stress / syllable-timing system explanation came from Dauer (1983), who argued that speech rhythm was a function of phonological features of language, ranging from consonantal structure, the presence or absence of syllable reduction, and patterns of word stress. He concluded that patterns of rhythm did not reflect any underlying, intrinsic rhythmic system. The tendency of English to reduce
syllables make it seem stress-timed, while in contrast, the relative absence of syllable reduction in Spanish make it seem syllable-timed. Eventually scholars established that patterns of prosodic rhythm are continual and gradient rather than categorical and discrete. (Miller, 1984; Ramus, Nespor, and Mehler, 1999:268-69) Languages previously understood to be prototypical stress-timed languages (Germanic languages, such as English and Dutch) and prototypical syllable-timed languages (Italic languages, such as Spanish and Italian) simply came to be seen as languages with well-defined timing characteristics, but not independent systems of rhythm per se. In addition, some languages were identified as having mixed characteristics, such as Catalan, which exhibits simple syllable types but also syllable reduction, and Polish, with complex syllable types but no reduction. These languages could then be identified as intermediate, neither stress- nor syllable-timed.

Interested in the question of the influence of phonological structure on rhythm, Ramus et al. (1999) devised a study in which native speakers of languages reported to be stress-timed (English and Dutch), syllable timed (French, Italian, and Spanish), and mora-timed (Japanese) were asked to read sentences aloud. They analyzed the spoken data for three continuous variables: the standard deviation of duration between consonants, standard deviation of duration between vowels, and the proportion of an

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3 Syllable reduction is a phenomenon in which unstressed syllables are shortened in duration and the vowel centralizes to /ɐ/, the second vowel sound in the word sofa.
utterance taken up by vowels. The languages sorted out according to rhythm type for all three measures, leading the authors to conclude, in agreement with Dauer (1983), that rhythm is not totally dependent on phonological structure. More recently, however, evidence from three Niger-Congo languages (Ibibio, from Nigeria; Anyi and Ega from Côte d'Ivoire) suggests that rhythm may be somewhat independent of phonotactics. Gut et al. (2002) selected these languages on account of their phonotactic differences from one another. Despite the structural differences, Ibibio, Anyi, and Ega Gut and her colleagues classified all three as syllable-timed languages.

Much of the trouble in studying rhythm historically had to do with the absence of a methodology that could analyze rhythm without conflating it with speaking rate and other non-segmental factors. Low & Grabe (1995) introduced the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) to address this lack. Their methodology compares pairs of syllables while controlling for speaking rate. Measurements for syllable duration are taken and each syllable is subsequently compared with the adjacent syllables by using the PVI formula, which consists of the absolute value of the difference between adjacent syllables, divided by the mean of the two syllables. The result is an index of scores that indicate the degree of syllable- or stress-timing found in examined varieties. High scores indicate more stress timing while lower scores indicate more syllable timing. Using this method, Low & Grabe demonstrated that Singapore English was
substantially more syllable-timed than standard British English, as was expected based on prior impressionistic accounts.

Among those using PVI to explore cross-dialectal differences were Low, Grabe, & Nolan (2000), with additional results on Singapore English; Spencelayh (2001), who compared four dialects of English in the UK; and Fought & Fought (2003), who compared Latino English with the English of the adjacent Anglo California community. Fought & Fought’s (2003) application of PVI revealed more syllable timing for the speakers of Chicano English than for the non-Chicano speakers, though syllable timing was concentrated in the first five syllables of an utterance. Coggshall (forthcoming) also found syllable-timing among Native American speakers in the United States. In addition to my own studies differentiating Latino English from Mexican Spanish and American English (Carter 2005a, b), a number of studies (Bond and Fokes 1985; Mochizuki-Sudo and Kiritani, 1991; Nguyen, 2003) have found that native speakers of syllable- and mora-timed languages have a difficult time learning the rhythmic patterns of stress-timed languages. These studies have examined a wide range of languages, including Malaysian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Japanese. Despite increasing attention to prosody and speech rhythm in particular, it is widely agreed that current methods, including PVI, are still limited. In part, this is a function of the fact that rhythm is largely a perceptual system, but also because the role of language-specific phonological properties on rhythm is still somewhat of an open question. Further, current methods,
such as PVI, that use quantitative metrics to quantify rhythm are unable to account for the distribution of syllable types across a segment of speech. White and Mattys (2007) describe this limitation in their study of rhythm in first and second language varieties of Dutch, English, Spanish, and French. “Clearly, a full quantification of rhythm should take account of both relative syllable strength and syllable distribution. Insofar as rhythm metrics only provide information about the former, they are a necessarily incomplete, though informative, account of speech rhythm.”(519)

3.6 Linguistic Methods and Results

In Section 3.5, I provided a general description of the features of Maria’s speech that I examined in both time periods, which I will refer to as ‘time 1,’ (T1) and ‘time 2,’ (T2). In the current section, I will describe the methods used to extract, measure, and analyze the linguistic data in question.

3.6.1 Field Methods

I conducted my first interview with Maria in 2003 in her parents’ apartment in Raleigh, North Carolina. At the time of the interview, I had already established a friendly relationship with her parents, both of whom are immigrants from Mexico City. At the time, the aim of my project was an intensive investigation of immigrant dialect accommodation. I was interested in the extent to which Spanish-speaking immigrants acquired the local linguistic features of the contiguous native-English-speaking community. I informed Maria’s parents, whom I later interviewed in Spanish, that the aim of the project was to collect stories about immigrant life in North Carolina and
border-crossing experiences. They agreed to allow me to interview Maria, and Maria assented to the interview. The interview was recorded using an analog Marantz tape recorder and a clip-on Lavalier microphone. Maria and I talked for about 45 minutes, in English and in Spanish, about topics ranging from her daily routine, to differences between school in Mexico and the U.S., to descriptions of her family. Most of the conversation was relatively prosaic but one topic caused quite a lot of emotion. I asked Maria about how she came to the U.S. In retrospect, this was an irresponsible question to have asked, but at the time I was not aware of how traumatic the experience could be, especially for children. She narrated some basic facts about her border-crossing experience – the rio, the coyote, etc. – but when she got to what happened once on the U.S. side of the border, she broke down into tears. I instantly stopped the conversation and suggested that we take a break so that she could be comforted by her parents. I decided it was not appropriate to reinitiate the conversation, but I stayed in the apartment for a few more hours and spent time watching television with Maria and her parents.

At the time of the second interview, Maria’s family had moved out of the city into a new house in a historically white, rural town about forty-five minutes away from her previous home. Though the family had very little money – Maria’s father worked in construction and her mother worked in fast food – they were able to purchase this home with the extensive help of a local volunteer and a non-profit community organization.
that helps Spanish-speaking immigrants purchase real estate. In the years in between the interviews, I remained in close contact with Maria and her family, visiting her mother in the hospital when she gave birth to Maria’s sister and later again when she gave birth to a brother. Maria and I talked for about an hour, and the conversation focused almost exclusively on her new school, her classmates, and the social organization of the school. For this interview, I used a Marantz digital audio recorder, model PPD-660, with a clip-on Lavalier microphone.

3.6.2 Volatile Vowels

The original analog tape from T1 had to be digitized in order to perform acoustic analysis. This interview was digitized at a sampling rate of 20 KHz, with lowpass filtering at 8 kHz. Spectrograms were generated in PRAAT phonetics software for PC (Boersma and Weenink 2005) using a window length of 5 ms and a viewing range from 0 to 5 kHz. For the second recording (T2), no digitization was necessary and spectrograms were generated in PRAAT for Mac (Boersma and Weenick 2007) using the same window length and viewing range specifications.

For the analysis of the allophones of /æ/, 15-25 words (called, “tokens”) containing the sound in pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal contexts were excised from the interview data for both time periods, T1 and T2. No more than two tokens of the same lexical item were included in the analysis order to minimize the potential effects of
Within sociolinguistics, lexicalization refers to a process by which certain high-frequency words are deployed in ways that differ in pronunciation from expected pronunciations, based on phonetic context, regional dialect, etc. In other words, lexicalized tokens represent exceptional cases that may obscure meaningful linguistic and social patterning. For an explanation of lexicalization in functionalist phonology, a view commensurate with sociolinguistics, see Bybee (2000).
variable in each time period. Despite obvious changes in Maria’s vocal tract length over the three-year period (since she grew taller), I decided that it was not necessary to normalize\(^5\) the vowel data since, although vowels do have “intrinsic pitch” as a result of fundamental frequency (Ohala and Eukel 1987) vowel quality, which is under investigation here, is independent of pitch (Fant 1960) which is more affected by vocal tract length and not explicitly under investigation. In other words, any acoustic difference in vowel quality of a sound in the “same” word produced in both time periods could not be explained by vocal tract length differences alone.

Table 1 shows the results for the productions of pre-nasal /æ/ in both time periods, T1 and T2. The table provides the total number of tokens considered (N), the mean for each formant in Hertz, the standard deviations, and the t-statistic and the p-values for each formant, F1 and F2, in each time period, T1 and T2. As the data provided in the table indicate, Maria’s production of pre-nasal /æ/ was lowered in the acoustic space between T1 and T2, as her mean first formant (F1) production moved from 683 Hz to 904 Hz. The t-test shows that this difference is significant (p < .001). Maria’s production of pre-nasal allophone of /æ/ also moved back along the horizontal dimension of the vowel space, as her F2 production moved from 2680 Hz to 2130 Hz between T1 and T2, respectively. This difference is also significant (p < .001).

\(^5\) Various techniques are used to normalize acoustic data in order to make comparison across speakers possible. This is necessary because formant measurements are highly variable across speakers as a result of differences in supra-glottal anatomy and sound source frequency. (Hindle 1978; Disner 1980; Miller 1989; and Adank, Smits, and Hout 2004)
Table 1: F1 and F2 Values for Pre-Nasal [æ] in Two Periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-statistic / p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1, pre-nasal [æ] (T1)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>683.7 Hz</td>
<td>57.32</td>
<td>t stat = 7.49, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1, pre-nasal-[æ] (T2)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>904 Hz</td>
<td>74.17</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2, pre-nasal-[æ] (T1)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2681.9 Hz</td>
<td>118.11</td>
<td>t stat = 5.28, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2, pre-nasal-[æ] (T2)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2130.0 Hz</td>
<td>107.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the results for Maria’s production of the non-pre-nasal /æ/ allophone. This is the variable that occurs in words such as hat and lap. The mean production for the first formant in T1 was 941 Hz and 925 Hz during T2, showing very little modification during the two periods. The difference in these mean productions was not significant (p = .874). The front-back dimension, however, does show significant modification over time. The mean F2 value in T1 2250 Hz and 1950 Hz in T2. This modification was statistically significant, with p < .001.
Table 2: F1 and F2 Values for Non-Pre-Nasal [æ] in Two Periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Hz</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-statistic / p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1, non-pre-nasal-[æ] (T1)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>941.5 Hz</td>
<td>167.2</td>
<td>t stat = .161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1, non-pre-nasal-[æ] (T2)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>924.42 Hz</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>p = .874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2, non-pre-nasal-[æ] (T1)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2251.1 Hz</td>
<td>128.01</td>
<td>t stat = 5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2, non-pre-nasal-[æ] (T2)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1952.3 Hz</td>
<td>104.31</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 depicts Maria’s vocalic production based on the data collected during T1.

Note that instead of the /æ/ symbol the variables are labeled as /ash/ and /ash/-N. The vowel plot shows that at the time of the first data collection with Maria, her vocalic inventory includes an unequivocal allophonic split between pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal productions of /æ/, as is common in most non-Latino varieties of North American English (Thomas 2001; Labov, Ashe, and Boberg 2006). The pre-nasal allophone is raised to within 100 Hz of the mid-high vowels ([ɛ], [e], [I]) along the F1 dimension and is more or less congruent with them on the F2 dimension.

With respect to the /u/ sound (the vowel sound in words such as food), Maria shows a fronted, back-gliding variant. This is indicated in Figure 4 with the arrowhead indicating the direction of the glide. The /u/ sound demonstrates great regional and
social variation in varieties of American English. Though /u/ is classically defined as a high, back, rounded monophthong in General American English, /u/ is widely produced as a diphthong\(^6\). In a number mainly white dialects, the nucleus of /u/ is fronted; this phenomenon has been reported for varieties throughout the south, in parts of the Midwest and more recently in California. In contrast, Latino and Chicano varieties are commonly described as having a distinctly backed, monophthongal [u] commensurate with the [u] in all varieties of Spanish, which is backed and monophthongal\(^7\).

Nevertheless, Fought (2003, 111) has found /u/ fronting among native speakers of Chicano English. She writes that “the discovery that there is /u/-fronting, a variable clearly associated with a sound change in the Anglo community, among Chicano English speakers is a significant finding in terms of sociolinguistic theory.” This can only be described as a significant finding for sociolinguistic theory in light of the fact that it has been claimed that ethnic communities do not participate in sound changes taking place within minority communities. I should be clear that I am not weighing in on this debate – Maria’s situation is distinct – I merely want to provide some background on the distribution of this variable.

\(^6\) The distinction between monophthongs and diphthongs can be a somewhat fuzzy one. The phonetic distinction is that monophthongs have one ‘quality’ or ‘timber’ while diphthongs have two. For the diphthongs in American English, one ‘quality’ is called a nucleus, the other a glide. Most descriptions of American English present three diphthongs: [ai] as in bike, [oi], as in boy, and [au], as in house. However, several of the vowels traditionally classified as monophthongs actually demonstrate some glided quality, especially the back, rounded vowels [o] and [u].

\(^7\) For full descriptions of these phenomena, I refer readers to Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) and for the specific regional distributions I refer readers to Labov, Ashe, and Boberg (2006).
The vowel plot in Figure 5 depicts Maria’s vocalic production during T2, the time period during which Maria was attending a majority African American school with a larger Latino population than her previous school. As a reminder, the change in the home community is the opposite; her prior community was a dense, relatively insular Spanish-speaking community of immigrants. Her new community is much more heterogeneous and more spatially diffuse – an ethnically diverse community comprised of single family homes in a planned neighborhood development. A comparison of the two plots shows some reorganization of the vowel space. First, /u/ has monophthongized, losing its backgliding diphthongal quality, and has moved to the back of the vowel space, though this claim must remain somewhat tentative provided that the low token count precluded statistic analysis. Tables 1 and 2 indicated that both pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal ash moved toward the back of the vowel space along the F2 dimension. The vowel plot in Figure 5 makes this modification clear, particularly in the case of the pre-nasal allophone, which has moved back almost to non-pre-nasal space, essentially obliterating the allophonic split.
Figure 4: Vowel Plot of Maria’s Vowel Space in T1
Figure 5: Vowel Plot of Maria’s Vowel Space in T2

I have now presented the data for both allophones of /æ/ in two forms: a) descriptive statistics and test of significance, and b) vowel plots based on formant measurements of vowels extracted from tokens taken from both time periods. In addition, I would like to further describe the data by providing specific examples of
changes in the shape of the formant structure for various tokens representative of the variables under investigation. The shape of the formant structure is instructive, as formant values themselves are always relative. The following figures show waveforms and spectrograms for tokens taken from the data. Each of the following was used in the quantitative analysis. The first formant, which correlates inversely with tongue height, is the lowermost horizontal line punctuated by red dots. The second formant, which correlates positively with tongue advancement, is the second horizontal line punctuated by red dots.

Figure 6: Waveform and Spectrogram of and in T1
Figures 6 and 7 depict waveforms and spectrograms for words containing /æ/ in the pre-nasal position. Figure 6 shows the word *and* and Figure 7 shows the word *candy*. The sections highlighted in blue correspond to the /æ/ vowel. The spectrogram, found in the bottom half of the figure, presents three kinds of acoustic information about the vowel. The first is formant frequency, measured in Hertz; this frequency range runs along the y-axis from 0 Hz to 5,000 Hz. There is acoustic information at frequencies higher than 5,000 Hz, but it is not relevant for vowel measurement. Duration is depicted along the x-axis and intensity (loudness) is indicated by the darkness of the lines. The important piece of acoustic information to notice in Figures 6 and 7 is the high second formant in the /æ/ vowel. The shape of the formant structure in *candy* is particularly

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**Figure 7: Waveform and Spectrogram of candy in T1**

Figures 6 and 7 depict waveforms and spectrograms for words containing /æ/ in the pre-nasal position. Figure 6 shows the word *and* and Figure 7 shows the word *candy*. The sections highlighted in blue correspond to the /æ/ vowel. The spectrogram, found in the bottom half of the figure, presents three kinds of acoustic information about the vowel. The first is formant frequency, measured in Hertz; this frequency range runs along the y-axis from 0 Hz to 5,000 Hz. There is acoustic information at frequencies higher than 5,000 Hz, but it is not relevant for vowel measurement. Duration is depicted along the x-axis and intensity (loudness) is indicated by the darkness of the lines. The important piece of acoustic information to notice in Figures 6 and 7 is the high second formant in the /æ/ vowel. The shape of the formant structure in *candy* is particularly
striking, as the second formant approaches the frequency at which Maria produces /i/, a high vowel. Also of interest in Figure 7 is the somewhat unusually long period of aspiration following the burst from the stop articulation of the sound /k/ in *candy*.

Figure 8 presents a waveform and spectrogram for *and*, representing the same variable, pre-nasal /æ/. This token comes from the data collected with Maria in 2005, almost three years after the first interview from which the data for Figures 6 and 7 were culled, and is representative of Maria’s production of pre-nasal /æ/ during this time period. It is the case that formant structure varies even for ‘the same’ word produced by
the same speaker in the same dialect, simply because production is never fixed. Despite that fact, the formant structure for the two productions of *and* (Figure 3 and Figure 5) is more different than expected for the same speaker producing the same sound in the same word. The low second formant (F2) indicates a variant of /æ/-N that is produced much further back in the oral cavity than the examples presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 present representative formant structures for two words, *juice* and *who*, taken from T1 and T2, respectively. The important distinction between the two is once again the differences in the realization of the second formant. The high second formant in the token from T1 is in contrast to the exceptionally low second formant in the token from T2. It must be pointed out that some of the difference between the two is the result of the phonetic context. In particular, the palatal articulation of [ʤ], the first sound of the word *juice*, has the effect of pulling the second formant up (in Hertz; i.e., forward in the vowel space). The effects of palatal place of articulation and palatalization are well attested in the phonetics literature. Further, Maria’s production of *juice* included a palatal glide, rendering the word [ʤus], rather than [us]. This pre-[u] glide was not uncommon in Maria’s speech at the time of T1. Nonetheless, the overall difference in formant structure between the [ju] and [u] is instructive as to the type of modification in production Maria exhibits between T1 and T2.
Figure 9: Waveform and Spectrogram of *juice* in T1

Figure 10: Waveform and Spectrogram of *who* in T2
The final pair of spectrograms that illustrate changes in production over time are in Figures 11 (go) and 12 (so), which provide examples representative of Maria’s production of /o/ in both time periods. /o/, like /u/, is a back, rounded vowel traditionally described as monophthongal in American English. Also like /u/, /o/ is subject to fronting and diphthongization, as has been attested for a variety of regional and social dialects. While Maria’s /o/ in Figure 8 might not necessarily be described as “fronted,” the /o/ in Figure 9 is clearly a backed variant. The difference in formant structure for /o/ between T1 and T2 is not as marked (at least for these particular examples) as it was for /u/ and /æ/, but the inclusion of /o/ nevertheless helps to provide a more complete look at Maria’s vocalic production in the two periods.
Figure 11: Waveform and Spectrogram of go in T1

Figure 12: Waveform and Spectrogram of so in T2
3.6.3 Rhythm of Speech

One of the things that I noticed about Maria’s speech was that she seemed impressionistically more syllable-timed than she previously did. Maria’s linguistic reinvention struck me as thorough and not limited to a handful of discrete features. With this in mind, I hypothesized that changes to Maria’s language would either bear directly on suprasegmental systems, or at least implicate them in some way. By ‘implicate’ I mean that modifications to linguistic segments, such as to vowels or consonants, may indirectly alter suprasegmental features. In other words, segmental modifications may have suprasegmental effects.

I have already discussed the linguistic literature dealing with prosodic rhythm. In what follows, I will describe the specific methodology I used to measure Maria’s production of prosodic rhythm in both time periods. As I described in section 5.3.3, the study of prosodic rhythm became widely possible with the introduction of the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) first introduced by Low & Grabe (1995) and later by Low, Grabe, & Nolan (2000). This method, now used in numerous comparative linguistic studies, measures the degree of stress- or syllable-timing by comparing the duration of syllable pairs while controlling for speaking rate. The equation for calculating rhythm with PVI is shown below.

\[
\frac{(a - b)}{(a + b) / 2} = \text{PVI}, \text{ where } a \text{ and } b \text{ represent syllable durations}
\]
The absolute value of the difference in duration of two adjacent syllables is divided by the mean duration of those syllables. The original PVI method used by Low & Grabe, which used laboratory speech, had to be adapted for the current project given the use of field data. The difference between laboratory and field data is essentially one of recording quality, where field recordings tend to have ambient noise, overlapping speech, and in general reflect the messiness of actual speech situations. The disadvantage of field recordings is that spectrograms produced from them are far less clear than spectrograms made from speech recorded under controlled conditions. Therefore, Low & Grabe (1995) made syllable-to-syllable measurements and were able to include consonant heads and codas because of high recording quality. However, my use of field data, which made determinations about the onset of certain consonants and the assignment of intervocalic consonants to a given syllable difficult to make, necessitated the measurement of only vocalic nuclei. The exceptions were coda liquids (/l/ and /r/), which were considered as glides and included with the vowel in the duration measurement. Syllables in pre-pausal feet\(^8\) were also excluded from analysis due to the effects of pre-pausal lengthening, where pauses were those perceptible breaks of 100ms or more. In addition to pauses, syllabic feet were also omitted before hesitation markers such as ‘uh,’ repairs, and restarts. In general, all of these environments resulted in

\(^8\) A syllabic foot is the combination of a stressed and one or more unstressed syllables in stress-timed languages.
lengthening that might obscure rhythmic sequence of the non-pre-pausal portion of an utterance. I made a minimum of 175 syllable-to-syllable measurements for Maria’s speech in each of the two time periods. T-tests were conducted to determine significant difference in Maria’s rhythm production between the two time periods. Figure 13 depicts a spectrogram containing a full utterance, rather than a close-up of a vowel, as in prior figures. The parallel vertical lines flank the word the vowel [a] in the word *lot*, showing how duration is taken.

Figure 13: Spectrogram Depicting Duration Measurement for the vowel [a]

Figure 14 presents the PVI results from Thomas and Carter (2006). The graph plots median PVI scores (*y*-axis) against year of birth (*x*-axis) and each point represents an individual speaker. Lower PVI scores indicate more syllable-timing (the pattern traditionally thought to characterize Italic languages, such as Spanish and Portuguese)
and higher scores indicate more stress-timing (the pattern thought to characterize Germanic languages, such as Dutch and English). The cluster of stars in the lower right represents Spanish prosodic rhythm. The dashed line separates almost completely the prosodic rhythm of Latino English and Spanish from the prosodic rhythm of non-Latino English speakers.

Figure 14: PVI Results for Speakers in North Carolina and Texas
Table 3 shows the Pairwise Variability Index results for Maria in both time periods, T1 and T2. The table provides the total number of pairwise measurements (N), mean PVI score, standard deviation, and p-value for Maria’s rhythm production. In T1, her mean PVI score was .435 and was .4562 during T2. While she did become slightly more stress-timed, the difference was not statistically significant, with a p-value of .56. The bar graph in Figure 15 positions Maria’s individual mean productions from both time periods against the group means for North Carolina African Americans and European Americans, other speakers of Latino English from North Carolina, and Spanish speakers. The graph shows that her production of rhythm matches up with the other Latinos in both time periods. Thus, while Maria acquired new productions at the segmental level, her system of prosodic rhythm was not modified at a statistically significant level. There are several possible explanations for this result. During T1, Maria had acquired the segmental phonology of her [white] school cohort, but retained the prosodic patterning from her [Latino] neighborhood, which is likely the result of substratal influence from Spanish. It is possible that there was simply no change to her prosodic production between periods T1 and T2. That is, she didn’t ‘need’ to make modifications to this domain, since it was already congruent with the Latino style she seems to be producing in T2. On the other hand, it is also possible that changes in her segmental phonology that are unaccounted for here necessitated some modification to prosody that resulted in prosodic rhythm in T2 superficially similar to that of T1. It is
possible that Maria acquired even more native phonological features, such as unstressed vowel reduction, phrase-final lengthening, and stressed-syllable lengthening, at the same time that vowel quality (timbre) became more “Latino” or Spanish-inflected. This will necessarily remain an open question, since the debate over the role of phonological structure in prosody is still unsettled.

Table 3: PVI Results for Maria’s Speech in T1 and T2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PVI Period</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t-statistic / p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PVI T1</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>.4350</td>
<td>.3262</td>
<td>t-stat = .586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVI T2</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>.4562</td>
<td>.3273</td>
<td>p = .56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15: PVI Scores for Maria and Comparison Groups
3.6.4. Other Features

In addition to the vowels discussed above, there are two additional features of Maria’s speech in T2, categorically absent in T1, that are worthy of comment. The first, and most conspicuous, is Maria’s use of an alveolar click. Although the function of the alveolar click in Maria’s speech is somewhat unclear, it seems to serve a discourse-marking function and tends to accompany reversals, false-starts, and disapproval. In the data collected from T2, I asked Maria to describe a normal day in her life, including everything that happens before, during, and after school. In the following example taken from the interview, Maria seems to use the click to signal either disapproval with herself for using the ‘wrong’ preposition (‘from’ rather than ‘to’) or to signal a sort of discursive reversal.

“When you get [pause] from school <click>, I mean, when you get to school from the busses [pause], you go to the seventh grade hall.”

Fought (2003, 79-80) also observed the use of clicks among speakers of Chicano English in California, particularly among male gang members. She describes the click as serving a discourse-marking function, possibly to mark topic disapproval, and describes its use as more widespread, both in terms of frequency and context, than the similar alveolar click used to signal disapproval in most non-Latino dialects of English (i.e. the sound sometimes rendered in orthography as ‘tisk-tisk’).
Figure 16 provides a close-up waveform and spectrogram of the click taken from the data in T2. Figure 17 presents the same example within the context a longer time window. The click is highlighted in blue and flanked by two red, vertical lines. Unlike the vowels and other consonants, the acoustic energy of the click extends throughout the entire frequency range (the window is cut off at 5,000 Hz). The click depicted in Figures 16 and 17 is the same click from the quotation above.
Figure 16: Waveform and Spectrogram of Alveolar Click in 2005

Figure 17: Waveform and Spectrogram of Alveolar Click, Depicting Intensity
The second feature observed in T2 and not in T1 is the use of the velar fricative /ɣ/, a sound found in Old English, but not in modern English. In Maria’s speech, /ɣ/ occurs in place of the velar stop /g/. In contrast to English, most dialects of modern Spanish have both sounds, with /ɣ/ being an allophone of /g/, such that /g/ is realized as /ɣ/ before a word boundary (_#) and pre-vocally (_V), but never following nasals or liquids, irrespective of the following phonetic environment. Thus, ‘gato’ (‘cat’) is realized with /g/, for example, when following the indefinite article ‘un’ ([un – ga – to], ‘a cat’), but with /ɣ/ following the first person singular possessive pronoun ‘mi’ ([mi – γa – to], ‘my cat’). To be clear, /ɣ/ is subphonemic in Spanish (i.e., it doesn’t distinguish word meaning), but it is phonotactically obligatory (i.e., /ɣ/ must be realized in certain phonetic contexts; there are no other possible realizations). In terms of production, /g/ and /ɣ/ are quite similar: both are produced with voicing (vocal fold vibration) and by raising the dorsum of the tongue to the velum, or soft palate. They differ in the way they obstruct airflow in the vocal tract. For /g/, the tongue and the velum create a more or less impermeable closure, cutting off the flow of air completely behind the oral obstruction, followed by the total release of the built up air and air pressure. For /ɣ/, the dorsum of the tongue also raises toward the velum (soft palate), but stops short of creating a full closure; this permits the steady egress of airflow from the lungs. The rush of air through the aperture in the partial obstruction creates frication noise, which is why this type of sound is known as a ‘fricative.’
The presence of /γ/ in Maria’s speech in T2 is only interesting in light of the fact that it was absent in the data collected in T1; otherwise, the use of /γ/ would seem to be a result of incomplete mastery of English phonotactics, Spanish language transfer, or some other cognitive / linguistic explanation. To have ‘mastered’ a particular phonological rule and then reverse it speaks to the likelihood of the reversal being socially motivated, particularly in light of the fact that Maria was, in general, a more adept English speaker during T2. I will take up the issue of social motivation in the following sections, but I would like to now make the point that, as far as learning second language phonology goes, learning the rule for /g/ is relatively uncomplicated. Since /γ/ is categorically absent in English, the only ‘rule’ to master is the replacement of /γ/ with /g/. It is the case that /g/ may have alternate phonetic realizations in modern varieties of English. For instance, in rapid speech, /g/ may lack a full closure in intervocalic contexts, producing a sound somewhat resembling /γ/. However, it seems unlikely that this would constitute reason enough to systematically produce a perceptible /γ/, especially in light of a viable socially motivated explanation.

Figure 18 shows a waveform and spectrogram of an utterance in English containing /γ/ taken from the data collected during T2. The utterance is, “you go to the seventh grade hall.” The sound in question is marked with a blue circle on the spectrogram. What distinguishes the velar fricative (/γ/) from the velar stop (/g/) acoustically is the absence of several characteristic stop features. The first is the absence
of an acoustic burst that comes with the release of the stop closure in the oral tract. For /g/, the burst is concentrated in the F2/F3 region. This is clearly not the case for the sound identified in Figure 18. The second characteristic of stop (plosive) consonants absent in this diagram is a definable acoustic structure with movement across the duration of formant resonance.

![Figure 18: Waveform and Spectrogram Depicting Voiced Velar Fricative](image)

### 3.7 The Standard Accounts

Before I consider Maria’s case in the context of the framework I am attempting to set forth here, I would like to first review three ways in which the case study presented here
may be interpreted within zeitgeist frameworks. I have separated these frameworks from one another for ease of description, but I do not intend to imply that any particular framework is completely detached from the others – the theoretical situation is just not that simple. Nevertheless, I think readers in linguistics will recognize the frameworks that follow as legitimate, if oversimplified, ways of reading data such as these. In 3.7.1, I provide a dialectological reading of Maria’s situation and, in particular, pay attention to the role ethnicity influences linguistic interpretations within this framework. In 3.7.2, I look at Maria’s change in self-presentation through the lens of stylistics and identity. In the following section, 3.8, I will return to the critique of identity set forth in Chapter 1 and the poststructuralist account of subject formation set forth in Chapter 2 as a means of providing an alternate account of Maria’s situation.

3.7.1 The Dialectological Account

Taken without the non-linguistic, cultural data, a prima facie examination of the linguistic data might lead us to believe that Maria has “acquired a new dialect.” It is worth making explicit that if data were only available from T2, there would be no analytical problem—Maria would be a speaker of Chicano, Latino, or Mexican American English. The explanation would be rooted in dialectology. The terms of this logic seem to work: Maria is a non-native speaker with new linguistic inputs and her new linguistic outputs reflect nothing more than the acquisition of new dialect norms. The change in Maria’s language, then, could be thought in terms of variation in second language
acquisition. To claim that Maria speaks (or has newly acquired) Latino or Chicano English—that is, to render her normative, demographic category matching up congruently to dialect category—is to miss, obfuscate, or erase the facts of Maria’s linguistic history.

Thus, harnessing our understanding of Maria’s case, on the one hand, to dialectology only limits the analytic possibilities. Rather than a person who “speaks Latino English,” Maria was first a monolingual speaker of Spanish, then Spanish-influenced English, and then a variety of English associated with white suburbanites. Only after that series of ‘dialects’ did Maria acquire the one she is expected to have had all along – a version of Latino English. However, rendering Maria a ‘Latina’ who speaks her correctly matching ethnic dialect assumes a prior ontological subject, and the empirical data do not square with that assumption.

3.7.2 The Identitarian Account

The lexicon of “doing” or “accomplishing” social goals with language has a certain cache in the current moment in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. Maria has certainly accomplished something with language. She has learned a certain set of linguistic norms – a style of speaking – and has applied that style in ways that are socially felicitous and likely socially advantageous. “Doing” is frequently associated with expressions of identity in the language and identity literature. For example,
members of particular social groups may deploy particular linguistic features that index localized social meaning as a way of expressing or “doing” or “performing” identity.

3.8 Subjectivization and Language

As Maria and her friends have described to me, the social milieu of their middle school is carved up into racialized social groups. On one pole of the social spectrum are the “nerds” who are categorically white regardless of academic achievement, and on the other end of the spectrum are various gangs who are categorically African American and Latino. In between are the “Latino nerds,” the “average” Latinos, and the “average” African Americans. Maria’s presentation of self, including language, necessarily underwent a process of racialization in ways that match up with the always-already racialized social milieu of her new middle school. The effect was the abandonment of an old semiotic system for a new one. Whereas within an identitarian framework, Maria’s linguistic and cultural adaptations would likely be read as agentive acts, within the terms of the framework proposed here, Maria has been resubjectivized. This is not to say, on the other hand, that she has been determined by the norms, discourses, and other forms of power she encountered in the new sociocultural context. However, faced a new regime of norms, new forms of interpellation, and new forms of power likely made the process of mimicry a desirable option. Obviously, I cannot speculate about what was going on inside of Maria’s head – and I do not have the tools to know if her
actions were conscious ones at the level of articulation. In addition, I purposefully did
not address her change in self-presentation in conversation.

In theorizing regulatory systems, Judith Butler claims ‘agency’ comes in
recognizing norms. In *Undoing Gender*, she writes, “if I have any agency, it is opened up
by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven
with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition
of its possibility.” The paradox of the agentive, the condition of agency’s possibility, is
the inexorable tension between socially-mediated survival, on the one hand, and
individual assertions of volition on the other. For Butler, “agency” (“if I have any…”) is
about exercising choice within determinant limits. The agentive, then, does not pre-exist
or operate outside of social context or ideology; indeed, the social and the ideological
produce the possibility of volition. This is what gives me pause about those accounts of
language and identity that emphasize agency at the expense of the conditions that
produce the terms of an ostensibly agentive choice in the first place. Any discussion of
agency and social practice, which at times masquerades as agency, should be aligned
with an attendant discussion of subject position and subjectivization.

Thus, Maria’s engagement self-mimicry can be seen as a negotiation between
socially-mediated survival and volitional action. The corporeal and linguistic
manifestations of Maria’s reinvention are the result of the simultaneous and paradoxical
*acknowledgement* and *resistance* to the discourses and other forms of power acting upon
her in a new social context. The agentive component in Maria’s action, then, is her recognition of a new bundle of social and linguistic norms. In vitiating her suburban persona, a persona that likely would have been culturally unintelligible, undesirable, or infelicitous in her new school for a dark-skinned, immigrant, Latina, Maria rendered herself legible—and unassailable from peer critique—within the already established limits of her new environment.
4. The crisis of identity

“If we are able to understand at all the role of language in human life, we cannot merely postulate it, we must investigate it.” Dell Hymes 1974, 170

When I had the idea to explore my ideas about subjectivity and language in the context of a middle school, I really had no idea how hard the work would be, logistically, intellectually, and emotionally. I had spent quite some time before deciding what sort of institution to study by reading school ethnographies from a variety of disciplines, and was inspired by work in cultural anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. The many ethnographers who shaped my expectations about what my own experience as an ethnographer would be like somehow made it seem, if not easy, at least easily manageable. I now understand that any continuity and coherence that I experienced as a reader of ethnography in the texts I chose was quite simply a result of the genius of the ethnographers who managed to make sense out of inevitably messy situations. Moments in culture, replete with the many layers of human social and cultural existence, are in fact chaotic, confusing, and even contradictory. No cultural moment – and therefore no moment of ethnographic observation – is neutral. The residues of history, the vestiges of old forms of material culture made new again, the politics of cultural difference, the instability of social formations, and the subjects who dwell within the historical, cultural, and political morass of their place in time – all of it animates every moment. All of this is doubly complicated, since I am myself a subject of the moment I want to apprehend. The psychic work of locating myself in the moment,
understanding the relationship that I *already* had with the subjects of the school before I ever met them, and attending at every step to the effects of my presence and to the politics of me, was at times disorienting and almost always exhausting.

Amidst all of this was *language*. Subjects who speak, and subjects who are spoken. Discourses that liberate some, and discourses that entrap others. Words that express, and words that silence. In middle school, language takes many forms. Gang graffiti. Sports announcements. Whispered secrets. Epithets, admonishments, and declarations. “Country talk,” “ghetto talk,” and “proper talk.” The forms that language takes, the things it expresses, and the cultural and social work that it does, are shaped by the same contours of history and culture that produced the moment in which it was spoken, written, or heard. Like the historical moments of its use, language is messy. It is complicated. Fortunately, a premise of both ethnography and sociolinguistics is that out of the messiness of language and culture, patterns are discernable, and that these patterns are socially meaningful. This chapter is concerned with these patterns, as a means of answering the questions that animate this dissertation: How do subjects become subjects who speak? How does language mediate between subjectivity and identity? How do the forms of language relate to the discourses that produce the subjects who speak them?
4.1 Why Ethnography? Why Middle School?

Part of what motivated the decision to study middle school linguistic and cultural practices was the question that motivates anyone interested in language on some level: “how are the kids talking these days?” My own interaction with people under the age of 18 was essentially non-existent, and my curiosity about that age group was slowly piqued over the past few years of listening to undergraduate students at Duke University speak. More importantly, though, I had in mind a theoretical project – what I have described in Chapters 1 and 2 – that I wanted to explore empirically. In thinking about possible empirical contexts, I knew that I needed a setting where subjects with different subject positions inhabited the same cultural space in consistently routine ways, and were ostensibly exposed to an identical set of institutional subjectivizing practices.

A school setting seemed to meet these criteria nicely, but I was initially reluctant to choose a school context as the site for my project, as it is the case that the interpretive social sciences are by no means lacking school ethnographies. In anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics, ethnography has become an accepted methodological practice in recent decades, and schools have been the primary site for linguistically oriented ethnographic projects. This broad acceptance of ethnography in the context of language study surely has at least something to do with Eckert’s (1989/ 2000) highly influential study of a Detroit high school, ‘Beltan High,’ in which she established that
certain linguistic variables associated with a widespread linguistic change taking place over a broad region in the U.S. could acquire highly localized, social meaning in the context of the school and be deployed in complex ways by students to do social identity work. Eckert (1991, 213) speaks to the value of anthropological methods in the study of language. “The use of ethnography in the study of variation allows the researcher to discover the social groups, categories, and divisions particular to the community in question, and to explore their relation to linguistic form.”

Since Eckert’s study of Beltan High, other sociolinguistic ethnographies followed, including many based in U.S. high schools with evermore localized foci. Bucholtz (1999) studied ‘nerd girls’ at ‘Bay City High School’ in California; Mendoza-Denton (2008) studied the cultural and linguistic practices of Norteña and Sureña gang girls in a highly diverse suburban high school outside of San Francisco that she called ‘Sor Juana High;’ Rampton (1995) studied the appropriation of Panjabi by teenagers of Afro-Caribbean and Anglo descent, and the use of Creole by teenagers of South Asian and Anglo descent in a town in the South Midlands region of England; Fought (2003) studied the Chicano community in Los Angeles; and Heller (1999) studied French / English bilingualism among high school students at a school in English-speaking Ontario, Canada. Although school-based projects were conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s, the incorporation of ethnographic methods into mainstream sociolinguistics is a more recent development.
In addition to school ethnographies from linguistics, many school studies have been conducted by anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars in the humanities and interpretive social sciences. Thorne’s (1993) influential study of gendered behavior by elementary-aged children in school contexts in California and Michigan has been followed by numerous ethnographies examining one or more aspects of the race-gender-class triad, including, to name only a few, Ferguson (2001), Bettie (2003), and Carter (2007).

Clearly, though, the theoretical questions motivating each of these studies are not the same, and to the extent that ethnographic projects in school settings do overlap, the data that each study contributes come from unique contexts, which together provide a broad swath of complementary data and perspectives. As I worked through the literature, it became clear to me that there were at least two areas where ethnographic studies of schools were lopsided: age and region. Linguistically oriented school ethnographies have tended to take place in high school settings. Bucholtz (1999), Eckert (1989/2000), Rampton (1995), and Mendoza-Denton (2008), for example, all studied high school aged adolescents. At least one other ethnographic school study where language is brought into the analysis –Bettie’s (2003) study of class and gender – took place in high schools. Ferguson’s (2001) study of black masculinity and Thorne’s (1993) study of gender and race both took place in elementary schools. In linguistic ethnography, the middle school context has been roundly overlooked. There is also an imbalance with
respect to region, with the Midwest (Eckert 1989/2000) and California (Bettie 2003, 
Bucholtz 1999, and Mendoza-Denton 2008) receiving the bulk of the attention among 
ethnographers interested in language variation, to the near exclusion of much of the 
South. In the end I decided to carry out the project at a middle school in urban setting in 
central North Carolina in an effort to fill the age and region gaps in the current 
linguistically oriented ethnographic literature.

Ethnography is also compatible with my theoretical commitments in 
functionalist linguistics and poststructuralist theory. The ethnographer is concerned 
with making inferences about cultural artifacts and cultural behavior, including, at 
times, language. As such, the ethnographer attends to the entirety of the social situation, 
even when the object of analysis is more limited. Likewise, functional linguistics, in 
wanting to know how people use language to accomplish everyday behaviors, is 
invested in the holistic social situation, which includes both speech and other social 
practices. Bettie (2003) shows that grounded poststructuralist theory is in fact possible, 
as she attends to racial and class formation and subjectivity through ethnographic study.

4.2 “Bedlington” Middle School

Of all the schools in the urban region I was interested in, I was most compelled 
by Bedlington, a fictional name. The school district of which Bedlington is part is known 
locally for its “rough schools,” even in the middle school grades. Bedlington, in contrast,
is reputed to be different, because it is a “lottery school,” meaning parents have to submit applications for their children to attend. This has a number of interesting effects on the population of the school and the way school faculty, administrators, and students conceive of talk about Bedlington. One important effect of the lottery process is that the socioeconomic class scale of the student population is more narrow than in other schools in Bedlington’s district, and is skewed toward more middle class students. This statement requires a bit of perspective – approximately half of Bedlington students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. While this figure would be astronomically high in some urban and suburban school districts in central North Carolina, as many as 80% of students in other schools in Bedlington’s particular district are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. As a result, Bedlington is known locally as a “good school.” At least in terms of reputation, the other middle schools in Bedlington’s district have more serious problems with student violence and gang involvement, neither of which, however, is categorically absent at Bedlington. In addition, Bedlington consistently scores at the top of its district on End of Grade tests (known in the school as EOGs). This is a great source of pride for the school and the administrators advertise this fact regularly by posting EOG test results from previous years around the school and by frequently referencing Bedlington’s testing success in the morning announcements. Naturally, Bedlington’s scholastic successes are understood as being the result of the hard work of teachers and students. This is not untrue, but what the statement elides is
that is that Bedlington does not have to deal with student poverty to the same extent as other schools in the district.

With respect to the lottery system itself, an administrator told me during my first week on site that only those students with parents who were willing to “put forth the effort to apply” came to Bedlington. The conversation we were having at the time was about Bedlington’s success with parental involvement, but that comment gave me an early glimpse into one of the institutional discourses that frames almost everything that happens at school – *individual choice*.

### 4.2.1 Bedlington Student Profile

Like the other schools in the district, the overwhelming majority of Bedlington students are African American (58.4%). White students comprise about 18.8% of the student population, and Latinos about 16.3%. Other groups are “Asian and Pacific Islanders” (3.5%) and “multiracial” (3%). In the city where Bellington is located, African Americans make up 43.8% of residents, and whites make up a slightly larger 45.5%, according to data recorded for the 2000 US Census. Bedlington’s Latino population is slightly higher than the recorded city population, which was 8.6% at the time of the last official census in 2000. Several teachers and school administrators who had been employed at Bedlington in previous years told me that the Latino population at the school has grown to nearly 10% today from almost none a decade ago. This increase
parallels the growth of North Carolina’s Latino population in general, which was the fastest growing in the nation between 1990-2000. Reflecting the relative incipience of this population, North Carolina was also the state with the largest number of Spanish language monolinguals in 2000, as a percentage of its total Latino population. Like many schools in central North Carolina, Bedlington has an English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) program, which employs one full time teacher. During the semester I was at Bedlington, a part time ESL teacher was hired. At Bedlington, ESL is synonymous with “Latino” and, indeed, very few students of non-Hispanic origin are enrolled in ESL classes. The school has very small number of students of South and East Asian descent, corresponding to the small Asian population in the city (3.6% in 2000). Bedlington also has a much larger than average deaf and hard-of-hearing students, on account of its hearing impaired program, which employs two full time hearing impaired teachers, two hearing impaired language facilitators, and three hearing impaired interpreters.

4.2.2 Physical Layout

When you walk into Bedlington’s front doors from the visitors’ parking lot, two points stretch into the sky above the cream colored, two story building. They are twin peaks, flanking the school, one reaching upward from the back of the building, the other from the front; they were points that thousands of people who had passed through Bedlington’s front doors had probably not bothered to register – they were that ‘neutral,’
that uninteresting, that ordinary. It took me about three months of conducting daily fieldwork at Bedlington to notice the points myself. I had been so focused on the school’s interior that I had barely noticed its exterior. Then one weekday morning in March, I saw them. It was the first morning I had been to school since the start of daylight saving’s time, and it was still dark when I got out of my car at 7:30 AM – not pitch black, but the sun was still not directly overhead. Something about the sky, the way it framed the school in different colors, shades of gray and purple, brought the twin peaks into relief. The twin peaks – an American flag in front, and a church steeple, topped with a cross, from the back – made me think about the school, not the institution, but the building. If the school constitutes its own subjects, how does the physical space contribute to that constitution? This was, at first, an esoteric question, but it was not long before I realized the tremendous subjectivizing force the space played on the subjects who dwelled within it.

The front doors of Bedlington open into the main lobby, a hub connecting the elective wing of the building, the main office, and corridors leading to the gym, auditorium, cafeteria, and classrooms. Trophy cases with shelf upon shelf of athletic plaques and sports trophies flank two light blue, wooden ram horns that emerge headless from a wooden plaque in the shape of national crest. On the perpendicular wall, a painted mural depicts three Black children with bookbags on their backs waving to a steam-engine named ‘Bedlington Express,’ which is pulling away from the school,
its steam spelling out the name of the city where the school is located. A long rectangular poster on tarp-like plastic, with the heading Bedlington Middle School in light blue, reads, “It’s not where you start, it’s where you finish…finish strong.” The ubiquitous ram’s head, the Bedlington mascot, looks leftward from the bottom right corner of the banner.

The three grades are separated into three separate wings of the school, the 6th graders up the stairs from the main lobby, the 7th graders downstairs on a corridor behind the cafeteria, and the 8th graders directly above them, on a corridor accessible from a staircase from the outside of the cafeteria. Each grade is divided into two “teams,” with names like ‘Navigators,’ ‘Voyagers,’ ‘Discoverers,’ and so on. Each hallway is figuratively split in two, with one team occupying classrooms on one end, the other team on the other. The school partitions itself in a couple of other important ways. First, the “arts” (music, chorus, and art) are fully separated from the rest of the instructional space, occupying a single story wing, a recent annex to the main building, accessible only via the front lobby. There are two small hallways located upstairs, between the 6th and 8th grade halls, that house two different constellations of students. On the first hallway, a 6th grade language arts class, truncated from the rest of the 6th grade classrooms, is located immediately on the right, next to the main upstairs lobby. Further down the hall, past a long, uninterrupted cinderblock wall, painted in the manner of the rest of the school, a glossed off-white, is a cluster of three classrooms,
housing three seemingly unrelated populations: deaf and hard-of-hearing, ESL (English-as-a-Second-Language), and PASS (Positive Alternative to School Suspension), also known as ISS (In-school Suspension). It is worth noting here that many of the students enrolled in ESL spend a significant amount of time in PASS as well.

Another interesting classroom cluster is located on another short hall that runs parallel to the ESL / PASS hall on the second floor. This hall is referred to as the ‘vocational hall’ and houses three classrooms – “life skills,” “technology,” and Spanish.

Small 2 x 1 foot laminated posters line the walls on both sides of the vocational corridor. Each poster listed the name of the career at the top, had a color picture in the center depicting some attribute or symbol of the career, and a list of information (salary, amount of education needed, etc.) in a box at the bottom. Each of the following careers was featured in a separate poster:

*Bus drivers, foresters, bricklayer, computer office machine repair, engineering manager, fire fighters, dental hygienists, plumber, marine engineer, bank teller, retail sales, plasterers, travel agent* (starting salary $12,900; 10 years experience, $25,000), *meteorologist, stock handling, refuse collectors* (average weekly earnings: $300), *jewelers, aircraft mechanic, broadcast technician, construction laborers, chauffeurs, farm operators, animal caretakers, and restaurant managers.* At the end of the hall, a poster read, “Make Spanish, Life Skills, and Technology Your Passion!”
4.3 Gaining Access, IRB Protocols, and Confidentiality

Access to Bedlington, like any public school, was somewhat difficult to obtain. Fortunately, some sociolinguistic fieldwork had already been carried forth in this school district by Walt Wolfram and his team of researchers at North Carolina State University. I was introduced to a contact in the school system who arranged for me to meet the principal of the school, Principal Conner. My first meeting with him was productive, and he seemed open to the possibility of my project. I explained that I would be willing to volunteer at the school, in the capacity he deemed necessary, in exchange for permission to be on campus. My proposed exchange of labor for access was doubly motivated. The first order concern was showing that I was willing to be a good neighbor with good intentions in order to be granted access. The larger issue, however, is a commitment to a tradition in sociolinguistic research that Wolfram (1993; 1998; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1995) calls linguistic gratuity, a principle whereby linguists return linguistic favors to the community research setting. My main contribution to Bedlington was facilitating communication between Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking teachers, administrators, and students, a role which I will discuss throughout this chapter.

4.3.1 Working with Human Subjects

Prior to meeting with Principal Conner, I had already obtained approval from Duke’s Institutional Research Board (IRB) after several months of collaboration on the
project proposal with members of the board. Ancillary IRB materials, including parental permission forms and prompts for student assent, are provided in Appendices A-D, as described below.

*Informed Consent:* Because the students I was interested in studying are legal minors, I had to obtain written consent from a parent or legal guardian of each student who agreed to talk to me. The consent form explains who I am, explains the project, and provides possible topics of discussion. An English language version of the consent form is provided in Appendix A, the Spanish language version in Appendix B.

*Student Assent:* As legal minors, students could not provide written or oral consent for themselves, but I was required to obtain verbal assent from each person who agreed to talk to me on recording. I asked students for assent, after receiving a signed consent form from their parent or guardian, at the beginning of each recording I made with them. The IRB required that I obtain three specific types of assent from students.

1. Permission to talk and make a recording of the conversation.
2. Permission to make a written transcript of the conversation.
3. Permission to play portions of the recorded conversations in professional settings such as in teaching and at academic conferences.

I began each recorded conversation by reading or paraphrasing a written prompt for obtaining assent. Each student provided oral assent to each of the three levels of
permission provided above (recording, transcript, presentation). Written prompts for student assent are provided in Appendix C (English) and Appendix D (Spanish).

Confidentiality: I was and remain deeply committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all of those who shared their voices and stories with me during my time at Bedlington. I have taken specific measures, both during data collection and in the current writing, to protect the identity of all participants. Those measures include:

1. Pseudonyms – I refer to all figures who appear in this and other writings with pseudonyms. I asked all students who talked to me on a recording to make up their own pseudonym. I invented pseudonyms for students who talked with me on tape only in cases where they declined to make up a name for themselves and in cases where I learned that a student selected pseudonym could still give away someone’s identity (a middle name, a nickname, etc.). I assigned pseudonyms to all administrators, teachers, and staff, as well as to those students who did not talk to me on tape but still appear in the writing.

2. Field notes – I used small notebooks to record my observations from the field. I kept these notebooks, which contained descriptions of people and real names, private and locked in my home while not at school. As I will describe later, I typed extensive field notes, nearly 400 pages, based on the notes I collected on site. Those notes are stored on a backup hard drive located in my home and thus strictly confidential.
3. Recorded interviews – All interviews remain strictly confidential. For the purposes of linguistic data analysis and preservation, the entire corpus of data was added to the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project (NC SLAAP), a web-based archive of sociolinguistic recordings and tools for linguistic analysis, hosted by North Carolina State University (Kendall 2007, 2008). SLAAP allows various levels of access to the sociolinguistic corpora it houses. Access to the interviews conducted at Bedlington is restricted to me alone.

4. Sharing Observations – Students told me many things in confidence, ranging from who they think is involved in gangs, to who they ‘like,’ to who they are angry with, and everything in between. I never repeated this information to anyone and my main strategy for keeping secrets was to play dumb. I frequently heard rumors and secrets from different parties with different stakes in those rumors and secrets. No matter how familiar I was with a given piece of gossip, I always acted as though all secrets were novel ones. This was important, as part of what constitutes “drama” at Bedlington is access to information, not only the information itself. With respect to privacy, students were surprisingly reluctant to use me as a way of finding out information about people they knew I had talked to. I was only ever asked by one student what someone else said in an interview – I simply reminded her that I could not talk about it, in the same way I could not tell other people about what she told me. I was also privy to confidential information in two additional capacities, my volunteer work as a translator and my time
spent in the main office. When the Bedlington administration learned that I was a Spanish speaker, they began to call on me to translate in a variety of situations, including many parent/teacher, parent/counselor, and parent/administrator conferences. Obviously, none of these conferences were recorded and I never took field notes while working as a translator. I never discussed any of these meetings with any student, teacher, or administrator. I also spent quite a bit of time in a common area located in the central office where I sat alone in observation of the action around me. Many exchanges took place there between teachers and administrators and between students and administrators, which frequently included personal information about teachers and students. In addition, the two clerical assistants who sat at the front desk next to where I sat were deeply involved in the faculty gossip network. I kept all information discovered in these and other capacities strictly private.

4.4 Methods of the field

Linguists and humanities scholars unfamiliar with ethnographic writing may find my discussion of methods tedious and unnecessarily detailed. It is the case that I take great care to discuss methods that other methodological programs take for granted, such as note-taking. Methodological transparency is important because the slices of life that I present throughout this chapter are the products of my own methodological and interpretive lens. Even the research questions that I ask are the result of my own
participant observation in life at Bedlington, and are therefore in every way a function of the methodological choices I made while in the field.

4.4.1 Ethnographic Methods and Reflexivity

I am not formally trained in ethnographic methods, and my formal training in general qualitative methods is limited, as the bulk of my training in methods has been oriented to sociolinguistic fieldwork and quantitative linguistic analysis. I am therefore deeply indebted to those ethnographers, anthropologists, and linguists who taught me through their writing, namely Norma Mendoza-Denton, Penelope Eckert, Julie Bettie, David Valentine, Barrie Thorne, Amanda Lewis, Ann Arnett Ferguson, Prudence Carter and many others. I am also indebted to my colleague Christine Mallinson who shared with me materials from the graduate seminar she teaches on qualitative methods at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Barbara Johnstone’s (2000) *Qualitative Methods in Sociolinguistics*, the only book of its kind, was an invaluable resource, especially while thinking through the ethical issues involved in ethnography. Two additional books on ethnographic and qualitative methods were invaluable to my work at Bedlington: *Analyzing Social Settings* (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006) and *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I referred to both continually while in the field.

I spent just under five months at Bedlington. This period is somewhat shorter than that of similar ethnographic projects. Bucholtz (1999) spent approximately one year
in Bay City High School, Mendoza-Denton (1997/2008) spent about two years at Sor Juana High, and Thorne (1993) and Bettie (2003) spent eight and nine months, respectively, in their schools in California. Knowing that my window was shorter than in comparable studies, I approached fieldwork vigorously, spending an average of six hours a day at school everyday, Monday through Friday, month after month. School started at 7:30 in the morning, but many students, especially those receiving free breakfast, arrived well before starting time. Many days I arrived at school by 7:00 AM in order to observe students in their most unsupervised moment of the day. The same was true for the end of the school day, which was at 2:30. Many students stayed after school for various activities such as sports teams and band, and I spent many afternoons hanging out in the front lobby after school with the non-bus-riding students who were waiting on their rides home.

My time at Bedlington was spent in a variety of ways, from wandering the halls making observations about the physical space itself, to observing students at lunch, observing students in the halls, paying attention to which students came in and out of the main office, in-school suspension, and selectively talking to students informally, at lunch, in the halls, and after school. These activities, all copiously recorded in my field notes, constituted the bulk of my research agenda at Bedlington. This research agenda was ultimately directed at the question about language and subjectivity – in this context, how students are subjectivized through language to become speaking subjects. The
more proximate question, however, was simply one of making sense of what was going on in the school, to learn about what it meant to be a student, to learn about how the students talk and what they talk about, and to find out how they create and make sense of their own lives. This was a formidable task, and only after I had a sense of place and a sense of meaning did I begin to embark on the interviewing process, the final stage in the project. I approached the ethnographic task by imagining myself as an outsider interested in making a chain of connections with students. Though clearly it was impossible to become a true insider, I did hope to achieve an ‘outsider-within’ status. I am partial to the way Emerson et al. describe the quality of the closeness I hoped to achieve: “immersion is not merging.” (35) I implemented a few principles to help me achieve this status. The first was to minimize contact with other adults in the school and, in particular, teachers. Even though students knew I was an adult, it was important that they not see me as an authority figure or a colleague or ally of known authority figures. The distance-from-teachers principle was not difficult to implement. I informed the school principal, Principal Conner, that I was not interested in studying teachers or evaluating them or their teaching in any way. As such, I did not seek or obtain authorization to observe in classrooms, either from the Duke IRB or from the Bedlington administration. Before I arrived on campus, Principal Conner sent an email to the entire faculty explaining who I was and what my project was about. He also informed them that I was not interested in observing in their classrooms. Also in the effort of achieving
an outsider within status, I remained very conscious about my own appearance throughout my time at Bedlington. My appearance was actually a minor point of contention with Principal Conner, who asked me on my first day at school to try to dress like a teacher. He was apparently worried that not doing so would be too much of a distraction to the students. I tentatively agreed and came back the next day wearing a brown sports coat and black leather shoes, which was the extent of my dressing like a teacher. Once I gained more comfort with Principal Conner, I abandoned any attempt to purposefully not dress like a student. My usual attire included suede tennis shoes, blue jeans, sometimes ripped, and T-shirts in solid colors. During the winter months at the start of my time at Bedlington, I also wore an informal black puff jacket. I abstained from wearing any jewelry, aside from my wristwatch, and I was conservative with the way I styled my hair.

What I have just described – a retrospective summary of my actual research life at Bedlington – corresponds quite closely to my planned research schedule and my imagined role as ethnographer. However, there are two major departures from the planned schedule that I have not yet mentioned. The first is my role as an ad-hoc, pseudo-volunteer. From early on, I was asked by the testing coordinator to proctor state exams, of which there were a bewildering number at Bedlington. In addition, as mentioned previously, I served as a translator in numerous meetings, both planned and spontaneous. The other, more fundamental departure from my planned research
schedule was the intense, long-term engagement I made with Graciela and Alma, two women who worked in the school as housekeepers. I discuss my relationship with Graciela and Alma, their role in Bedlington culture, and what I learned from them in section 4.8. Both of these departures presented challenges to the role I imagined for myself at Bedlington – an outsider who achieves some insider status through intense, ongoing engagement with student culture. Both my role as a volunteer and my relationship with Graciela and Alma threatened to compromise my relationship with students, as both brought me closer in line with the institution and the adult figures in charge of running it. On the other hand, both roles gave me first-hand access to students (through translating), institutional contexts (through proctoring) and information about student life that I would not have otherwise had.

I will outline in the following sections the major methodological components of my research agenda at Bedlington.

1. Ethnographic fieldnotes: Writing fieldnotes was the single most exhausting part of my research at Bedlington. As Lofland et al. (2006) point out, “an enormous amount of information about the settings under observation or the interview in process can be apprehended in apparently trivial happening…Given the potential significance of seemingly insignificant ordinary details, the fieldworker must pay careful attention to consistent and meticulous documentation.” (81) I made ‘meticulous documentation’ a way of life during my months at school. I say the work of writing fieldnotes is
exhausting, in part, because maintaining attention to detail – to sounds, colors, shapes, voices, smells, movements, interactions – is in itself time-consuming, at times tedious, and requires great concentration. Fieldnote writing is exhausting, though, in another sense. As Emerson et al. (1995) note, fieldnote writing is more than the routine recording of an endless series of observations, details, and facts – “interpretation and sense-making” of those observations takes place during the writing. Thus, the accruing of detail occurs in conjunction with the assimilation of those details into sense-making. Fieldnotes, then, constituted the foundation, not the surface, of my interpretive analysis of social life at Bedlington.

“Writing” fieldnotes actually encompasses related but distinct activities, the first being the recording or ‘jotting’ of observations into a notebook or journal while in the fieldwork setting. The second, which takes place outside of the fieldwork setting, is the work of reading, cohering, assimilating, and reflecting on those jottings in order to give them shape in a more formal, typed fieldwork document. Lofland et al. recommend, as a general rule, spending as much time writing as observing. “Cloistered rigor” in writing, in their view, should match “all the energy and enthusiasm” of being in the field. This recommendation was simply not feasible for my study, and I spent considerably less time writing than I did in the field. This was a function of the fact that I spent between 4-8 hours in the field, everyday. I was still able to produce good, detailed fieldnotes, in part by adopting a strategy of ‘open jotting’ while at Bedlington. Though it
may seem trivial, the decision to write observations openly (in the presence of others in
the field) or to take notes privately is actually quite important, since it effects the both
quality of the notes and the way subjects in the field understand the role of the
ethnographer. While Lofland et al. caution against writing publically, even as a known
observer (109), Emerson et al. take a different approach, acknowledging that establishing
an active note-taking role, “jotting notes comes to be part of what people expect from the
fieldworker.” (22) Open jotting allowed me to come away with more, and more
complete, written material, which made typing up fieldnotes faster. Open writing also
facilitated the recording of my general impressions, feelings, and questions, in addition
to the lodging of interactional and sensory detail. It also allowed me to incorporate
actual overheard dialogue – sometimes just words, sometimes complete conversations –
into my fieldnotes. Following the recommendation of Lofland et al., I distinguished
between various types of speech notationally, using quotation marks (“x”) to indicate
verbal material I was sure about, and single quotation marks (‘x’) to indicate
paraphrasing. It did not take long for me to develop a reputation as a copious note-
taker. Teachers and administrators frequently made jokes in passing about how much I
was writing, while students were mainly curious about the content of my notes. When
students asked what I was writing about, I told them that I was doing a study of ‘middle
school life,’ which was satisfactory to most who asked. Occasionally, students wanted to
know more, and I told them that I was interested in how middle school students make friends and talk about their friendships with others.

In my typed account, I attempted to cohere sensory observations about setting with interactional ‘scenes’ to create vivid, readable accounts of my observation. Keeping in mind Goffman’s advice to write “lushly” (1989, 131), I wrote extensively about my sensory experience at Bedlington. Not only was the result of this mode of writing useful in terms of its product, the process of this mode reminded me that I was always as physically embedded in Bedlington as the people I was writing “about.” The goal of this writing was to create scenes and to tell stories – the people in my notebook became characters in my typed notes. One character who appears on nearly every page of my fieldnotes is “the ethnographer,” me. Since I did a lot of non-participant observation at the beginning of my time at Bedlington, I wrote myself into scenes by describing my stance, point-of-view, or physical relationship to the action I was describing. Later, when I began to participate more actively with students, mainly by having lunch with them, I wrote myself into scenes as a direct part of the interaction. This was practically necessary since I was an interactive participant in some scenes, but it was also theoretically important. Writing fieldnotes as a narrative, as Emerson et al. note, is “highly interpretive writing” (89) and being the author of my own character reminds me that the story I tell is really my own and is highly subjective.
In the end, my jottings filled five full journals and produced over 400 pages of typed fieldnotes. Since completing my fieldwork at Bedlington, the fieldnotes, in conjunction with digital sound files and typed transcripts of those files, are the primary data source for analysis. 400 pages of notes is an extraordinary amount of data to work with, and the process of evaluating those data, grouping scenes, organizing characters, finding patterns, constituted the analysis that lead to the findings that I will report later in this chapter. Johnstone (2000) refers to ethnographic analytical techniques as “unpacking” or “uncovering,” and likens this type of analysis to “literary criticism” in that these techniques are “traditionally learned by reading and practicing.” This is a useful way of thinking about analysis of ethnographic data; my own interpretive endeavors were very much grounded in text, both conversational and written and I would suggest that the process of “uncovering” in ethnography is closely aligned with close reading techniques in literary studies.

2. Landscaping: I spent, approximately, the first two weeks of my time at Bedlington attending primarily to the physical environment, from literally learning my way around the school grounds, to making observations about how space was used and inhabited, and making observations about the physical accoutrements of space. My attention to space included attention to what Lofland et al. (2006, 89) call “physical traces” – the erosion of materials used by human subjects (sketches on walls, wearing of floors, chipping paint, etc.) and the accretion of human traces (lost and found items,
accumulation of trash, etc.) These observations helped create the sensory-rich images needed to produce vivid fieldnotes. Physical landscaping, however, was by no means divorced from attention to language at Bedlington, and much of the mapping I was doing was language oriented. As I wandered the school, I made many preliminary observations about the language that I heard, and copious, detailed observations about the language that I saw.

In his outline of the “ethnography of speaking,” program Dell Hymes (1972, 1974) convinced language scholars that spoken and written language in a particular speech community were, in addition to being a means of finding out about a community, themselves cultural objects of the community, and were therefore worthy of study as such. Contemporary sociolinguistics is thoroughly convinced of this claim as it pertains to speech, but in general has been far less interested in writing as an artifact of community culture. In contrast, my initial attention to the linguistic landscape was directed most closely at the writing within Bedlington – eventually this would extend to student writing, including ‘popularity charts’ and gang ‘tagging,’ but in the beginning I was captivated by the richness of the language posted by the administration and teachers on the walls throughout the building. In my notebook, I detailed every poster, every slogan, and every piece of student art and writing hung by teachers.

Documentation of the material culture of the school, particularly the texts and images
posted by the administration, was an important element of the investigation of ‘institutional discourses’ in the analysis that follows.

3. Student observation: The main site of student observation was the cafeteria, during breakfast in the morning and during lunch, which ran almost continuously from 10:30 in the morning until 1:30 in the afternoon. Because class times at Bedlington were staggered by grade and by team, one or another group of students was almost always in the hall at any given moment. I spent quite a bit of time standing around in empty halls, which was fortuitous, as I learned about an interesting bathroom culture at Bedlington – it was the place where students went to skip class. I also conducted student observation in the main office, which was a hub of disciplinary and administrative activity. I had unplanned access to students in classrooms when I proctored exams, and translating put me in student context I would not have otherwise been able to access. For the first six to eight weeks, I did not actively talk to students. Provided that the primary task in the initial research phase was to determine the relevant analytic categories at Bedlington, I did not want interaction with some students (and not others) to pull my analysis in one or another direction. This is not to say that I did not speak to students. Principal Conner told me from the outset that students would be interested in me and my role at Bedlington, and he was correct. Students frequently approached me to ask questions, which I always entertained, though I was careful in the beginning not to enter into deeper conversation too soon.
4. Reflexivity: I have marginally referred to myself as an actor in the action that I present here, mainly in the discussion of fieldnotes, but there is more than needs to be said. As many ethnographers and authors writing about methods have pointed out, the subject position of the ethnographer affects what can be observed and when. My subject position also affects my interpretation of the cultural material to which I am privy. Bettie (2003, 22-23) describes this arrangement. “Reflexive ethnography demands that as ethnographers we point to our own subjectivity, acknowledge that it undoubtedly shapes the story we tell, and – most importantly – recognize the fact of the power we wield, the power of interpretation.” I am very committed to reflexive ethnography, because I believe in its intellectual merit, but also because I feel responsible to the people of Bedlington who shared their voices and experiences with me for four months. By writing myself into this account, I hope to remind readers that the story I present is as much mine as it is theirs and, as such, it is necessarily partial and incomplete.

In the broadest sense, I have a lot in common with the students of Bedlington. I, like them, attended middle school in North Carolina and, like most of them, am from the South. I come from a family that shares many of the dialect traits of Bedlington students. On the very rare occasion that I heard a student address a teacher or administrator with ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am,’ I was not surprised. Some of the teachers at Bedlington – white women with khaki pants, pink sweaters, and tight perms, could have been plucked straight out of my own middle school. The similarities mainly end there. I did grow up in North
Carolina, but my suburban community was affluent and overwhelmingly white.

Though my best friend in middle school was an African American female, my school experiences were mainly white, largely a function of the community where I grew up, and unlike Bedlington, there were almost no Latino students at my school.

I found myself with a similar set of questions and doubts about myself that Bettie (2003, 25) experienced in her study of “Waretown High.”

The ethnographic dilemma I faced was that my cultural identity as a white woman might result in an analysis that was not sensitive to Mexican-American culture and racial/ethnic identity, either, on the one hand, by failing to recognize cultural specificity or, on the other hand, by reducing girls to their ethnicity, whereby everything they do can be attributed to and is overdetermined by “their” culture, ignoring intracultural variation.

I wondered, too, if I would be able to avoid the pitfalls of being blind to meaningful cultural practices or being predisposed to see racialized or cultural meaning when it was not there, or was orthogonal to the practice at hand. I am a white, middle class, educated man who tried to become an insider in a majority-minority middle school, which also happens to be in the South. I will never know to the fullest extent how my subject position – middle class, white, male – affected my research at Bedlington. I can only imagine what was going through the heads of some of the students when I said I wanted to learn about their lives as middle school students. Even though students from every racial group approached me, I can say with certainty that the white students, mainly 7th and 8th grade white girls, expressed the least reservation in engaging with me, including greeting me by name and asking me questions about my project. The forms of address students used with me varied. Some of the Latino students called me “Felipe,”
as did Graciela and Alma, whereas white and African American students called me “Phillip,” the name I wrote on my visitor’s nametag the first two weeks on campus, or “Phil.” The students who were most familiar with me frequently called me “Phil,” even though I never introduced myself to anyone that way. One student, a 6th grade African American girl who greeted me daily during her lunch period, persisted in calling me “Mr. Phillip,” even after insisted that she call me “Phillip.”

The first students to approach me in the cafeteria were a group of bubbly 8th grade white girls. It would be wholly untrue to say that it was not easy to talk to them – the social scripts were, in a sense, waiting for us. It did not take long to realize that I should be cautious about how much time I spent talking publicly with white students. Even though they were just as interesting to me as non-white students, I knew that I ran the risk of being perceived as conducting a white project if it looked like I had made a special connection with the white students. Once I began the interview phase of the project, I realized how salient my whiteness was to many of the African American students, who used hedges and mitigating forms such as, ‘no offence to your people, but…’ or ‘I’m not trying to be racist, but sometimes the white girls…, but no offense.’ For instance, in a conversation I had with the most popular African American girls in the 7th grade, Diamond hedged by addressing me directly when talking about white students.
“Oh, like us, us, not trying to put your, the color of our skin, us, we think of your color as your skin, like back in the day, we think y’all act like y’all better than us”

Of course, I observed as much (or more) hedging and mitigation among the white students when talking about race, but the affect was different. Whereas the white students mitigated conversationally to deal with race in the abstract, the African American students seemed to use mitigation techniques as a politeness technique with me specifically. Race structures social life at Bedlington in some surprisingly rigid ways, so I quickly realized that reflexivity – knowing my own status – was a method unto itself.

As I child, I learned Spanish. It actually started in the 6th grade, when I was placed in a Spanish class against my will. It did not take me long to become obsessed with the language, and by my last year in high school, I was taking advanced Spanish classes at the state university, since I placed out of anything available to me in my school system. By the time I was in college, I was deeply involved with the local, mainly Mexican, immigrant community, not as a ‘volunteer,’ but as an outsider who achieved some insider status and for a period of about two years, my primary social network was the immigrant community. I spent weeknights watching Soñadoras, a popular Mexican novela at the time, and weekends dancing at Latino discos. The only language available to all of us was Spanish. I eventually became the padrino of a child born to two of my friends from the community. In the many years since then, Spanish has remained an
important part of my life in ways that I need not describe here. I mention my own language history, though, because Spanish became a vital way of communicating at Bedlington, mainly with Graciela and Alma, but also with many students. Once it became apparent that I was a Spanish-speaker, the Latino students would approach me, sometimes without introduction, and ask “¿hablas español?” My response was always the same: “Sí.” Nothing more. I have had a great deal of experience dealing with people who register great surprise, sometimes to the point of disbelief, that I speak their language. There is, of course, absolutely nothing unusual about bilingualism, as it is the linguistic norm for the vast majority of the people in the world. Moreover, most of the people who register surprise are themselves bilingual, as was the case at Bedlington. I almost need not point out that what is surprising to people when they hear me speak Spanish is not bilingualism, but rather the reversal of the racialization of Spanish and English in the American context, particularly in the South. It is this dimension – the exceptionalism of a white American Spanish speaker – that I try not to indulge. Nevertheless, many Latino students at Bedlington were curious and wanted to know if I was really a Chicano, or from Spain, or had a Latina mother. A typical conversation would unfold something like this:

¿De dónde eres?

De acá, de Carolina del Norte

¿Eres Chicano?
No.

¿De dónde son tus padres?

De Carolina del Norte

Pues, ¿por qué hablas español?

And then I provide some highly condensed version of my linguistic history.

There is no doubt that speaking Spanish gave me a certain credibility with the Latino students that I would not have otherwise had. Additionally, the relationship I developed with Graciela and Alma – the school housekeepers – was only possible because I could speak to them in Spanish. At Bedlington, Spanish was far more than a way to communicate with Spanish speakers. Spanish became an object of analysis once I began to realize that it performed important discursive work and had complex racialized and gendered meanings. Spanish was also political, and at one point, I found myself in the middle of a set of power dynamics where the tensions surrounding race, language, and professional status came to an uncomfortable boiling point. I do not wish to give the impression that speaking Spanish nullified my race and class status, turning me into a Latino insider. That did not happen. Spanish did, however, grant me access to parts of Bedlington culture that I would not have otherwise ever seen.

It is not entirely clear to me how African American and white students perceived me as a Spanish speaker. On reflection, I find it somewhat unusual that no one, other than Latino students, ever asked. The African American and white teachers and staff,
including the ones for whom I translated and who sought me out specifically to help them in bilingual situations, also never asked me about Spanish, even though they would ask me other ‘personal’ questions, such as where I was a student and what I was studying. However, my public role as a Spanish speaker did not stop non-Latino students from expressing strong attitudes about the use of Spanish at Bedlington. I will return to that issue in Chapter 5.

4.4.2 Interview Methods and Participant “Sampling”

Johnstone (2000, 84) notes that sociolinguistics, including quantitative approaches, has a history of borrowing ethnographic methods; “ethnography has always, implicitly or explicitly, been involved in sociolinguistic work in the Labovian quantitative paradigm…” Indeed, the area of greatest methodological overlap between linguistics and ethnography in my work at Bedlington was the interview phase, where I incorporated a range of interview methods.

Unlike in sociolinguistics, I abstained from setting up interviews with students until I had some grasp of the culture of Bedlington, its social structure, and some of the social formations within that structure. After months of observation, I began to disseminate parental consent forms during lunch, available in English and Spanish. It was my policy to give a consent form to any student (or teacher) who asked for one, though I targeted the students and groups that I wanted to know about most. All of the
students whom I approached already knew who I was and what my project was about, as they had seen me at lunch, in the halls, and after school for months.

There were two major constraints on the interview phase of the project. The first was the consent process. The overwhelming majority of the students who I wanted to talk to received permission from a parent or guardian, but there were a few students whose parents did not consent and were, thus, unable to participate in an interview. I provided my phone number on the parental permission form and encouraged parents to call me if they had questions. One mother whose daughter I later interviewed called to ask questions about where and with whom the interview would take place. I could sense real reservation in her voice, and she explained that her elementary-aged son had been sexually abused by a school volunteer. She encouraged me to conduct my interviews in public and to avoid spending time alone with students. This phone call made me think seriously about how to conduct interviews with children, and I decided to schedule only group interviews. On the occasion when that was not possible, I made every effort to make the interview situation transparent to the school, usually by conducting the interview in a conference room in the main office with the door open. Other students habitually lost or forgot to return their forms, which made scheduling group interviews difficult.

The other constraint was time. I was, in general, very concerned with being a respectful guest at Bedlington, knowing that complaints to the administration from
teachers could foreclose the project altogether. Therefore, I decided not to ask to pull students out of class and to conduct interviews during lunch periods. However, Bedlington students only have about 40 minutes for lunch, which includes the time it takes to make it through a lunch line that could have 75 students in it at any given time. This meant that interviews tended to be short, on the order of 25-30 minutes long. All students in every grade are scheduled in a class called “Core Plus,” which amounts to a free period in which students can do their homework. I had the opportunity to interview several students during this period, which allowed for interviews on the order of 45-60 minutes.

Once I obtained signed parental consent forms from an entire friendship group, I would schedule an interview with them during their lunch period. Because 6th, 7th, and 8th grade lunch periods were not concurrent, it was not possible to schedule interviews with friendship groups that spanned grade levels, though this was not a major problem since friendship tends to be highly grade-stratified. On the day of a scheduled interview, we would leave the cafeteria and eat lunch in one of several rooms located in the main office complex, or at an outdoor patio between the cafeteria and the main lobby. Interviews were recorded digitally using a Marantz PMD-660 solid state recorder and all interviews were recorded directly onto a compact flash card. At the end of the day, I transferred interviews from the flash card to my computer and to a backup hard drive and erased the interviews from the flash card. I used a Sony Electret Condenser clip-on
microphone (ECM-44B) for all interviews, and although I conducted interviews in groups, I found that it was feasible to use only one microphone by placing it in the middle of the table.

I began every interview by reading the script for assent, reminding students of their rights (to leave at any time, to ask me to erase any or all of the interview, etc.), explaining confidentiality, and asking for various levels of permission. I also asked students to make up a name they would like me to use if I were to talk about our conversation. Following these programmatic issues, I began every interview with a version of the following: “Tell me what I need to know about being a student at Bedlington. If I were a new student here, what would I need to know about this place?” This was enough to prompt most students to start talking, but some students misinterpreted the question as requiring a ‘student response,’ such as “do your homework, come to school on time, and be nice to others.” To those responses I would rephrase the question, “Okay, say I were a new student and I wanted to start hanging out with you and your friends, what would I need to know, do, or say?” In many of the interviews, the students carried the conversation from there, with me intervening only to ask for clarification or to follow up on something I found interesting. For the more reticent students, I asked questions derived from my observation; for instance, “When I ask what it’s like to be a student here, many people say that there’s a lot of ‘drama.’ Is that true?” That question invariably resulted in a voluble response.
The interviews were, in general, more like informal conversations between the students and me, and the students and each other. To the extent that I asked questions, they were always rooted in the ethnography in some way. That is, I did not pursue information exogenous to the Bedlington context. This meant abstaining from stock sociolinguistic interviewing techniques designed to elicit spontaneous or ‘vernacular’ language and those techniques designed to elicit particular linguistic structures. I rarely intervened to change the direction of conversation, except to avoid ‘teacher tangents’ (performative complaining about ‘mean’ teachers) and topics that I agreed not to discuss in the IRB contract (i.e., sexual behavior).

By the end of my time at Bedlington, I interviewed 50 students in 27 separate interview situations. Unlike other school ethnographies, I resisted ‘ethnographic focusing,’ choosing instead to talk to a range of students who I could identify as being members of particular friendship groups (“the cuatro amigos;” “the dynamic duo”) or members of a particular ‘social class’ indigenous to the Bedlington social structure (“popular Black 7th grader;” “gangbanger;” “wannabe gangbanger”). The students in the Bedlington corpus do not represent a random sample of students, nor do they represent a complete representative cross-section of the overall student population. Random sampling is obviously antithetical to the ethnographic project, and to the extent that I wanted a representative cross-section of students, the constraints of time and limitations imposed by the consent process made that type of corpus almost impossible. Therefore,
the story and analysis that follow are about my experience talking to a limited cross section of students, selected because they demonstrated consistent, patterned social behavior that I was able to identify through several months of ethnographic observation. For every pattern I was able to identify, and for every students I was able to situate in the Bedlington structure, there are surely countless patterns I was never even aware of, and many students I could not locate.

4.5 The Story of Bedlington

“Unlike the development of instincts, thinking and behavior of adolescents are prompted not from within but from without, by the social milieu.” Vygotsky 1934, 108

In this section, I provide a narrative of my first day at Bedlington (4.5.1) that incorporates two points of view – my first impressions as a naïve ethnographer, and a retrospective that contextualizes those impressions with what I learned during my time in the field. I include some of the mundane details of my experience that ground the narrative in Bedlington’s quotidian ordinariness. In 4.5.2, I introduce the students of Bedlington in the context of the friendship groups in which I observed them. When possible, I provide direct quotations, either from field notes or recorded interviews, from Bedlington’s inhabitants that qualify, substantiate, complicate, and ground my own observations.
4.5.1 The First Day

I drove into the parking lot of Bedlington Middle School, just before 7AM. It was my first day of fieldwork, and I was nervous. I had been to Bedlington several times before, mostly for meetings with the administration about my project. Now it was time to do what I proposed. The doubts swirled in my head. “Do I know what I’m doing?” “Will the students take me seriously?” “What if the teachers are not supportive?” “What am I doing here?” Walking into middle school as an ethnographer for the first day was curiously like what I remember it was like to walk into middle school the first day as a student.

Among them all, there was one doubt that had been haunting me for weeks prior to starting fieldwork. “What if I don’t find anything?” My biggest fear was the fear of absence, or of some sort of interpretive impotence that would render me incapable of seeing. It would not be long before that particular worry faded into oblivion, but as I saw the school – the front circle where parents were already dropping off their kids, the long, slender parking lot being filled by teachers’ cars, the football field and asphalt track in my periphery – my thinking was a rush of worry. As I walked through the front doors and into the main lobby, my mind jumped to the question that must have occupied my thinking on countless other first-days past: my appearance. The question of what to wear was already problematized last week by Principal Conner, who suggested that I dress up a bit in order to unequivocally disambiguate myself from the
students. Having myself the opposite goal – appearing as little like a teacher as possible – I found myself in an awkward position as I stared at my closet this morning. I knew I had to strike the right balance – appearing to respect the principal’s request without compromising my own research conviction. I decided to go with blue jeans, a short-sleeved black shirt, untucked, with a casual but professional brown jacket. I decided to play it safe with the principal and wear a pair of black shoes, not dress shoes per se, but not casual either.

I walked into the main office, signed into the guest book, and took a nametag from a small plastic basket sandwiched between the guestbook and a potted plant. The nametag was blue and white – the school colors – and pictured a large ram – the school mascot in the upper right-hand corner. Next to ‘name,’ I just wrote ‘Phillip,’ which I later realized must have seemed strange to students and teachers alike, given that the latter group introduce themselves, even to me, as Mr. Smith or Ms. White. With my nametag pressed against my brown jacket, I walked into the main corridor.

I spotted Principal Conner standing with one of the two assistant principals, who I had not previously met. He was busy talking to a student but noticed me in his periphery and turned and asked me to introduce myself to the assistant principal. The latter man was about my height, 5’11’’, dressed in a dark gray suit with a matching tie and dark shoes. He is African American, light skinned, with short, cropped hair and dark eyes. He extended his hand, and with a friendly smile and baritone voice, said
“I’m Mr. Johnson, Leon Johnson, one of the Assistant Principals.” I introduced myself and briefly explained that I was conducting a research project at Bedlington this semester. Principal Conner walked with me upstairs to a small office he reserved for me. I thanked him for his help, tossed my bag down behind the desk in the office space assigned to me, grabbed a pen and my notepad and headed back downstairs, where students were making their way off the busses and into the main building. I opened the heavy door to the cafeteria for the first time. It was breakfast time. I would later learn that breakfast was one of the few times when the students are free to choose where and with whom they sit – at lunch they sit at the same table with their class, though the seats at the table are not assigned.

This was the first moment I was able to observe students doing something other than moving from one place to the next. The cafeteria, rectangular in shape, constructed of cinderblocks painted an institutional white, with a slight gloss, was not an imposingly large space. For a space of its size, the ceiling was incongruently low. On the left side of the cinderblocked, rectangular room, was a smaller space that I ended up naming ‘the alcove.’ Seemingly a structural addition, the alcove had an even lower ceiling and was separated from the rest of the room by three large columns. Between that space and another building that connects the lobby to the gym behind it, is an outdoor cement courtyard with five cement tables. I had no way of knowing in that moment, my first in that space, how important the cafeteria was to the organization of sociality at
Bedlington. It took about a day to realize the cafeteria was an entrepôt for rumors and
gossip and about a week to realize it was a theatre to perform status. To figure out that
the cafeteria was a site where Bedlington’s social structure was instantiated, where social
formations were made and undone, and where subjects found themselves mired in a
morass of social, psychic, and material forces that constitutes, if imperfectly, the field of
meaning in which they know themselves, took quite a bit longer.

On my first morning, the cafeteria was abuzz with energy. Assistant principals
walked through with their walkie-talkies, a young African American girl with a white
puff jacket slips and falls on the shiny, newly buffed floor (someone behind her yells
out, “embarrassing”), a Latina girl walking back to her table slaps a boy across the back
of his head. I stand, interested but somewhat unsure of myself, at the end of the
cafeteria near the lobby, the furthest point from the food line and the tables where most
of the students were sitting. In a collage of faces in shades of brown, tan, and black, two
pairs of white faces were visible. At the first of a series of plastic tables arranged in
parallel rows, a group of African American students sat together, all the boys together
on one end, all the girls together on the other. At the table to their right, from my
vantage point in the corner, was a group of Latino students who, unlike the first table,
did not separate by sex. To their right was table arranged in the same way as the first,
African American boys at one end, African American girls at the other. At the forth
table, the one closest to me, Latino students, boys and girls, sat together at the end
closest to the kitchen, and African Americans, boys and girls, occupied the other end. The two white boys I noticed were talking to two black boys who sat across from them at the third table. The two white girls I saw sat together talking, separated from the rest of the table by a few chairs. Suddenly, there was a mass movement. Students started pouring out of the cafeteria at 7:20, and as they passed me by, I could hear something other than ambient noise: words. Latina girls talking to each other in Spanish. White teachers with Southern and Midwest accents herding the students into the lobby. Some black boys and black girls speaking African American English, others not.

I walked through the cafeteria and into a hallway I had never been in before. It was locker time. I stood against the wall at the intersection of two corridors. A white, woman with a navy business suit and a reddish-brownish shoulder-length bob greeted two Latina girls in Spanish. A moment later she walked to the edge of the boys bathroom and shouted, “Gentlemen, I can hear your vile language all the way out here—zip it!” At 7:28, music comes on over the loudspeaker. It’s Beethoven’s Symphony Number 5, in C Minor. Clearly it was intended to invoke a race, of sorts, starting out slow, gradually increasing its tempo until culminating in an explosion of brass and strings. The Spanish-speaking white woman with the bob yells out, “Music’s on, let’s go please!” A moment later, “Almost end of the music!” The students are trained to be out of the hall by the time the music stops, but it apparently works with mixed results – the clank of the metal locker doors slamming shut continues after the music stops. Then, the
morning announcements. “Good morning Bedlington.” It was Principal Conner, who almost immediately turns the microphone over to a student, a girl, who starts with a career day announcement – “come dressed for your future career,” she reads, in African American English. Principal Conner picks back up with an announcement about track try-outs, which last until 5PM, and Battle of the Books, which starts next week. “And now join me in The Pledge of Allegiance. I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America…” I could hear the students’ voices, chanting ensemble and in unison with their principal. A final ‘have-a-great-day.’ A shutting-off of the microphone. The closing of classroom doors. The school day had started.

With all the students in class, and with several hours to kill before the first group of students poured back into the cafeteria for lunch, I decided to try and learn the layout of the school and make some observations about materials hung on the walls throughout the school, which I had already noticed was quite abundant. I started in the cafeteria. The first poster: “Ram Pride: Healthy Foods, Strong Bodies, Intelligent Minds.” I turned and looked toward the alcove part of the cafeteria and noticed a mural of colorful fruits and vegetables, against otherwise whitewashed walls. I walked out of the cafeteria and back into the lobby. On a bulletin board behind a glass face is the “Bedlington Commitment to Wellness – ‘I am committed to completing 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week.’” Pictured below were a series of small posters, all with the slogan, “Do Amazing things.” One was a white boy freestyle jumping on inline
skates. Another was a white boy riding a mountain bike of a ramp. One was a white girl posing on figure skates and two other posters pictured two girls, one black and one white, in gymnastics poses.

I walked upstairs, where a poster advertising “The 10 Most Wanted Careers,” caught my eye. It was peculiar for the jobs that it listed (e.g., medical technician), but before I could contemplate further, a woman approached me in the hall. “Can I help you,” she asked. She had short black hair pulled back tightly, and wore a beige dress and flat loafers. Her skin was the color of coffee, and she was no older than 35. As we talked, I noticed a hint of a non-native accent, but didn’t rush to ask where she was from. Eventually she asked me first. “North Carolina, how about you?” “I’m from Panama.”

“Ah, Panameña.”

“Yeah, oh you speak a little Spanish?”

“Bastante.”

The recognition that I spoke Spanish resulted in a conversation that lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. I asked her about the Latino students at school and if they matriculated in her class. She explained that middle school Spanish is too easy for most of the Latino students, but that many Latinos aren’t literate in Spanish, which creates a problem in placement. I asked how well she thought the Latino students got along with non-Latinos. She said that she noticed them mixing most in Spanish class,
because the “American” kids need the help of the Latino students. As the hall started to
fill with students, I extended my hand, “Soy Felipe.”

“Soy Ximena, con equis. Ximena Wilson.”

“Mucho gusto.”

“Mucho gusto.” She turned to walk away, but turned around to add, “Señorita
Wilson,” she added, showing me her ringless ring finger. “No estoy casada todavía.”

I was happy to have met an adult Spanish speaker. So far Señorita Wilson was
the only one. For several weeks following our meeting, we had nice conversations about
her teaching or my project, always in Spanish. Then something changed – Señorita
Wilson started speaking to me in English. It took me several weeks to unravel the
politics behind the change.

I continued the task of mapping the Bedlington linguistic landscape. I walked a
few feet down the hall from where I had the conversation with Señorita Wilson and
noticed two posters, the first in English. The other, hung to the right and slightly lower
than the first, was a Spanish translation. Against a black background, colorful letters
mixed with colorful confetti:

“You will have 15 to 17 jobs in your lifetime. Are you ready?

Then I looked at the Spanish translation.

“¿Ud. tendrá 15 o 17 trabajos toda su vida? ¿Está USTED LISTO?"
I can only imagine the confusion that the Spanish version of this would induce in any native speaker who reads it. The ‘Ud.’ (abbreviation for ‘Usted,’ third person singular, formal ‘you’) and ‘USTED’ come across as bizarrely formal in the colorful, “cool” context of the rest of the poster. More curiously, though, is why the declarative from the English – “you will have 15 to 17 jobs” – is translated as a question in the Spanish: “Will you have 15 to 17 jobs in your lifetime?”

I walked up the short set of stairs to the main lobby, where I saw Assistant Principal Kowalski. She was a white woman who appeared to be in her late 30s. Her reddish-brown hair was cut short, and she wore a beige pantsuit and walked with walkie-talkie in hand. She approached me and asked how I was doing. It was the first time that I had actually gotten a good look at Ms. Kowalski – I was surprised by the dark, puffy circles under her eyes, there in spite of an otherwise young looking face. She was tired. I took the opportunity to ask about her role in the administration. She explained that she was in charge of the 6th grade, but that she was interested in the Latina girls in all three grades. “Several of those girls are very close to my heart. I tell them, I’m your school mom and if you do that again, I’ll kill you!” She was referring to the fact that some of the 8th grade Latina girls skip class to be with their high school aged boyfriends, who pick them up on the road off of school grounds after the girls run from the school. She also informed me that the Latino kids were the most likely to be
affiliated with gangs. That was the first time I had heard the word ‘gang’ at Bedlington, but it would certainly not be the last time, even that week.

The first lunch of the day starts at 10:30AM – it’s the 6th graders. They come to the cafeteria with their classes and sit with their classes, but can mingle more generally as they go through the line. I find a spot by the doors to the main lobby where I can have a good view of both the alcove and the main room and remain as inconspicuous as possible. The first kids emerge from the lunch line and make their way to their tables: it’s a sea of white, Styrofoam trays, moving from one end of the space to the next, topped with rectangles of cheese or pepperoni pizza or a pile of chicken nuggets. A group of Latino boys and girls sit together at the end of the table to my left, in the alcove. “No me veas,” one girl ordered to her friend. One of the 6th grade Latino boys had dark, spiked hair. He wore a black hoodie sweatshirt pulled over an ash gray T-shirt with, despite the below freezing temperature outside, long, oversized jean shorts that hung to just above his ankles. His shoes were hi-top sneakers in red and black. Across the table from him sat another Latino boy, much larger and, indeed, larger for his grade. His hair was also spiked, but was buzzed down the sides. He also wore a hoodie sweatshirt, navy blue, and wore a rosary made of large wooden beads hung around his neck. I would see many rosaries over the next few months, always on Latino boys. A Latina girl dressed in pink sat next to the first boy with spiked hair. She wore a pink top with glittery silver and black stars, with a pink hair band drawing back her wavy brown hair,
which was pulled back into a ponytail with a pink twist. Her faded army fatigue-print pants seemed unlikely next to the glitter and pink of her top. She looked cautiously at me as she pulled tiny pinches from her enormous, school-baked biscuit. To her right was a Latina girl I take to be her friend. Her long, straight hair was parted down the middle. She wore a white sweatshirt hoodie, which was covered in small golden stars, and blue jeans studded down the sides with silver half-snaps, which flanked a brown embroidered strip of fabric with sequins and small, embroidered flowers. Her sneakers had patches of gold and white, matching her hoodie.

The door to the lobby to my left opened and in walks a Durham Police Officer, about 45 years old, African American, potbelly, dressed in the uniform blues, gun in holster. He walked directly to the table in the middle of the cafeteria where the teachers ate. He leaned over the table and almost before he could have completed a full sentence, one of the teachers popped out of her seat and walked across the open space to the table to my left, in the alcove. Without walking all the way to the table, she pointed at a thin African American boy named Jeremy. “Get up and get your stuff,” the offer instructed. They left together via the doors to the main lobby. I learned later that the police officer was named Officer Benson. He was a city police officer assigned to Bedlington, and he taught a course on gang prevention that was mandatory for all 6th grade students.

My attention then turned to the custodian, a Latina woman with dark, heavy eye makeup. A dark blue headband held her dark frizzy hair out of her face as she swept
the cafeteria floor. She was thin, and wore form-fitting blue jeans and black tennis shoes.

It was difficult to estimate, but she was probably in her late 30s. I watched as she pushed around two oversized, wheeled, rubber trashcans, one in each hand. She collected food from students, taking their empty trays by hand, or moving the trashcans to a place where they could toss in their own rubbish. None of the students really seemed to pay much attention to her, except for the Latino students at the end of the table to my left, in the alcove, who said, “gracias,” as she took their trays. As she moved closer to me, still pushing the trash cans, I noticed her long, un-tucked shirt, with thin, alternating blue and white vertical stripes, which nearly obscured the walkie-talkie and long chain of dangling keys she wore on her hip. “Custodian” was stitched in red across a patch in the upper left-hand part of the shirt.

My attention returned to the 6th grade class at the table to my left under the alcove. I noticed a white boy, thin, pale in the face, in a white and blue stripped T-shirt. He was energetic, laughing and moving frenetically on the bench, never getting up, but never sitting still. He shouted across the table to the larger Latino boy with spiked hair. “Hey, are you gay?” He laughed and turned back to his friends, and back again to his victim. “I SAID, are you gay?” I couldn’t tell if the boy gave him an answer – I was afraid of them noticing me noticing them. Then the pale boy singled out another Latino boy, to whom he asked the same question: “Are you gay?” Since this boy was more directly in my line of sight, I could discern his reaction better: it was confusion. It
appeared that he didn’t really know what the pale boy was asking him, or what he was
supposed to say in response. Perhaps he was intimidated into silence. I’m not sure. He
sat confused until the boy next to him said, simply, “Say no.” My heart raced. I felt
exposed and I remembered when it happened to me, also when I was in 6th grade.

My first lunch was winding down. The students were leaving. After they all
left, the African American police officer from before joined two African American
women who worked in the kitchen. They had emerged to eat their own lunches. The
three chatted as the women ate. On the other side of the cafeteria, a slightly older Latina
woman, who I would later learn is named Alma, joined Graciela. The silence of
acoustically-poor open space created an echo of sorts. Two groups of behind-the-scenes
workers were left and I could hear their voices coming from both sides of the cafeteria.
African American English from my left, Mexican Spanish from my right.

Now it was time for 7th grade lunch: 11:45AM. The first group to come in is the
7th grade special education class, led by a young, white male teacher, maybe age 30.
He wore slacks with a white button-up shirt and a tie, but with funky tennis shoes:
brown with orange stripes. More students file in from the opposite side of the cafeteria.
I notice the first racially heterogeneous group of girls I’ve seen all day (I would end up
seeing this same group everyday this week that I observed 7th grade lunch). Five girls,
three African American and two white, sat at the end of the rightmost table closest to the
kitchen. Another class came in and began to occupy the table to my immediate left in the
alcove part of the cafeteria. The group stood out to me and I realized – it was a class of mostly white students. Of the entire table, 20 or more kids, all were white but three, a mirror image of the other tables. This was not a case of self-segregation, since the students sat with their classes. I observed this class everyday my first week at Bedlington and on the last day of the week, as I stood at the end of the cafeteria closest to the kitchen, the white, female teacher of the mainly-white class came up to me. She was heavy, wide hips with a rotund face. Her hair was curly and dark. She wore blue jeans and a white T-shirt with a flowered pattern. She said that her students had seen me all week, and they were curious what I was doing and why I was watching them and other students. She was very friendly and smiled at me as I explained what I was doing, nodding her head affirmatively. I took the opportunity to ask about her class. “One thing I’ve noticed about your class that stands out is that unlike most of the other tables, theirs is mainly white.” Before I could finish the sentence, she was already nodding her head up and down, as if she knew what I was asking before I even said it. “Well, this is the most advanced Language Arts class in the 7th grade,” she explained, as if the relationship between advanceness and whiteness were self-evident. Over the months ahead, I would hear students, white, black, and Latino, conflate the two.

I looked back to the ‘most advanced,’ ‘mostly white’ class to my left. One short, chubby white girl with wavy, shoulder-length brown hair walked passed another white girl who was already seated. I saw the chubby girl turn to the other as she walked
passed. “I hate you, too, bitch,” the chubby girl said. Then I saw a light-skinned African American girl mouth the words “go sit down there with the losers,” the /u/ vowel stretched out and fronted, to a boy carrying his tray, looking for a place to sit. It then occurred to me, as more and more kids came out of the lunch line and made their way to their assigned table, that nearly all of them were trying to inhabit one half of the long table, leaving the end furthest from me almost empty. At the empty-ish end of the table sat four boys, who timidly kept to themselves. One white boy – slightly taller than the rest – wore a red long sleeve shirt and a white, beaded necklace. His hair was black and short-cropped. He was clearly uncomfortable as he sat staring at the lunch table, arms folded at times, playing with his nails at other times. He brought his lunch in a soft, blue, zip-up bag. Inside was a series of Tupperware containers that he neatly resealed and repacked upon finishing his lunch. The shy boy with the red shirt and soft blue lunch bag eventually leaves the table and goes and sits alone at another unoccupied table.

As I stood looking out over the whole of the space, I noticed a thin African American boy coming up to me from the mostly-white table to my left. His class was getting up to leave and was making their way out of the alcove. I wrote in my notebook that he was “well dressed,” but I didn’t note more than that. I remember that he had on jeans, like nearly every other boy in the school, but his seemed sharper somehow. His
whole outfit struck me as sharper, somehow, though it wasn’t different enough from the other students for me to make a recording.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said.

“Yeah,” I replied, fully expecting him to ask me what I was doing.

“My friend here,” referring to another African American boy of similar height who stood behind him, “thinks you’re a fine, strapping young man.”

The other boy replied, “what’d he say?”

“He’s just joking, it was nothing,” I said, mortified.

After the cafeteria was emptied, I decided that I had had enough. I remembered that the Loftland book on ethnographic methods recommend spending no more than five hours a day in the field during the first week of a new project. I remember thinking that I would ignore that advice, but as I looked at my watch and saw I had been there seven hours, I was more than happy to take Lofland’s advice. So there it was – the end of the first day – my first continuous seven hours at the school, and I had already encountered two gay remarks, one of them involving me directly, the other, an eerily similar reproduction of a homophobic Althusserian hailing that happened to me a good eighteen years prior. I was done. I walked out of the cafeteria, up the short set of stairs into the main lobby, and into the main office. I found the place in the visitor’s log where I had signed in earlier that morning, took the pen off the counter and signed out before tossing my name tag in the trashcan and walking out.
### 4.5.1 Institutional Subjects

Student culture at Bedlington is complex and so any account I give of it is necessarily oversimplified. Nevertheless, I feel quite confident about the generalizations I provide here about the basic contours of social organization at Bedlington. I focus in this section on difference, fissures between individuals and groups, though it would be just as easy to focus on the points of overlap. I am compelled by difference, though, because it is through difference that identities meet with subject positions. Butler is useful for thinking difference in the context of identity formation.

Factionalization, understood as the process whereby one identity excludes another in order to fortify its own unity and coherence, makes the mistake of locating the problem of difference as that which emerges between one identity and another; but difference is the condition of possibility of identity or, rather, its constitutive limit: what makes its articulation possible is at the same time what makes any final or closed articulation impossible.

There are four primary social divisions at Bedlington out of which subjects are produced and identities are attached. Within these carvings, there are many other lines of differentiation, and in every case, there are exceptions, students who “cross,” or make identity out of the materials associated with subject types and subject positions different from their own. Of the many possible social divisions I could have identified as ‘primary,’ I stop with these four since they permeate the other divisions ‘beneath’ them. The first is grade level. Social formations tend to be within the same grade, and even though many students have relatives or friends in other grades at Bedlington, most students have stakes in sticking to their own grade. The second is popularity, which is
complicated at Bedlington because there is no popularity superstructure; instead, there are smaller popularity formations. The third division is gender and the fourth is race.

Of these, the most rigid, or ‘structural,’ is race. I cannot overstate the importance of race and racial meaning at Bedlington – it permeates almost every volitional social arrangement on the part of the students as well as many arrangements imposed by the institution. It took me many months to understand the way popularity worked at Bedlington, and it was not until I started talking to students that I found out that popularity is stratified by race, such that the question “who is popular here?” has only two meaningful responses. The first, and most common, is for students to enumerate the students in the popular caste in their own racial group. On occasion, Latino students asked for clarification – “you mean in the Hispanics?” The fact that popularity is racially stratified is widely accepted at Bedlington, but does not seem to surprise or interest anyone and students are overwhelmingly oriented to the popularity formations within their own racial group. For example, Brandy, an African American girl in the 8th grade who described herself as ‘the most popular,’ shared with me a popularity chart that she and her friends devised. Before she brought me the chart, she explained that it showed popularity for the 8th grade. In fact, it showed only 8th grade African American girls, who were placed into numbered groups, which were ranked. Each group was connected with arrows to other groups with which they could associate and groups of the same degree of popularity were depicted adjacent to one another.
At lunch, students are only allowed to sit with their classes, but from time to time, the school allows ‘free lunch,’ during which students can sit anywhere in the cafeteria they choose. The following rough diagrams are reproduced from my field notes and show the location of free seating by race (A, African American; L, Latino; W, White; As, Asian) and by gender (F, female; M, male), for each grade level. For each table, there are two rows of students, corresponding to the benches on both sides of the table that face each other. I was unable to record observations for some tables. For the 8th graders, I provide data from both sides of the cafeteria, but only one side for 6th and 7th graders.

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4.6 Discourse and Subjectivization

The institutional discourses of the school, evident in conversational tropes in student discourse, produce and reinforce the subject positions inhabited by speaking subjects. The discursive and material partitions between ostensibly neutral institutional subjects reinforce differing linguistic and cultural practices. These differing practices are taken, on the one hand, as evidence of “natural” difference between subjects whose difference is actually institutionally fortified and maintained. On the other hand, differing cultural and linguistic practices are taken as evidence of agentive, volitional difference between these subjects. Paradoxically, the natural and volitional logics of
subjective difference may be conversationally articulated in concert, such that subjects are seen as simultaneously determined by their nature and endowed with an unattenuating free-will. Therefore, the cultural practices of individuals (language, scholastic engagement, dress, etc.) may be seen as the natural extension of a particular ontological status (e.g. ‘Black,’ ‘poor,’ ‘female,’ etc.) or of individual choice. Since individuals constitute the group formations they are imagined to dwell within, group formations are, too, seen as natural or agentive constellations of similar individuals. The logics of individuals and groups run in a constant feedback loop, such that individual comportment and group membership continually reinforce each other, fortifying the illusion that subjects derive from nature or derive from choice. Because subjects are caught up in the discursive admixture of nature, choice, individual comportment, and group membership, any notion of production, constitution, assignment, or contingency is categorically absent from the discursive and conversational field at Bedlington. The materials and practices of culture, and the subjectivities made possible by those materials and practices are apprehended neither by the institution at large nor by the students as being the result of the historical and cultural moment in which they are embedded. The tensions between ontological and agentive forms of subjectivity constitute a major part of conversational discourse between students and myself. I will refer to the logics that produce these tensions as the myth of nature and choice. In this section, I will describe two levels of discourse – institutional discourses and
conversational tropes – that contribute to the production of speaking subjects within the context of the school. Further, I will describe the ways in which these levels of discourse promote and interlock with extra-institutional discursive formations, including race and sexuality.

I should make two qualifying points about the outline of discourse that I present in this section before proceeding to the analysis. First, the levels of language that I will set forth here are always multiply articulated and jointly produced; that is, they are connected with each other. For example, the shape and content of the conversational tropes that I will describe take the particular shape and acquire the particular content that they do because of the institutional discourses that precede them. Institutional discourses are never independent of culture, which is why they appear ‘normal,’ ‘neutral,’ or ‘natural’ in the school context. Without the institutional discourse of “individual choice,” the conversational trope of promiscuity – in which girls ‘choose’ to be ‘hoes’ – would not be possible in its current discursive form. At the same time, specific conversational tropes reinforce the naturalness of the logics of institutional discourses that promote them, such that the institutional discourse of “individual choice” achieves deeper embedding as a result of the trope of “promiscuity” that follows from it. Similarly, specific extra-institutional discursive productions (e.g. “Latino”) are supported foundationally by broad institutional discourses, on the one hand, and are continually reproduced in the field of ‘the real’ by specific conversational tropes on the
other (‘Latinos stick together;’ ‘they don’t speak much English,’ etc.). Each layer of discourse continually feeds back on every other level.

Second, the arrangement of discourses and conversational tropes within the institutional space is always co-articulated with extra-institutional subjectivizing forces. The simplistic way of putting it is that even though what I describe here is particular to the school setting, it is never untethered from the culture in which the school itself is embedded. The school institution is but one arm of the broader cultural apparatus that produces subjects. What I am describing is one plane where that cultural apparatus unfolds, producing speaking subjects particular to an institutional context itself embedded in culture. It is because institutional discourses interlock with discourses outside the institutional context that they achieve the status of ‘neutral.’

Institutional Discourses

I use the term ‘institutional discourse’ in the Foucauldian sense: “Discourse—the mere fact of speaking, of employing words, of using the words of others (even if it means returning them), words that the others understand and accept (and possibly, return from their side)—this fact is in itself a force. Discourse is, with respect to the relation of forces, not merely a surface of inscription, but something that brings about effects.” (1994, 124) I am interested in the effects of institutional discourses on language, on how students talk, and on what they talk about. That is, I am interested in the way
that students are subjectivized through institutional discourse, the way they are transformed by them into subjects who speak. I do not wish to imply that the institutional discourses I will describe are unique to Bedlington – surely they are not. As an ethnographer, though, I can only describe the shape of the discourses and the evidence of them in the context I observe. The task, then, is not necessarily to describe what is unique about the institutional discourses at Bedlington, but to instead try and understand the effects of the discourses, in particular, to describe their subjectivizing effects on the inhabitants of the school.

1. Achievement / Exchange Value

It is difficult to spend any significant amount of time at Bedlington and not notice the effects of the discourse of achievement and value. Its residues are ubiquitous – in the morning announcements reminding students their test scores are ‘the best in the county,’ in the posters advertising messages about future income, in the pretend economy in which quizzes can be traded for symbolic dollars, and in a career day that conflates ‘goodness’ with earning potential. All schools have symbolic systems of exchange (e.g., grades), but what I am referring to is the broad coordination of meaning around the concept of exchange.

Bedlington’s linguistic landscape – the posters, flyers, student work, posted test scores – the total assemblage of texts displayed in the school, provide much of the evidence. For example, the first poster I noticed when I started making observations
about the linguistic landscape at Bedlington was of an enlarged image of George Washington from the one-dollar bill. Above his face it read, “Never having enough money gets old really fast” and below, “Do the math – stay in school.” Something about the image was arresting to me – but I could not identify what it was. I walked a few feet to an intersection of hallways and turned left into the “Career Hall.” A doorless stretch of wall, maybe 8 or 10 feet long, was covered in a single poster. The background was made of continuously repeating images of opened newspapers with headlines about various news-making careers. The poster itself was titled, “10 Most Wanted Careers” which stretched along the width of the banner, a few inches separating each cut-out letter. The careers were numbered one through ten and were presented from left to right, in ascending order. Each number provided some basic information about a given career, the most interesting of which for me was salary.

1. Network Systems and Data Analyst $18,610 - $96,860

2. Physician Assistants $16,460 - $74,390

3. Medical Assistants $16,460 - $74,390

4. Medical Records and Health Information Technicians $16,460 - $74,390

5. Computer Application Software Engineers $18,610 - $96,860

6. Physical Therapy Aides $16,460 - $74,390

7. Fitness Trainer and Aerobics Instructors $7.09 - $26.22 / hour

8. Database Administration $16,460 - $74,390
9. Veterinary Technologists and Technicians $16,170 - $33,750

10. Dental Hygienists $8.45 - $39.24 / hour

I had to reread the title several times: “10 Most Wanted Careers.” I was surprised that ‘teacher,’ or ‘doctor’ or ‘veterinarian’ didn’t make the list, but medical record technician did. Of course, I am not sure where the data come from, if they were based on student preference or a national survey of some sort, but it struck me as peculiar that almost all of the careers were support roles: dental hygienist, not dentist; physical therapy aide, not physical therapist, etc.

Evidence that labor can be exchanged in a marketplace of symbolic value is found throughout Bedlington. The first time I was asked to proctor a state exam, I was placed in a 7th grade math classroom, where I spent most of my time observing the space while the students took their exam. A small poster at the front of the class, hung just above the whiteboard, stood out to me.

“Sale Prices”

10 dollars  FREE Homework

$20  eliminate 10% of questions

$50  5 points on an exam

100 dollars  1 point on final average
During my second week, I wandered into the media center for the greatly advertised Bedlington Career Day. Parents of students volunteered to talk to the students in their child’s class about their career. I found a spot at the back of the media center where I could watch and write without being noticed. A line of parents waiting their turn to speak stretched down a wall of books. A white woman stood at the front, translating into ASL. Behind her was the first speaker – a fireman, dressed in uniform. He was a young African American man who spoke with Southern variety of African American English. “People think we sit around and eat. No, no that ain’t how it go,” he explained. He told them that the starting salary was about $33,000 per year and that they only work 10 days a month. He added that without a degree, the salary could go as high as $74,000 per year, higher with a degree. He concluded by asking, “Any questions?” No one asked anything for a moment. Then a teacher asked, “What type of education you need?”

“High school education.”

“And a clean background?”

“Yeah, clean background.”

I moved from where I was standing (next to an island bookshelf) to a chair at a table in the back. The next speaker was a nurse. She was an African American woman in her 50s whose dialect was similar to the prior speaker. She wore a turquoise turtleneck shirt with a white lab coat and a nametag. One of the first things she said
after introducing herself was that 15% of the nurses at the hospital where she works are male. She explained that, “you need at least two years past high school.” She went through some of the attributes nurses should have and then asked for questions. A hand shot up: “How high does the salary go?” She said that a nurse manager could earn up to $100,000. “Oohs” and “aaahs” filled the room as she thanked the audience. The third speaker was a “contractor” who owned his own business. He was a thin, African American man who appeared to be in his 50s. He talked about how he learned construction from his father and how to be a business owner. “I’ve seen women in the construction business, not so much with the hands-on part, but in the office. The office is an important part of the construction business and a woman can be just as good a construction manager as a man.” After he finished talking about being a business owner, he started giving some pieces of advice, such as: “In this world you have to know money.” He encouraged them to learn about “taxes” and “economics.” Three more speakers came and went and, suddenly, it was over, with no applause and no final remarks.

The message of career day was abundantly clear: hard work pays off. Period. Labor is exchanged for money, which constitutes ‘success’ and ‘achievement.’ The discourse of exchange value is ubiquitous, but takes on racialized and classed meanings in certain spaces throughout campus. Posters in the vocational hall depicting trash collectors, for example, remind the mainly African American and Latino students who
take classes on that hall of the condition of their possibility. The categorical absence of
Latino speakers at career day reminded approximately 10% of the students that hard
work – whose final limit is necessarily success – will likely take different forms for them.

2. Choice

The impetus to choose, to make decisions about one’s life and to execute those
decisions is ubiquitous at Bedlington. To be a student at Bedlington is to inhabit a never-
ending series of choices, and a chorus of reminders that the choice is yours. Just choose,
and choose wisely, though the choice to choose unwisely is also available to you. It is,
after all, your choice. At Bedlington, one chooses success or one chooses failure.
Discursively, nothing is exterior to choice. Choice is the outer limit of individual
subjectivity. Thus, gang membership, poor attendance, scholastic failure, and their
opposites (freedom from gangs, good attendance, and scholastic success) are derived
from discrete decisions. No forces exist beyond the will to choose as choice is co-
extensive with its outcome. Although the impetus to choose is institutionally
instantiated and reproduced in countless interactions, school policies, and material
reminders, individual teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors admitted to me
in private conversations that they are personally aware of the tremendous hurdles faced
by some students. To suggest that the will to choose is institutionally instantiated is not
to suggest that it determines how individuals apprehend choice; it means simply that
the will to choose is a diffuse, public force that itself instantiates effects. In the context of Bedlington, the discourse of choice provides a way of interpreting and making sense of the world; it is a way of knowing.

The will to choose manifests around the school grounds materially in the form of motivational signs and posters. On the second floor, for example, at the top of the stairs leading from the main lobby, a laminated poster is taped on the white cinderblock wall above the threshold of the door. Against a dark blue background, white letters covered in laminate, read to passersby:

CHOICE…
GOOD
OR
BAD,
IT’S YOURS!!!

This sort of signage can be found all around the interior of the school. I found a small 6 x 6 inch yellow, laminated sign taped to the wall at the busy intersection of the 8th grade hall and the main upstairs corridor. In black lettering, the sign read:

Pledge of Success

Today is a new day, a new beginning.

It has been given to me as a gift.
I can either use it or throw it away.

What I do today will affect me tomorrow.

I cannot blame anyone if I do not succeed.

I promise to use this day to the fullest by giving MY best,

realizing that it can never come back again.

This is my life and I choose to make it a success.

At the top of another stairway landing, I found another sign; it had been added a couple of months into my time at Bedlington. This sign was the same in size, about 6 x 6 inches, and the background color was pink, with black lettering. It read, simply, on two lines:

You are

WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE…

Signage, ubiquitous as it is at Bedlington, is not the only manner in which the discourse of choice manifests. One specific articulation of the discourse of choice is AVID, a program referred to as a “college prep class” by students and teachers. I learned about AVID on morning while I sat in the empty cafeteria writing field notes. Mr. Houston, a tall, slender African American somewhere in his early 40s walked quickly and intently through the cafeteria. “Good morning,” he greeted me as he walked past in an orange, wool sweater, navy blue pants, and brown shoes. I looked up from my notes
and nodded. He walked out of the cafeteria in the direction of the 7th grade hall, but returned no more than thirty seconds later. “Excuse me.” I looked up from my journal to find Mr. Houston towering over me. “Who are you?” he asked with an inquisitive smile. “Phillip Carter,” I said, extending my hand.

“Mr. Houston,” he replied.

“Mr. Houston, right.” His name registered with me – I remember seeing it on door upstairs. He looked at me curiously, as if to say ‘how have you heard of me?’

“I’ve seen your name on the door.” I rehearsed the usual description of my project, to which he replied, “That’s very interesting. Well I teach AVID here.”

“Wait, what’s AVID?”

“AVID is Advancement through Individual Determination.” He stops talking periodically to greet students as they walk through the cafeteria. At one point he stopped a tall, corpulent African American girl who wore long braids pulled up behind her head. She wore a low cut top, exposing what looked like stretch marks on her chest. She was much bigger than most students at the school, but soft-spoken.

“Tell this gentleman what AVID is,” Mr. Houston commanded.

“AVID is Advancement through Individual Determination.”

“So do you get to go to AVID everyday?,” I asked.

“Yeah, we go everyday.”

“And so, what kind of stuff do you guys do in AVID?”
“We learn about college and what we need to do to get ready for college. We learn proper grammar.” Naturally, I was curious about what she meant by ‘proper grammar.’ “Why do you need to know proper grammar?” What followed was a long, awkward pause.

“Because.” Another pause. “so that we represent AVID and our own school.”

Before I could ask a follow-up question, Mr. Houston chimed in, “I don’t want you to be late to your next class. Thank you.”

“Thank you,” I added. Mr. Houston invited me to sit in on his class and we agreed to schedule a time for me to do so after he ran the idea past his students first.

About three weeks later, I found time to sit in on two of Mr. Houston’s AVID classes. The desks in the room were interspersed with armchairs, sofas, and rocking chairs and configured in several circles throughout the class. I sat at one of the circles in a student desk, and was soon joined by four students, three girls and one boy, all African American. The students performed a variety of activities, such as helping each other with their homework, but much of the time was Mr. Houston speaking about individual determination. He was big on analogies and proverbs that he seemed to have invented himself, and I must admit that I had a hard time following most of them. At one point, he talked at length about a mythical figure who had to walk 40 miles to get a handful of grain. “But you can go to Whole Foods and get long grain brown rice, basmati rice, whatever you want.” This flowed somewhat haltingly into information
about a local CROP walk to stop hunger that he encouraged students to attend on the weekend. “…Just like poverty won’t get solved unless we do something…This is AVID, we do things other people refuse to do, and if it’s meant to be, it must start with,” he said, pronouncing with in a rising intonation to indicate it was a question. “ME,” they all shouted in response. Then it flowed back into Mr. Houston’s discussion of individual determination: “The door is closed.” He pointed to the door of the classroom, which was, indeed, closed. “Some people believe in luck.” He asks a student to open the classroom door. “I’m so lucky, the door’s open,” he said, performing the voice of the person who believes in luck. “Now close the door,” he instructed the student. “Now the door’s closed. I can get upset and cry about it.” He walked past the group of students who were sitting on the floor in front of the door. “Or I can open the door myself,” he said, opening the door. “Because your today,” Mr. Houston called, “Is a result of your yesterdays,” they responded in unison.

I stayed behind the second class to thank Mr. Houston for allowing me to sit in on his class that resulted in an interesting, if puzzling, conversation with him. He was, at first, interested in my impressions of AVID and pressed me to give him some, but the truth was that I had not yet formed impressions that I could articulate. “It was interesting,” I finally told him. “It seems like you focus closely on individual action and individual responsibility,” I added. “That’s correct,” he nodded. Somewhat against my better judgment, I asked how that focus squared with the non-individual problems that
students could be facing. “Like what,” he asked me. “Such as race, I don’t know, racism,” I said, wondering if I was pressing too far.

What happened next was not what I would have expected from Mr. Houston, who I had just heard give one hard-nosed, bootstrapping anecdote about personal responsibility after another. He told me a personal story, one about applying for college that let me know he knew precisely what I was talking about when I said “such as race.”

His wife encouraged him to apply for college at University of Arizona in Tuscon. I think he said that he had been in the military and was not particularly sure about what to do when he got out, and was thus not particularly invested in college or anything else. But he agreed to apply anyway. For some reason that I can’t remember and didn’t record, he had to go to the admissions office to find out if he had been accepted. He waited in a long line with his wife and eventually made it to the counter where he was greeted by a friendly white woman with blonde hair. He provided his name and she pulled up his information. He was denied, she told him. He thought absolutely nothing of it and walked out with his wife. On the way out the door, he and his wife were talking about why it was that he had been rejected. An African American woman overheard them talking and asked if he said he had been denied. “Come with me,” she instructed him. They walked back up to the desk and pulled up his information. He had actually been accepted. Apparently, University of Arizona personnel had been systematically turning away black students who had actually been admitted to college. I was impressed that
despite this, and presumably countless other forms of institutional racism, that his passion as a teacher was individual responsibility and institutional acceptance. Mr. Houston was a paradox to me. He wore traditional African clothing and peppered his anecdotes with references to poverty and admitted to institutional victimization, but emphasized the norms produced by those institutions in his teaching, among them hyper-politeness, hyper-standard English, and middle class comportment in general.

Conversational Tropes

The popular figuration of adolescence is that it is a time of rebellion, a time to test the limits of authority, and a time to experiment with new ways of being. Although rebellion and experimentation are everywhere at Bedlington, what struck me in the end was not how students thwarted, ignored, subverted, or rebelled against institutional authority, but how they reproduced institutional discourses conversationally at nearly every turn of talk. Again, this is not to say Bedlington students do not subvert authority; they do, prolifically and ingeniously, but that subversion is, in a sense, superficial. The students of Bedlington – the good kids and the bad kids, the gang kids and the ‘angels’ – produce talk that is bounded by the discourses of the institution.

1. ‘You can do what you want.’ – The discourse of choice that circulates within (and outside of) Bedlington culture disciplines students to become subjects who choose.
This is reflected in the way students talk about a range of topics, from identity to academic success. Across the corpus of interviews I conducted, Bedlington students demonstrate little, if any, comprehension of cultural context, external conditioning, or even circumstance. Outcomes are indicative of the choices that preceded them.

I spent quite a bit of time talking to Eddie, the boy who approached me on my first day to tell me that his friend thought I was a ‘fine, strapping young man.’ Eddie is African American, comes from a wealthy family, and hangs out with other kids in his advanced classes, white and black. I interviewed him with two white boys, Hunter and Andrew, both his friends, who are part of a group I called, “hair boys,” a label I heard given to them by a classmate. The hair boys, all white, were popular, athletic, good at school, and especially popular with girls. They also had long, hip haircuts in the style of Zac Efron, the Jonas Brothers, and other white boy stars of the moment. I asked the boys why it was that their class was mostly white, when Bedlington classes were mostly black. For Eddie, “the other” black students are not in advanced classes because they “act ghetto.”

PMC: Cool. Now, so I though, I noticed that your table actually early on Cause it was different because it was mainly white kids whereas the rest of the tables were not

Eddie: That's what we say all the time. We say like why are there only like four black kids in algebra and like honors.

PMC: Yeah.

Eddie: Like the rest are like white.
Hunter: Yeah.
P PMC: How’d it end up like that?
Eddie: I don’t know.
Andrew: I think it might be cause like our parents push us more.
Hunter: Yeah
PMC: Really?
Hunter: Yeah I guess so. Like I get in trouble if I don’t get A’s.
The boys discuss how their parents punish them if they don’t make As, giving examples
from their own experience. I try and bring the discussion back to my original question.

PMC: Right. No, but I think it’s interesting. So how uhm why do you think there
are like mainly white kids in advanced classes?
Eddie: All the, all the uh
(Laughter) – All three boys laugh.
Hunter: It’s gonna sound racist
Eddie: Yeah. I don’t want to sound racist so there’s like all the other black kids
are ghetto.
PMC: Oh.
Eddie: And like they act like crazy and stuff. And like [they don’t try in school.]
Hunter: [And they do crazy stuff.]
PMC: Oh they don’t try?
Hunter: Yeah, like they just want to, like a kid named Jamil, wait not Jamil--
Reggie? He got like a thirteen and a twenty-seven on his progress reports a while
ago.
PMC: So, ok, you said they’re ghetto, what does it mean to be, what does that
even mean?
Eddie: Act crazy. It's not a matter of like race. Cause like there can be ghetto white people and ghetto Mexicans.

PMC: Are there ghetto white people here?
Hunter: Not really.
Eddie: Yeah.
Andrew: Yeah there's a couple.
Hunter: Some.
Eddie: There's a couple. Then there's like, there's a lot of ghetto Mexicans.
Hunter: Hmmhmm.
PMC: OK, so, what, but I still don't know what ghetto means.
Eddie: Ghetto means like acting crazy and like having like outbursts and doing whatever you feel like it yeah cause... I [don't know why.]
Hunter: [Cause you don't care.]

The conversational trope of choice, in the context of race, is frequently met with deployments of strategies of “color-blind racism,” which Bonilla-Silva (2003, 2) describes thusly:

I content that whites have developed powerful explanations – which have ultimately become justifications – for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color. These explanations emanate from a new racial ideology that I label color-blind racism. This ideology...explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.

Bedlington students make use of any of the strategies Bonilla-Silva describes for deflecting and mitigating the perception of racism (i.e., participating in race talk), including denials, claims of ignorance, and disclaimers. White students tend to have a larger arsenal of color-blind tactics and use them with greater frequency, but I found
prolific use of disclaimers among black students. This may have been a strategy for mitigating discomfort they might have expected me to have when talking about whites. Additionally, however, several of the black students in advanced classes, such as Eddie and Taylor, used disclaimers when talking about the ‘other’ black students, as evidenced by Eddie when he says, “I don’t want to sound racist…” and “It’s not a matter of, like, race.” Color-blind strategies help students mobilize the discourse of choice in conversation without appearing racist when talking about inequality or undesirable (racialized) behaviors.

Some students are also reluctant to name another person or group as “racist” and go to great lengths to avoid doing so. This allows race talk on the part of others to be the result of individual choice. Mateo is a 6th grader who is in a group of friends they call “the cuatro amigos.” Two of the boys are Mexican, one boy is Salvadoran, and Mateo is Argentine. In addition, he is phenotypically ‘white’ in the American context. I will discuss Mateo in relation to the discourse of authenticity below, but for now I would like to highlight his color-blind conversational strategies. When I asked who the cuatro amigos hang out with, besides each other, he responded by trying to avoid describing others as racist.

Mateo: Mostly like, you know, the Hispanics. Cuz like other people like you know, after what’s going on with all the immigration, you know.

PMC: what do you mean?
Mateo: No like you know how like some are sorta being not racist but a little bit? So you know.

PMC: Oh, you mean because immigrants are coming here?

Mateo: Yeah.

Later in the conversation, ‘white’ and ‘black’ students came up, and I asked if they tend to hang out with one group or the other more. Mateo seemed to exhibit a tension between wanting to explain why he does not hang out with black students, on the one hand, and desperately wanting to avoid sounding like a racist, on the other. The result is a moment of profound incoherence. At the end, he gives up on explaining why he does not hang out with African Americans, stating “for some reason I think it’s easier getting along with whites.” I should note the use of the word ‘colored’ by Mateo in the following text. I have no way of knowing the provenance of this term for him – the other boy in the interview referred to African Americans as ‘African Americans.’ I would like to point out that of the ‘cuatro amigos,’ Mateo has lived in the United States the least amount of time, and is the least proficient of the four in English.

Mateo: Like some are [pause] more friendly than others. Like there are some coloreds that are still the [long pause] like [pause] there are some others that are like the, you know [long pause] they’re both like really the same, but some colored, and some white too, are like different from other ones. For some reason I think it’s easier getting along with whites.

With respect to choice in the context of achievement, students frequently talked about those students who do not achieve as choosing ‘not to care,’ as was the case with
Eddie and the hair boys. The options from which students may choose are “success” and “not caring,” but it is also possible to actively choose a sort of negative success, as is evident in the way some of the popular eighth grade white girls, such as Alice, talk about it. Alice’s parents were vocal Obama supporters and her father took Alice and her friends out of school to drive to Washington D.C. to witness the historic inauguration.

Alice, like many of the other white kids I interviewed, brought up the topic of race before I could. This was in contrast to African American and Latino students, who tended not to mention race until I asked them about it. In my conversation with her, Alice brought up race immediately when I asked what Bedlington was like. This transitioned into a discussion about advanced classes.

PMC: Does everybody sort of know who the Honors kids are and who is not?
Alice: Not really. Not really. Cause, not really because, uhm, the classes are actually mixed. It's one of the things that really bothers my parents and actually really bothers me. But like, you have non-honors kids in the honors classes. Higher non-honors kids I guess? And the idea is, it's No Child Left Behind, which really doesn't work, cause a lot of those kids want to be left behind. And like, I think that sounds bad, but the truth of it is that that's what it is.

PMC: Yeah, so what do you mean by that, I'm interested in like the, some kids want to be left behind.
Alice: Some kids really don't care.
PMC: Uh huh. How do you know if somebody doesn't care? Like how could you tell?
Alice: You can tell like their posture, the way they sit, uhm. I mean, you ask the teachers to list them of, they'll say this kid, they'll have like a list of five or six
kids, like off the top of their heads. It's a lot of times; it's mostly guys who really, really don't care. Uhm, who don't even like pretend to do their homework, pretend to like study or whatever. I think like most of the girls, I don't think there are any girls who I can think of who just don't show any respect for anything.

Students also invoke the trope of choice to describe reputations based on sexual activity. By far, the most common epithet I heard at Bedlington was ‘ho’ (euphemistically, ‘the h-word’), a term given to a girl believed to be practicing sexual behavior or involved in pursuing multiple boys. I never heard the term applied to boys or to girls in ‘stable’ relationships (girls who “go with” boys). The

Destiny: But this girl named Kassandra, she wears inappropriate clothing like shirts that come all the way down and skirts. And all kinds of stuff. 
Devin: And she's heavier up here.
PMC: Uh huh.
Devin: And she knows it. And it's obvious when you see her, and so, I have— 
Destiny: And she thinks it's pretty.
Devin: And she thinks it's cute. And I would hate, like that's my fear in middle school, is to get a name as a ho, or a slut or as easy, that kind of thing? And so like when a boy tries to talk to me I make sure I take a little while before I try to answer so I don't get in that clique with the whores. 
PMC: Do those girls chose to be in that clique or do they get called that and then put into it?
Devin: I mean you chose to do-- 
Destiny: You chose.
Devin: **You chose to do what you do** and if you're around here jacking boys off and getting fingered and you're telling everybody this? And obviously, **you're choosing to get whatever kind of name you get at that point.**

2. **Authenticity** – “Being real” is practically a mantra for Bedlington students. The popular students take their own popularity as an unproblematic, almost natural characteristic, rather than a set of circumstances, with criteria they meet, within the discursive/material regime of the school. For the students of various popular groups, the call for authenticity is most evident in the edict, “don’t be fake,” which I heard over and over from popular students who accuse the unpopular of “acting fake” in order to fit in. For example, in my interview with the most popular African American 7th grade girls, which includes Montana, a Latina crosser, I asked what I would need to know if I were a new student at the school and I wanted to be able to hang out with them. They responded this way:

PMC: What would I need to do or what would I need to be like or whatever?
Diamond: First, you would need to learn how to dress real, real, real good. Yeah, OK. And then, just have conversations with us.
Montana: **And be yourself.**
PMC: Yeah.
Montana: Like don’t like be somebody you want us to, like don't be try to act like somebody we would want as our friend.
PMC: What does it mean to be real?
Montana: Like if you don’t like somebody and you tell another person and that person come back and tell you and like you go up to that person and ask them is
it what you said and they said no then **that would be considered being fake**

cause you're not being real like you’re not telling us the truth, just telling a lie.

On the other hand, some of the unpopular students, particularly those who are least invested in the popularity structure, accuse the popular class of inauthenticity. In an interview with three 6th grade African American girls who describe themselves as “smart” and “not popular,” Samiyah described why some popular kids ‘talk ghetto.’

Samiyah: I think most of the time they try to do that to try to fit in or like try and act like it.

The accusation of fakeness, and the attendant claim to authenticity (“being real”) presumes a stable, authentic self, a ‘real’ subject capable of knowing his/her own realness, and speaking it authentically. Every group, irrespective of status, makes a claim of authenticity. Thus, while some students readily admit to being unpopular, no one admits to being inauthentic.

Corporeal authenticity is frequently invoked by Bedlington students to explain behavior that is actually cultural or social. This can include a wide range of cultural comportments, such as gang membership, language, style, and membership in friendship groups. In one of my conversations with Joel, who, according to Officer Benson is the only Bedlington student to have been criminally involved in gangs, explains why he can’t completely disengage from gang life. In the Bedlington context, gang culture is associated with Latinos, even though most students are eager to add that
blacks and whites can also be in gangs. The logics of Joel’s explanation reside in the semiotic collapse of ‘Mexican’ and ‘gang.’ He is Mexican and, therefore, gang life is ‘in his blood.’

Joel: I don't got no other choice to do it but, I like, I used to be in it but now I'm out.
PMC: Yeah, it's kind of scary, I would be very—
Joel: Well right now, acting like, I won't lie, but I do still represent it. Like, I still be showing it off.
PMC: How do you, how do you represent it?
Joel: By throwing it up. They got all the videos where I'm throwing it up so that's why they can't, they don't do nothing no more. Because they know I, if they call my mom, my mom won't come, like won't say nothing.
PMC: You mean at school?
Joel: Mmhmm.
PMC: So throwing it up means like the signs?
Joel: Mmhmm.
PMC: OK. So how about—so that's interesting. So you are out of it but you still represent it? Why?
Joel: Huh?
PMC: Why do you, I don't understand.
Joel: **Cause I still have it in my blood. Like the Mexican. I can't take it out.**
PMC: Uh huh.
Joel: **And like this. Is still in my mind, I just can't forget it.**

The epitome of the inauthentic are the “crossers” – a very small number of students, mainly girls, who actively disarticulate assigned racial scripts. These are students with
ontological relationships that are incongruent with – usually quite broadly – with assigned racial categories.

The trope of authenticity at times comes into great conflict with the institutional discourse of choice. The biggest ideological (and conversational) knot in which students find themselves is produced when the discourse of choice runs head on into the discourse of authenticity.

I spent quite a bit of time talking to a group of 7th grade girls who described themselves as not popular, but ‘well known.’ Of the five girls, four were African American and one was white. I talked to Keandra and Krystal, two of the African American girls, separately. At the time, they were having “problems” with Jenna, the white girl in the group.

Keandra: But she acts like we’re deaf. Like we can, can’t speak.
Krystal: And she yells at us for no reason. It’s like, 'you do this and you do that.' I’m like..
Keandra: You don’t talk to Sakina, or you don’t talk about Sakina when she not here. And, I’m not trying to make fun of her skin color.
Krystal: Me neither.
Keandra: Well not really, but she acts like she’s black and she knows she’s not. She’s an inside-out-Oreo. There.
PMC: Inside out Oreo? What’s that mean? Like, so?
Keandra: She’s white on the outside but she’s black on the inside.
Krystal: [Black on the inside.]
PMC: Uh huh.
Krystal: Like, cause like uhm--

PMC: So, yeah, go ahead.

Krystal: So like when she’s uhm, around like us when she’s around me and Keandra sometimes she'll be like—

Keandra: I’m sorry.

Krystal: Like on the field trip? She was like all like 'hey!' And we were like 'hi...'

We’re like just standing there, cause we thought she was on, going on the Disney trip.

Keandra: And I was like 'oh my gosh, she's here!' And she like 'hey!' She was all on top of us. And then on that day of school we got lost. No, we didn't get lost, we lost our class cause they go, they, take a walk like every time.

Later, after a number of digressions, the topic of racial crossing came up again. This time, it was in reference to an African American 7th grade girl with whom they were acquaintances but not friends. Keandra quickly describes her as an “Oreo,” and both girls go on to impersonate the way she talks, parodying her refusal of birthday cupcakes as a way white girls eat.

Keandra: So, there is kinda somebody like Jenna, except her name is Malaya.

She’s a Oreo. She's black on the outside but she's white on the inside.

PMC: Acts white?

Krystal: Yeah, she's like, 'hi!' and then...

Keandra: No, look, when we were, when she said she had the uhm plate of full of french french fries out there, she was like, 'Dang, black people are so hungry!'

She's black.

PMC: What did she mean by that?
Krystal: **She tries to be funny sometimes like she doesn’t know that she’s talking about her own color.**

PMC: Mmhmm.

Keandra: And like one time it was hot outside and the teacher said that we had to huddle up and like, she’s like, ‘It’s too many black folks, it’s too hot for this.’ **And we’re like, doesn’t that include you, too? Because you’re that same color?** And so like, we’re like, just shocked for what she be saying sometimes and--

Keandra: I don’t know if this is true but somebody told me that she said, ‘hi, I’m white.’ I’m not sure--

Krystal: She did say that! Actually.

PMC: Really? So do you think she wants to be white?

Keandra: I really think she does because she, well, not just because her eating habits cause people eat the same. But I really think she does. Cause she was, yesterday was my birthday.

PMC: Oh, Happy Birthday!

Keandra: Thank you. yeah. I brought cupcakes and gave one to Deshawn. She was like 'Ew, you eat cake? Cake is so disgusting!' And she eats--

PMC: Oh does that sound like something a white girl would say?

Krystal: Yeah.

Keandra: Well not really to me, but she...

Krystal: Well we like just think that a white girls eat like that sometimes.

PMC: Uh huh.

While Bedlington students tend to champion personal choice, Keandra and Krystal interpret Malaya’s *choice* not to eat cupcakes as an affront to her essential blackness.

Jenna, the white girl in the group, participated in the same conversational tropes about choice and authenticity. Like in Keandra and Krystal’s critique of Jenna, Jenna’s
argument is predicated on ontological identity outranking choice, despite the fact that she herself as been accused, in ‘being’ an “Oreo,” of racial inauthenticity. In my conversation with her and the two other African American girls in the friendship group, Jenna’s two best friends, she describes, rather contemptuously, a black girl in her grade who “acts white.” I do not want the irony to be lost here: the critique comes from someone widely accused of “acting black.”

**PMC:** So do they, what kind of talk do they have?

Jenna: They talk like, Ciera **talk like a white girl.**

Dashawna: They talk— Mmmhmmm.

Jenna: **Like a prissy white girl.**

Sakina: Uh huh.

Dashawna: And she get mad when we, when we uhm talk to her white.

Later in the conversation, I returned to the issue of “white girls” and the way they talk. Before I could finish the question, Jenna, the white female, interrupted to imitate the way white girls talk:

**PMC:** OK, so let me ask you another question, going back to the, uhm, the way people talk and stuff, so those girls the prissy girls sound like—

Jenna: Like "**Oh my god!**" [heightened pitch, fronted /o/ in ‘oh’]

Joel, the reputed “real gang banger” at Bedlington, also critiques racial crossers, including Montana, and her older brother Manny, both of whom he contends “act black.” Acting black, for Joel, involves the acquisition of new, expensive, and ‘cool’ consumer products, including clothing and cell phones. In his assessment of how
Montana ‘acts black,’ he mentions the fact that she does not speak Spanish with other Latinos. This is interesting in light of the fact that earlier in the interview, Joel said that he himself rarely spoke Spanish at school.¹ The transcript for this portion of the interview is provided in a footnote. Spanish, like gang membership for himself, is ontologically tied to being Mexican, even when people are not proficient in Spanish or when English is generally preferred.

Joel: Him? He, he's like mostly he's black, he's not Mexican. He's trying to act mostly black, and like he's like black, he's not trying to act Mexican.

PMC: What does it mean for him to act black?

Joel: It means like, like because they, like, supposedly like the blacks be like having like more cooler stuff, like the clothes, the shoes, Air Forces and all that stuff. We only wear Converse, Cortez. And yeah some other shoes we don’t even

¹ PMC: So you say you're forgetting your Spanish?
Joel: Yeah.
PMC: Why?
Joel: I don't know, cause I mostly talk in English than Spanish. Like, because my friends? Yeah, I do talk to them in Spanish, but not too much, like, I get stuck with some words.
PMC: Yeah.
Joel: That I can't say and like I can't read it no more, I can't, I can write it but I can't read.
PMC: Uh huh.
Joel: And I can understand it but I can't, I can't like say some things. And like, mmm, when like I'm talking to my brothers, I mostly talk to them in English. And I don't but they understand me and Mom really talks to them more in Spanish.
PMC: Oh, right. But how about you, does she talk to you in Spanish too?
Joel: Yeah, but like I understand her but I can't talk to her in Spanish cause I don't really know that, the words that she's saying? I understand them but I can't say them.
PMC: Yeah right? And so uh, like with uh, all those guys that you say you hang out with here, you mainly talk to them in English?
Joel: Mmmhmm.
PMC: Why, is it cause they don't speak Spanish?
Joel: They do but like, I'm not used, I'm not getting used to speak Spanish that much.
know. But like mostly, Manny be like somewhere else. And Montana? She like tries to act like she don’t talk to Hispanics. And yeah, she does talk too much English, and she’s too much involved like with black people.

PMC: Oh, right. So you think she actually speaks Spanish?

Joel: I think because she like understands me when I be telling her, like I don’t really talk to her, but she understands me when I be telling her stuff.

PMC: For real?

Joel: Like, I’ll be saying hi and all that stuff and some other things.

PMC: So, uhm, do you understand why she and Manny want to hang out with black kids and not Mexican kids?

Joel: Because they feel like they more better than us.

PMC: Oh, really. Oh so you think Manny thinks that too?

Joel: They feel like they not Latino, they don’t belong with us. And I don’t get it, he talks Spanish.

PMC: Oh really. Do you have to be able, can you be Latino and not speak Spanish?

Joel: Yeah. Yeah you can. You can talk to us, we understand English, but we don’t really care. But at least you know what you are.

PMC: Yeah.

Joel: Yeah we know the blacks, what they are. And we do, they try to hang out with us, but they talk to their own. They have their own like, their own what they call it—

Later in my conversation with Joel, Montana and Manny came up again, this time in the context of people who have ‘cool things.’ Joel returned to the issue of Montana’s inauthenticity by noting that she has not ever gone out with a Mexican. Here the trope of authenticity collides with the trope of choice, when he contends that “who you date is
your choice” while at the same time questioning Montana’s choice of boyfriend. I also include my next question – if Mexican boys can date black girls. Joel’s response – affirmative – is qualified by a skin-tone condition, which may be evidence of ‘have your free choice and your authenticity, too’ type of logic.

PMC: Do you think she, do you think her parents are rich?
Joel: No I don't, well maybe. Because she like, collects boyfriends? I think she has, I think she never gone out with Mexicans. I only see her going out with black.

PMC: Oh, really. Do you have a word for that? Is there a word for like when a Mexican girl hangs out with black people?
Joel: No, we don't really, it doesn't really matter, it's your choice who you pick for a boyfriend, but it's weird she never, it looks like she never went out with a Mexican.

PMC: Mmhmm. What happens if a Mexican guy goes out with like a black girl. Does that happen?
Joel: Yeah, it happens, it happened a lot of times. But specially like, Mexicans be choosing the girl that's not too black. Like a little bit light color?

PMC: Oh, why?
Joel: I don’t know, that’s what they do, like our color, a little bit dark, you know, but not too dark, dark. So that's what, that's like, I don't know, like in supposedly she got to be beautiful and all that stuff, and that’s why, that’s why like, yeah some black girls are beautiful but like mostly Mexicans go out more with Mexicans.

*Latinidad* is complicated at Bedlington, since it cannot be reduced to perceived phenotype or other somatic features. Language, immigration status, and academic
achievement are other factors in the authentication of Latinidad. Mateo, the ‘white’ Argentine boy I mentioned earlier, is an interesting example of the figuration of Latino at Bedlington. In his friendship group, the ‘cuatro amigos,’ all the boys are non-white in the U.S. context, except Mateo. In all the time I spent with the cuatro amigos, I never heard Mateo or anyone else in the group raise this issue of his whiteness. Mateo’s whiteness is not the only thing that distinguishes him from the other three boys – he is the only one in the group not enrolled in ESL (English as a Second Language), despite having the least experience living in the United States and the least proficiency in English. Yet, Mateo is decidedly Latino (“Hispanic,” in his words) and decidedly not white, as talked about in conversation. For example, I asked Mateo and Hector a question that was intended to elicit information about whether or not white students hang out with other white students (i.e., “stick together,” like Latinos) or if they mix. Mateo misinterpreted the question, understanding me to be asking if Latinos hang out with whites.

PMC: So you said that Latino kids mainly hang out with Latino kids, but what about white kids?
Mateo: Mmmm. We talk to them too.

In an interview I conducted with Taylor, a self-described ‘unpopular’ eighth grade African American girl, I learned that it was possible for a student to share what
was for the other crossers a non-issue (unlikely) or an internalized conflict. Taylor describes

Taylor: **I consider myself an Oreo**, but uh

PMC: Wait, what’s an Oreo?

Taylor: **Black on the outside and white on the inside**.

PMC: Oh really?

Taylor: Yeah. I think I’m kinda mixed though but that’s the only way, I’m majority, you know, I’m just kind of weird like that.

PMC: Are you mixed race or you mean just how you identify?

Taylor: How I identify.

PMC: Uh-huh. So what does it mean to be white on the inside, that’s kinda neat?

Taylor: I don’t know it’s just how people say, like I heard that **back in sixth grade and people were like you are so white** and I’m like, well, I mean. Isn’t it just like your, I guess it’s just how you act, but I don’t know how you can act white. It’s like some people say **it’s because you’re smart, or if like, just the way you talk**. I don’t like to talk with a lot of. I mean I know I have an accent, everybody does, but I don’t like to talk with um, a lot of cursing in every sentence, and I like to talk with um, intelligence and stuff, so I guess that’s how people say I act white and then, I don’t know, my I-Pod has tons of music from everybody. The only thing that I don’t have is country music, but I have one song, um by Taylor Swift, so I mean, she—she’s pretty good.

PMC: Yeah, so I think that’s interesting so, um, okay, so what does it mean to act black then, could a white person act black, or be black?

Taylor: I, I know a couple of people that are like that, Chris, and um. Actually he’s probably the only one, but he’ll, if he passes some of the African American popular kids they’ll be like, wus up and he’ll be like, yeah. He hangs out with
them a lot, he hangs out with a lot of people though. The only people I haven’t seen him hang out with are the Latinos, but I don’t think he speaks Spanish, so.

4.7 Disciplinarity

The official organization of power at Bedlington: administration – teaching faculty – staff – students – is not only the form of power that constitutes the institutional apparatus of power. Like any institution, officially inscribed power is organized hierarchically at Bedlington, and while hierarchical power does contribute to the disciplinization of institutional subjects, it is not the only, or even primary, form of disciplinarity. Here again, I use ‘discipline’ in the Foucauldian sense, to designate a form of power exercised over free subjects, a conditioning form of power that contributes to the broader processes of subjectivization.

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to. (Subject and Power, 331)
There are at least three other forms of disciplinarity operating within the overall apparatus of power at Bedlingtion: discourse and interpellation. I will discuss the function of language ideology as a technique of disciplinarity in Chapter 5.

4.7.1 Discourse as Discipline

Foucault is clear that discourses themselves discipline subjects. In the context of Bedlington, the institutional discourses shape the way subjects talk about themselves and others, as described in the preceding sections. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the way that institutional discourses, as subjectivizing forces, effect linguistic form.

4.7.2 Interpellation

A particularly potent way in which subjects come into being is through ‘hailing’ — being reminded of a subject position or called into an identity from the outside. This concept is woefully missing from most work on ‘language and identity’ in linguistics and its absence that a subject’s attachment to a particular identity is agentive or even positive. It may well be the case that attachments to identities that are or appear to be ‘positive’ are in part the result of interpellative forces. The potential results of hailing are numerous and unpredictable, on account of the fact that interpellation is as much a psychic process as it is a social one.

*Lames, Trash, and Hoes*
For the most part, epithets at Bedlington are bifurcated by sex, with the most frequent epithet for girls being ‘ho’ and for boys, ‘gay.’ Both call attention to a subject who is not in conformity with normative gender and sexual expectations. Other words also carry interpellative force and are used to position students and ascribe inferior social status. In one of my conversations with the popular African American 7th grade girls, Diamond discusses how she calls ‘wannabes’ ‘dogs’ and ‘lames’ and poor students ‘trash.’

Pink: But Micah is really a lame, don’t nobody even know he exist at this school.
PMC: Yeah, what does it mean, "a lame?"
Montana: Like nobody really knows you.
Diamond: A loser.
PMC: Oh, yeah, uh huh.
Montana: Like, like, for example, like somebody would, for example, Shaun. Somebody would say Shaun did this and it’ll be like such a surprise because like nobody, nothing had really happened like, with them.
Diamond: With them or you forgot that they went to this school. (Laughter)
Montana: Or you don’t, basically you don’t even know them and they be like, Shaun did this, who’s Shaun. Something like that.
PMC: Wait and so do you call them lames?
Pink: I don’t, I won’t walk up to them and call them that—
Montana: I wouldn’t like, I wouldn’t—
PMC: Not, not like call them that but like you would refer to them like that?
Diamond: Yeah. If I will walk up to a boy, I’ll say, 'You dog, you look like trash, you lame.' Like that boy, he get on my nerves. That just walked out, Ryan? Ryan Wilson? My cousin Jonathan. He’s always, he used to always follow Jonathan
and Jamil. And yeah, stuff like that. And they used to call, Jonathan said that was
his dog, cause like when people follow you, it's just like a dog.

PMC: Yeah.

Diamond: Like they're following you, **that's why we say dog.**

PMC: Yeah, right.

Diamond: And when they look like they're poor and homeless, **I call them trash.**

(Laughter)

Montana: **Just like you had called Janeesha trash.**

*You Faggot!*

I'm not sure that a full day at Bedlington went by without hearing a gay epithet.

From my first day to my last, I heard boys calling each other 'gay' and 'fag' and 'faggot.'

As I will describe below, I was, unfortunately, not an exception. The psychic experience
for the recipients was surely not equivalent in every hailing, but these words obviously
caused a noticeable amount of embarrassment for many of the boys I saw. 'Gay'
operates at Bedlington as a way to describe or hail a boy whose gendered behavior
flouts prescribed heteronormative masculinity. Consider the following discussion I had
with Keandra and Krystal about boys who were 'gay.'

Krystal: But uhm, like, you know like uhm, **Dan! Dan, he**

**Keandra:** Dan is gay.

Krystal: Yes.

PMC: What does that mean?

Krystal: Uhm.
Keandra: Malcolm, he and Malcolm. OK [pause] **Dan is not gay cause I think he likes Kayla but Malcolm is definitely gay.**

Krystal: We can tell what his--

Keandra: What is gay? Why is he gay?

PMC: No, he, you mean--

Keandra: What is gay? Oh when he likes; not happy gay but like boy-boy, girl-girl.

PMC: Oh, OK. OK, yeah.

Krystal: Like if a boy--

PMC: How do you know that?

Keandra: Cause! Cause uhm **Malcolm smacked Dan’s butt twice, smacked Nick’s butt twice, and Dan gave him a piggyback ride that looked really nasty.**

Krystal: **It looked gross.**

In addition, ‘gay’ figures in another semiotic field, where it works almost as nonce epithet, and is used in verbal jarring between boys, along with ‘retarded,’ and various ‘your momma’ forms. Ostensibly non-gay boys also temporarily adopt gay personae as a mechanism to flirt with girls.

REBECCA: The guys will walk around with their hand out and be like that, or people will be walking around be like, ‘you’re gay.’

Payton: "You're gay"-- they’ll whisper.

PMC: Oh I see.

Payton: Whisper at you and be like, 'you're gay.' And guys know I think the guys are like-- It's a way to flirt with the girls a lot, because they have - No I'm serious!

PMC: Really?
REBECCA: They have something to say to the girls because they'll be like, oh you’re gay, and the girls will be like, no you’re gay!

PMC: Oh, I see, so it's like a way to—
Payton: Like, they say stuff like that! to like, communicate with each other. Yes. Also, the guys like think it’s funny to act gay sometimes.
REBECCA: Like-- Yeah. But they’re not.
PMC: Like what, like effeminate or something?
REBECCA: No. No, like smacking each other's butt. Like when two guys are sitting next to each other they be like, hey baby...
Ally: Or they’ll be like, they’ll be like, I love you!
PMC: Oh I see.
REBECCA: It’s just like funny, but-- Uh huh. they don't actually mean it.
Samantha: Yeah.
Payton: And it’s not like they’re making fun of gay people either-- They won’t say
REBECCA: The girls, when they do it, they’re just like, they’re like said I love you, I’d be like, just kidding, just kidding.
Payton: You know that. Yeah. And, but the guys are just like I love you!
And like they don't say just kidding, cause they know each other’s joking.
Samantha: [Yeah.]
REBECCA: [Yeah.]
PMC: Very interesting. OK, so I never would have guessed that people would say
Payton: I’ve seen it!
The jocular figuration of ‘gay’ does not diminish its interpellative force in other contexts. I have witnessed the silencing effect of ‘gay’ and allied terms time and again in the Bedlington cafeteria. In the following excerpts, I provide descriptions of scenes from my
field notes in which I witnessed this type of hailing. Following those scenes, I describe my own interpellative moment, which took place during 6th grade lunch. Many of the moments from my field notes were brief; usually my attention was focused elsewhere when I overheard ‘gay’ or ‘faggot’ and I would stop what I was doing to quickly scribble down what I had heard. Therefore, these scenes are short and necessarily incomplete.

Cafeteria, 6th Grade Lunch: My attention turned to a group of 6th grade African American boys who were in the lunch line to my left. “Hey, get off me. Ya’ll gay! Get up off me, man. Ya’ll gay.” The boys were pushing each other, but it wasn’t clear to me why the one boy was accusing the others of being ‘gay.’

Cafeteria, 7th Grade Lunch: “Are you gay? YOU! YOU FAGGOT!” A chubby African American boy who was sitting at the end of the table where Nathalie and the chubby white girl sat yelled out in the most vitriolic verbal attack I had witnessed yet. The chubby perpetrator wore glasses and sat with a group of other chubby boys. It was never clear to me who his victim was, but I know it was a boy toward the end of the all-boys table, where the cuatro amigos were sitting.

Cafeteria, 7th Grade Lunch: I was snapped back into reality when I overheard, “Russell, you’re gay! You’re gay!” My eyes followed the action – an African American boy at one table was yelling at an African American boy at an adjacent table who had turned around on his bench in order to talk to someone at the first table. The second boy turned
back around when the yelling commenced, not responding to the charge. A moment later I saw him staring down at the ground, his shoulders hunched over the table.

*Main Lobby, After School:* The majority of the kids waiting were white, but there was a group of African American boys who sat together in a circle-like formation. Soon after we all ended up sitting on the floor, which was the rule for people waiting on rides, I heard “I’m not a faggot...I’m not a faggot!” from the group of African American boys.

At 10:30, I was sitting at a lunch table talking to Graciela and Alma when a group of Latina girls brought their lunch trays over from the lunch line. Graciela and Alma usually sat with them while they ate. They did not do this with any other grade. These girls always spoke Spanish, which was, perhaps, why Graciela and Alma stayed with them. Normally I got up when the girls came over, but I decided to stay where I was today and observe them talking. There were about 6 girls sitting on two sides of the table, in addition to Graciela, Alma, and me. I eventually decided not to take up space on the bench, so I went to the end of the table and crouched down on my knees. Graciela was to my right, Alma to my left. We were speaking in Spanish about their lunch, when a 6th grade African American girl came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder. She had been sitting at the other end of the table with the African American kids in that class. The table was very clearly split between Latino and Black. “Can I talk to you?” she asked me. She was short, portly, and had dark, dark skin and thick braids. Sometimes she wore her braids up underneath a black, knit hat, not a toboggan, but something
bigger that seemed made to contain a lot of hair. Today her hair was down. “Sure,” I said, assuming she wanted to know what I was doing at the school, since that was the most typical exchange I had with students whom I hadn’t met. She sort of pointed to the still-unoccupied table behind us, indicating that she wanted to talk privately. I got up and walked a couple of feet away toward the empty table. I realized that I had seen her before and for a moment I felt happy that students felt comfortable enough with my presence now to talk to me so directly. “Um, it doesn’t matter to me, but are you gay,” she asked whispering the last word. I was pretty sure she had said gay, but since she had whispered, and since it was an unexpected question, I asked for clarification. “Am I what?” I asked, hoping I had misunderstood. “Are you gay?” she repeated, saying ‘gay’ louder this time, but still more softly than the rest of the question. I must have looked like a deer in headlights. I didn’t know what to do or say and I think I reverted to my middle school self, where I was asked that question from time to time. “Oh, no,” I said firmly and in my best heterosexual and masculine voice. “Okay,” she said, before walking back to the same table where I had been crouched down a moment earlier talking to the Latina girls. She was sitting with African American boys, one of whom said, “you asked him?” “Yeah, I asked him,” I heard her say. I realized that it was no longer limited to her – the whole end of the table could have been talking about it and she was the only one intrepid enough to ask me directly. I knew that I couldn’t run away, which was what I really wanted to do. I crouched back down at the table.
4.8 Speechless Subjects

Although I spent a great amount of time with the student groups I have described thus far, I never fully ‘entered’ any of them. This was by design. I did not feel comfortable ‘entering’ groups of pre-teens, and instead I fully embraced my insider/outsider status with all of the students I spent time with. Although I did spend time with students before and after school, I never met any of them outside of the institutional space. This was also by design. There was one group, however, that I made a deeper, more enduring connection with: the housekeepers, Graciela and Alma. The relationship evolved over a long arc, first chatting in the hall, then desayuno together in the teachers’ lounge, and then comida in the cafeteria between 7th and 8th grade lunch periods. Eventually I also started going with them to take out the trash in between lunch periods when there were no students in the cafeteria, and by the end of my time at Bedlington, I was working with them – folding up the cafeteria tables, pushing around the industrial broom, wiping down tabletops, and hoisting heavy bags of trash into the outside dumpsters, chatting all the while.

Graciela and Alma seemed reluctant to open up to me in the beginning and it took many months to learn about their lives outside of school. There was a single event, however, a single moment of recognition, which brought together the politics of race,
language, and status at Bedlington and made the three of us enter a deeper level of trust and mutual respect.

After lunch I talked with Graciela and Alma about Señorita Wilson, the Spanish teacher, who was “black” in the American context, although her skin was not dark. It had become apparent that Señorita Wilson was avoiding me now, which I found bizarre after she had spent so much time initiating conversation with me before during my first month or so at Bedlington. Whenever Señorita Wilson came up in conversation with Graciela and Alma, they would invariably laugh heartily that Señorita Wilson referred to herself as “Señorita;” for them, she was far too old to be a señorita, even if she was unmarried. We began to refer to her, simply, as “la señorita.” As it turned out, Graciela and Alma disliked Srta. Wilson immensely, especially Graciela, as the Srta. had been less than friendly to them since she began working at Bedlington. At first it was not clear to me why the only other native Spanish-speaking adult at the school would be such an adversary. Alma and Graciela filled me in little by little, instructing me by telling me stories about their interaction with the Señorita. When I asked them one day during comida if they understood why the Señorita had been ignoring me, Alma told me the following story. One day she was mopping the hall where the vocational classes were, which included the Spanish classroom. The floor was wet and slippery and Alma had put out a ‘Caution / Cuidado’ sign to indicate that. Several teachers had come through, all of whom went around the sign. A class of 6th graders came through, each student
filing by one by one, slowly as not to fall. Eventually Srta. Wilson came up – she was not teaching because it was either a planning period or her lunch. Alma cautioned her to go around, as the floor was slippery. La Señorita grimaced and barreled through straight to her classroom. She didn’t make it. On the way she slipped, her feet going up in the air out from underneath her. She landed flat on her bottom. Alma went to try and help her up, and she meekly went into her classroom, not apologizing for walking through the wet spot, nor thanking Alma for trying to help her. I could not believe it because, until very recently, Señorita Wilson seemed friendly, even humble. She apparently was never either of those with Graciela and Alma.

When Graciela saw that I was interested in the Señorita’s curious behavior, she encouraged Alma to tell me another story. The women’s faculty bathroom upstairs was clogged. When Alma, who was cleaning upstairs after school, saw that the Señorita was going toward it, she told her that it was out of order, that was being fixed, and in the meantime there was another faculty bathroom downstairs. The Señorita ignored her, saying nothing, and charged across the hall to the girls bathroom in the 6th grade corridor. Alma went back to her cleaning, but a few moments later, she heard a loud, reverberating THUD come from the bathroom. She thought that Señorita had fallen. She raced over to the bathroom to check on her. She got to the door (actually just an opening) of the girls bathroom and yelled in, “Está Usted bien?” She didn’t hear back, so she peered in. She saw the Señorita’s metal coffee mug on top of a metal heater and
realized that the thud she heard was actually the metal cup being slammed into the metal heater. Señorita had apparently gotten so angry about being rebuffed by Alma that she had slammed it down in a rage.

Somewhat against my better judgment, I decided to tell them about the observation I had made about Señorita Wilson and the change in the way she interacted with me. When I first got to Bedlington, she and I always spoke Spanish and she would always compliment me on my Spanish. Once she realized for the first time that I spoke Spanish, we almost never had an exchange in English. However, I noticed that a couple of months into my visit, when the fact that I was a Spanish speaker was well known in the school (as a result of talking to Latino students, Latino parents, but most of all Graciela and Alma), Señorita Wilson stopped talking to me in Spanish altogether. It was English only. I suspected strongly that it was because I spent so much time talking to Graciela and Alma in Spanish and our time together has actually been quite public, in the cafeteria, in the halls, in the main office and break room, etc. I’m happy that I decided to share this observation with them because they told me that Señorita Wilson has tended to speak to them in English too, despite the fact that their English is limited. My hunch that Señorita Wilson was making a power play out of language was strengthened by this new information. Graciela said something that made me think that she was really bothered by the structural and interactional inequality she experienced in her role as a custodian. “Somos iguales – tenemos diferentes posiciones, pero somos iguales,”
she said of Señorita Wilson, shaking her head right and left, indicating her frustration
with the impossibility of the situation.

Toward the end of my time at Bedlington, I began to feel frustrated with my
conversations with Graciela, as her position on the students seemed almost caricatured. I
felt burnt out on her implacable insistence that they were all groseros and cochinos and
involved in drugs and in pandillas. She hated that the teachers and the administrators
allowed the students to “run the school.” She talked about the students almost as if they
were evil and at times did not seem to be able to afford them any positive qualities
whatsoever. I felt frustrated that she was impervious to hearing about any difficulty any
student was facing. Paulina, for example, who was always upset and clearly had
personal problems, was just bad in Graciela’s view. She was convinced that she was
doing it all for attention. Senia was a chola and a pandillera and the girls, particularly las
Mexicanas were all mentirosas, mal educadas, groseras. These characterizations were hurtful
to me, because although Graciela and I had developed a tender friendship, she seemed
annoyed if I ever suggested that a student was acting out because of problems they were
having at home. I know from translating for Senia and her mother that she did feel
abandoned and although she never said so, the guidance counselor believed that her
father may have been abusive. Graciela could not accept these sorts of explanations. She
seemed, over time, less suspicious of African American students, but also saw them as
mal educados and groseros.
I knew that Graciela and Alma felt demeaned by their work, particularly
Graciela. They didn’t like that the teachers did not help them clean up. They didn’t like
that the student ‘volunteers’ were lazy in the way they helped clean at the end of the
lunch period. They didn’t like how messy the students were. “No tenemos la ayuda ni de
los estudiantes ni de los maestros.” They complained everyday that the students were
‘groseros,’ that they were ‘cochinos.’ I knew that Graciela felt hurt that the principals went
out of their way to rearrange the school day for teacher appreciation day, so the teachers
could go off campus for lunch, but that they got nothing – no recognition. On ‘teacher
recognition day,’ Graciela told me, “Tienen un dia para todos – menos nosotras. Un dia para
los maestros, para las secretarias, para los jefes. Lo que es un privilegio para ellos es mas trabajo
para nosotras.” I knew about the problems with Señorita Wilson, the Spanish teacher who
was demeaning to them. I knew all of this, but I still didn’t understand how Graciela
could be so one-sided in her view of the students.

In a single epiphanic moment several months after the conference with Senia and
her mother, I came to understand Graciela’s position. I was sitting with Graciela and
Alma at a lunch table at the conclusion of 7th grade lunch. Ashley, one of the popular 7th
grade African American girls, came back into the cafeteria. “Excuse me, I’m sorry to
interrupt,” she said, sweetly. “But somebody spilled some Gatorade in the 7th grade
hall…” “No, no, uh-uh,” Graciela said emphatically, shaking her head from side to side.
She told me in Spanish that this was one of the girls who made up or intentionally
created messes to humiliate them. There was, for a moment, utter confusion, and I was
in the middle translating. “¿Qué dijo?” Alma asked. I explained that there was
supposedly a spill on the 7th grade hall. “Voy a ver,” Alma said. “No,” Graciela
interrupted, shaking her head. “Pero Graciela” Then Ashley asked if she could just have a
mop to clean it up herself. “¿Qué quiere?” Graciela asked me. “Una trapadora,” I replied.
“Oh, no,” she insisted, again shaking her head an emphatic ‘no.’ I didn’t fully
understand why she wouldn’t just give her the mop. The confrontation was intense, and
the only thing I remember about how it ended was Ashley rolling her eyes and walking
away.

Graciela told me about how some of the students taunt them so that they can
hear them respond, which they find humorous in light of the fact that their English is
‘broken.’ Graciela was in a true rage when she described this – I could see that she felt
trapped. After Ashley left, I volunteered to go to the 7th grade hall and see if there
appeared to be a spill of any sort, which I did diligently, staring at the floor as I walked
head down the hall, zigzagging from one side to the next. I went back and reported that
there was nothing – it was possible that someone cleaned it up with paper towels, but
nothing felt sticky on my shoe; I had purposefully stepped with all my weight on a
couple of suspicious spots to see if my shoe would make a sticking noise. Nothing.
Graciela was angry. Alma seemed torn; I could tell she felt responsible for making sure
the hall was clean, but I think she also knew that it was a ruse. We sat and talked for
some time after – Alma told me about how boys would clog the toilets with toilet paper, leave the water running in the sinks to flood the bathroom, and even defecate in the urinals. Alma described the last time the latter had happened. She said she just put on rubber gloves and scooped it out. I was completely and totally mortified. And I think sometime after that day I understood how Graciela could seem suspicious of nearly everyone. I understood that when she said that the students ran the school, a claim I could never self understand based on what I saw, she may have actually meant that the students had more power than her. No matter what Graciela did – yell in Spanish, yell in English, complain to teachers, try and ignore – the subject position she occupied rendered her speechless. This is not to say that she had no power; power circulates and is ubiquitously present, such that Graciela could gain the upper hand in certain situations, such as refusing to hand a mop over to the girl who taunted her, insisting that Señorita Wilson be forced to apologize, or turning the volume down on her walkie-talkie when being summoned during lunch. As Foucault says, “it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape.” (‘The Subject and Power,’ 347).

Graciela and Alma were, perhaps, the only people at Bedlington not directly subjectivized by the institutional discourses. Accordingly, their point of view was completely different from any other I found at Bedlington. Subjectivity, as Foucault points out, is about experience, not ‘truth’ and, correspondingly, it stands to reason that
their understanding of what Bedlington was would be different from anyone else. This does not mean, however, that Bedlington had no subjectivizing affects on them. To the contrary, Graciela and Alma were interpellated as universally inferior. At the conclusion of every lunch period, Graciela and Alma pushed around wheeled trashcans to collect the students’ trash. Instead of tossing their Styrofoam trays directly into the trash can, some students threw the trays in such a way that leftover milk, the grease from scoop of taco meat, or a pile of uneaten green beans would hit the body of the woman behind the trashcan. I once made eye contact with Alma immediately after this happened; she shrugged her shoulders and continued pushing, as the group of girls she left behind snickered uncontrollably. Each one of these was a reminder, a hailing of sorts. Thus, Graciela and Alma were subjectivized in the context of Bedlington and in this respect they are no different from other subjects in the school. They differ, however, in that unlike students who are compelled ‘to speak,’ ‘to choose,’ and ‘to be,’ Graciela and Alma are compelled not to speak. Bedlington, as an arm of the culture in which it is embedded, produces some subjects who speak, and some who cannot.

4.9 Speaking Subjects and the Crisis of Identity

At Bedlington, student subjects are “free” and are “free” to speak. Likewise, subjects are “free” to express their own identities. In fact, they are compelled to do so by the forces of disciplinarity and broader forces of subjectivization both within and
outside of the institutional context. As Foucault has shown, however, freedom from something – or freedom to something – is always also conscription into something else, namely, other fields of power and new forms of subjectivization. Thus, freedom to speak and freedom ‘to be’ an identity are themselves forms of disciplinarity. As temporary attachments to subject positions, identities This is the trouble with taking identity as the analytical starting point, as I have attempted to argue in Chapters 1 and 2. That a subject expresses an identity with language, by language, or through language does not mean the subject does so as an act of agency, unless, we take agency to be nothing more than a recognition of norms. This is how Butler (2004) theorizes agency – an acknowledgment of situation under determinant constraints. She writes, “if I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility.” Put differently, the condition of agency’s possibility is subjectivization. At Bedlington, subjects are free to speak, and free to be. Paradoxically, these freedoms are compulsory.
5. Subjectivity and Language

As history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle; discourse is the power which is to be seized. – Michel Foucault 1984, 110

5.1 Introduction

Language, as discourse, is a subjectivizing process. As I attempted to illustrate in Chapter 4 through my analysis of conversational data in the context of institutional discourses, discourse shaped the way students talk about a wide range of topics. In this respect, language is also an effect of subjectivization, in addition to being one of its constituent processes. In this chapter, the analysis moves squarely to language, paying attention both to linguistic structure and variation, and metalinguistic talk about language.

5.2 Language Ideology as Disciplinarity

In the previous chapter, I examined two forms of disciplinarity: discourse and interpellation. Both operate as processes through which subject types are formed, and through which individuals come to understand themselves in relation to these subject types. In this section, I would like to entertain the idea that language ideology – the belief in the inherent ‘goodness’ or ‘rightness’ of a particular type or variety of language,
and the conglomeration of attitudes attendant to that belief, functions as force of subjectivization. In 5.2.1, I will review theory of language ideology as articulated in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. In subsequent sections, I will consider specific manifestations of language ideology and their role in subjectivization by looking at conversational tropes about language in the speech of Bedlington students.

A number of the cases I present here have to do with students whose linguistic practices are incongruent with assigned identities and/or subject positions, a phenomenon Rampton (1995, 1999) has called “crossing.” Such cases are theoretically useful because they expose the boundary lines that carve up the semiotic terrain in which identities acquire cultural meaning. One gains a sense of the contemporary contours of whiteness, for example, when a white subject breaks rank and “acts ghetto.” Recently, sociolinguists have become increasingly interested in ethnic stylization in the context of crossing. Coupland (2007, 127) writes, “using AAVE features allows white young people to share symbolically in a generalized urban youth identity.” This was the case for ‘Mike,’ a white adolescent studied by Cutler (1999), who uses features of African American English in order to move into a ‘black identity,’ which he later abandons. Cutler considered Mike’s movements a choice of lifestyles. I have no reason to disagree with her analysis, but what I would like to add to this discussion with the examples of crossing from Bedlington is that the discourses about crossing, rooted in multiple ideological formations, are disciplinary, affecting crossers and non-crossers alike. That
is, Mike or Maria or Montana would be unable to cross without the field of meaning in
which non-crossing subjects are produced as authentic. Because there is no such thing as
a pre-discursive ‘authenticity’ that precedes its imitations, the imitations and the
‘authentic’ are, equally, discursive productions. What sets crossers apart is that their
ethnic stylizations are commonly perceived as ‘performative,’ while those of non-
crossers are not. In the end, however, crossers and non-crossers are produced, and
produce each other, within the same field of meaning and by the same discourses.

5.2.1 Language Ideology

Bonfiglio (2002) discusses the relationship between ideology and ostensibly
“neutral” evaluations of linguistic form. “Like all ideologies, the linguistic ideology will
appear to be abstract and general and will not readily reveal an ostensible connection to
its generating infrastructure. Certain locutions will appear to be ‘proper,’ ‘good,’
‘pleasant,’ ‘elevated,’ ‘strong,’ etc., and others will appear to be lacking in or opposed to
those qualities.” Attachments between linguistic form and social evaluation are not
arbitrary, as scholars in the field of language ideology have productively argued.
other ideological formations, such that language – linguistic form – can be recruited into
the broader field of meaning in which the discourses that constitute ‘the real’ take shape.
Put differently, language (i.e., social evaluations of language) becomes a ‘natural’ form
of evidence for political and ideological beliefs.
I would like to argue that language ideology is a subjectivizing force – it conditions not only the way that people think about and use language, but also the way that they are produced as discursive subjects. Provided that language is one of the primary ways in which subjects understand the self, the regime of linguistic ideology and discourses about language that constitute “language” must have subjectivizing effects. In the sections that follow, I describe the discursive formations about language that I encountered in conversations with Bedlington students. Although Foucault rarely discussed ideology qua ideology, I would like to consider language ideology as a disciplinary force in Foucault’s sense of disciplinarity. Language ideology, I will argue, disciplines students and contributes not only to the constitution of language, but also to the constitution of the subjects who use it: speaking subjects.

5.2.2 Talking Proper

As scholars working in the field of language ideology have theorized, there is no such thing as a true standard language, empirically speaking. Nevertheless, at Bedlington, “proper” talk serves an important ideological / discursive function. Less than a clearly articulated variety, “proper” is more a discursive formation about language against which vernacular varieties achieve their status as non-proper. Time and time again, students describe proper talk according to its absences, which range from particular lexical items, expletives, pronunciations, and grammatical forms. This
phenomenon is by no means unique to Bedlington. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, 13) describe the negative definition of ‘standard’ English in the US.

Standard American English seems to be determined more by what it is not that by what it is...For the most part, Americans do not assign strong positive, or prestige, value to any particular dialect of American English. The basic contrast in the US exists between negatively valued dialects and those without negative value, not between those with prestige value and those without.

Devin and Destiny are two popular 7th grade African American girls. Devin comes from a wealthy family (she talks at length about her mother’s new “Jag,” for example) and she stands out at school for her designer outfits. The first day I noticed her, I was proctoring for a state exam on campus and I ended up sitting at an empty desk directly behind her.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes from that day.

The girl sitting in front of me looked down at her desk as she wrote. On the floor next to her desk was a shiny, designer-looking [faux] snakeskin handbag. Her black jeans were also designer-looking and looked new. She wore nearly knee-length black boots and a gray wool sweater with big gray buttons. Her dark hair shined. It was long and wavy, with several big curls, from a curling iron or perm that bounced down the back of her gray sweater like springs in a mattress. Her hair was pulled back in the front with a silver tiara-like hair bow that was adorned with a faux diamond broach in the middle.

Although many of the popular African American girls had new clothes, fancy bags, and flashy accessories, Devin’s look was somehow different. However, Devin differed from the other popular African American girls that I talked to in that she did
not speak African American English. Devin was the only popular African American girl who demonstrated none of the core features of AAE that I examined, as reported in section 5.3. I asked Devin and Destiny about language at Bedlington, and this is how Devin responded:

PMC: Hmm. What about, what about, OK, are there different ways of talking at this school that you hear?
Devin: Mm-hmm.
PMC: Like what?
Devin: People call me proper all the time.
PMC: What does proper mean?
Devin: They say, I guess cause I know how to talk, and I'm not going around fussing and cussing-- I don't cuss. I chose not to, I don't come from a cussing family. And people think you have to cuss in order to fit in but I mean I fit in and I don't cuss.
PMC: Mm-hmm.
Devin: And so I just don't. And there's a lot of different talk, like people talk and they use slang, like when they go down the hall, to call somebody, even a teacher, they're like 'Eh brah,' just going down the hall. 'Eh, eh, come here.' And then me, I'm like, 'Excuse me.' Or something like that. So there are a lot of different ways that people talk here.

Devin did not seem to mind discussing this in front of Destiny, who used of all four morphosyntactic features of AAE that I analyzed. More to the point, when I ask Devin what it means to be called ‘proper,’ she responds by saying what it is not – no ‘cussing’ and no ‘fussing.’ Though she does not explicitly expound on what it means ‘to fuss,’ she
does give examples of ‘slang.’ The form ‘eh brah’ is doubly marked: lexically (‘bro’) and phonetically (‘hey bro’ → ‘eh brah’). The only example she gives of ‘proper’ is “excuse me,” which she mitigates with “or something like that.” Proper talk is one part of an entire complex of prescribed behaviors corresponding to middle class comportments and may be located at any point on the standarness continuum (i.e., ‘informal’ standard to ‘formal’ standard; see Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, 10-11).

I had a very similar conversation with three 6th grade African American girls who describe themselves as “nerds.” Two of them, T.C. and Samiyah have been friends since elementary school. In my analysis of core AAE features, Samiyah used none, and for T.C., I found only one token of one feature – copula absence. Trix, in contrast, only started to hang out with Samiyah and T.C. at the start of the 6th grade year, because she said she did not fit in anywhere else. Unlike her friends, Trix used all four features of AAE that I examined, and impressionistically, her phonology was noticeably more vernacular. Like with Devin, this did not seem to inhibit T.C. from proclaiming that she is a “stickler for grammar.”

PMC: So, you said something about you’re a stickler for uh, proper grammar?
T.C.: Yeah.
PMC: What does that mean?
T.C.: I don’t, I don’t like to use like ain’t and like people go around your like, ‘hey what you’re doing?’ Or, no, no no no no. No, that’s, wasn’t right. They’re like, ‘yo, how it do?’
Trix: Oh, I know what she means! ‘Yo, what it do?’
T.C.: Yeah, yeah!

T.C.’s description of ‘proper grammar’ is that it does not include ‘ain’t’ or the lexicalized expression ‘what [how] it do.’ This prompts Trix to add her own anecdote about encountering ‘what it do,’ all the while using vernacular forms herself.

Trix: One time, one time, this boy walked up to me and he was like, ‘Yo shawtey, what it do?’ Who you think you talking to like that?

T.C.: I know, there’s an eighth grader that said that to me and he’s like right here. [Indicates that he is shorter than her.]

Trix: This, the boy, he was like right here. [Indicating height with a hand gesture] ...And then he was like, ‘Yo Shawtey [“Shorty”], what it do,’ and I was like, ‘First of all my name not Shawtey, my name is whatever my name is, yes, my name is Trix, so get it straight.’

T.C.: I was like first of all, you’re like five, four-eleven and I’m five-two, so don’t call me Shorty.’

PMC: So why do you, why do you care about proper grammar? What is it?

T.C.: I like to understand what people actually say.

PMC: Mm-hmm.

T.C.: When I’m talking to them.

PMC: Mm-hmm.

T.C.: **So I just blame hip-hop music**, they’re always just like saying—

Trix: Can you imagine us sitting right here talking to you and we using all slang you just sitting there looking like—

The irony in this text is that as T.C. and Trix co-construct a definition of what it means to speak proper grammar, Trix shows several utterances without the copula: “my name ø not Shawtey” and “we ø using all slang you ø just sitting there.” This underscores the
notion that linguistic evaluation and linguistic usage are not mutually inclusive (i.e., use does not always coincide with evaluation). T.C. also “blames” hip-hop music as the source of the forms she finds objectionable, but the conversational slippage is the absence of a source for “proper grammar.” The temporalities of linguistic form are part of the ideological formation – slang is ephemeral and traceable to a proximate [sub]-cultural source. Implicitly, “proper grammar” is immutable, timeless, and not traceable to a source. Of course, the “standard” forms that T.C. would seem to value are traceable in time and place. Further, that tracing reveals a somewhat insidious history in which language became a mode through which the humanist subject – “the straight, white, monied male” that Wiegman (1995, 6) names. To her description of the universal subject, we might add English-speaking and linguistically “proper,” since English-speaking is, alone, too broad a term.

As I wrote in the introduction to this section, the linkages between attitudes and linguistic forms are not neutral. The forms, styles, dialects, and registers that correspond to the language of unmarked subjects are not those that are seen as deficient, unintelligible, corrupted, or otherwise problematic. This is no coincidence, as language ideology works in the interests of those subjects. For marked subjects (non-white, unmonied, etc.), whose language is inferior by virtue of the conditions that produce those subjects as marked in the first place, language doubles back as a gate-keeping mechanism. The material consequences of the gate-keeping function of language
ideology are well documented by sociolinguists. (Lippi-Green 1997, Baugh 2003).

Language is a socially acceptable domain in which other ideologies can be expressed as though they were about language, rather than race, nationality, regionality, etc. The racial dimension that lurks behind discourse about ‘proper talk’ is brought out in conversation by Eddie (7th grade African American in ‘advanced’ classes), who describes how he ended up with ‘proper diction,’ in implicit contrast to other African Americans who did not.

Eddie: **Like having like proper diction.**

PMC: Yeah, so how’d you guys end up with proper diction?

Hunter: Parents.

Eddie: I don't know.

Andrew: Parents.

PMC: Parents huh.

Eddie: Well, I know how I ended proper diction cause like I hung around, like when I was in Indiana, like in fifth through sixth, like, mostly white. And I never seen like a white person, unless they're ghetto, talk about, like, talk like uhm like “girl you be bookin it” and stuff. And so, **I hung around a lot of white people and that's how I talk now, so--.**

PMC: So, do you have friends who are black?

Hunter: Yeah.

Eddie: Yeah I have a lot of friends who are black.

PMC: Mm-hmm. Do you guys too?

Hunter: Yeah.

Eddie: **But they’re proper and they’re not ghetto.**
The presence of black subjects such as Eddie reinforce the belief among whites that one’s language is a reflection of one’s choice (an African American boy can speak with proper grammar!). On the other hand, ‘proper talking’ African Americans present whites with a discursive bind. If talking proper is a choice, why don’t all African American choose to talk proper? This requires alternative explanations, such as that offered by Alice to describe Remy, an 8th grade African American boy who at lunch sits with white girls, rather than at the “black end of the table.” Alice and I had been talking about self-selected seating segregation and why Remy would choose to sit with white girls. Unprompted, she brings in language, discursively connecting whiteness and money to ‘correct grammar.’

PMC: Right. So. Yeah, right. So how did Remy end up sitting with white girls? Cause on the one hand it doesn’t seem like a big deal, but on the other hand, you guys told me...
Alice: Right. Uhm, it seems to me from what I can tell, his family I think his family has more money.
PMC: Mm-hmm.
Alice: And he, you know like certain African Americans kids talk with a certain slang and he, he talks, he uses correct grammar and that kind of sets him apart, which is weird. But it does.
PMC: And so uhm, you said that Remy is sort of set apart because he uses correct grammar?
Alice: I think so.
Since Alice brought up ‘correct grammar,’ I decided to ask for clarification. Here again, the unmarked form is defined negatively, in terms of what it is not, but Alice also fleshes out her explanation of grammatical correctness by considering it within regional and racial frames.

PMC: What is that, what does that even mean?
Alice: Uhm, like, I use the word 'like' a lot but I do speak with correct grammar, uhm, whereas a lot of the African American kids, I think because their families are more Southern, like for example my mom is from Indiana but my dad is from California. So if I came home and I started speaking like that... you know, there would be words, my parents would be like, they would say, 'It's she and I, not her and me.' Uhm, I mean they wouldn't be mad at me but there would be words.

PMC: Yeah, so you can tell like, there’s a certain slang that black kids have?
Alice: They use the word 'ain't,' and I use the word 'ain't' sometimes, but not as much. And uhm, also, 'thems,' I mean, you can just tell, if you listen to them. If you listen to people who talk like that as opposed to like Remy, I mean, Remy’s gonna speak with correct grammar, he’s never gonna say 'thems people,' you're never gonna hear him say that but there are people who will say that.

The slippage between regionality, class, and race is a mechanism for Alice to explain how it is that ‘a lot of the African American kids’ sound one way (grammatically incorrect), while she and Remy sound another (grammatically correct). Whiteness (grammatical correctness) is associated with the West (but my dad is from California), while Blackness is Southern. Although Remy is black (and Southern) “his family has more money,” and by virtue of his class status, is also grammatically correct. Running
parallel to the intricate explanations given for linguistic difference throughout my conversations with students is a consistent omission: a positive description of “talking proper.” Notice that the best example of correct grammar Alice provides is ‘she and I, not her and me’ which, as far as vernacularity is concerned at Bedlington, barely registers as vernacular. The difference she is able to articulate between grammatical English and ungrammatical English comes down to the use of ‘thems’ and ‘ain’t, which she herself admits to using.

5.2.3 Talking Ghetto

“Ghetto” talk was, by far, the most frequent response to my questions about recognizable styles of speech at Bedlington. Ghetto talk is configured discursively in a way that recruits the institutional discourses of choice and advancement, the conversational trope of authenticity, language ideology, and race and class frames. It is the discursive and ideological oppositional counterpart to “talking proper.”

Talking ghetto is either an attribute of one of two discursive formations: “being” ghetto or “acting” ghetto. For the most part, African Americans who “are ghetto” comport in ways that correspond to an imagined authentic ontological self. In other words, their ghettoness pre-exists the semiotic system in which that ghettoness is made legible. The practices of ghettoness, which encompass the domains of language, behavior, and personal aesthetics, are natural reflections of a prior subject who “is” ghetto. White students with the same or similar comportment, linguistic style, and
personal aesthetics are “acting ghetto” which, as I have shown in Chapter 4, is controversial, as it is understood as ‘inauthentic.’ In order for Diamond, Pink, and Mia to legitimate the inclusion of Montana in their friendship group, it was necessary that they narrativize her as “black on the inside,” where the ‘inside’ indexes a self prior to its actions. Although authentic ‘ghetto’ subjects are ghetto by virtue of being, their level of scholastic achievement is, conversely, nonetheless the result of choice, even as poor scholastic achievement is taken to be evidence of “real” (authentic, ontological) ghettoness. That is, what is on one hand the effect of something prior, can be, on the other hand, a part of that thing that produced it as its effect. The logics are crisscrossed and clearly circular; which I take to be evidence of the discursive and ideological density of ghettoness. Talking about ghettoness requires that students work through a lot of cultural and discursive material: discourses of achievement, choice, and authenticity, racial frames and tropes of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness,’ and the semiotics of material and aesthetic culture. The discursive density of ghettoness is evident in my conversation with Lizzie, Lauren, Melissa, Jenny, and Amanda, five white girls who are in the same advanced classes with Eddie, Hunter, and Andrew.

PMC: Wait, OK, so the people who are acting ghetto, are the black people, white people or what?
Lauren: Both.
Lizzie: Well a lot of black people can get along, like make, cause they ARE ghetto but some of the white people are just, no they can't get, go with it.
PMC: How do you know if somebody is ghetto or not?
(Giggles)

Lauren: I mean it’s—

Lizzie: You’re just like.... overall. Like, the way they talk and the way they dress is just like not like classy.

Jenny: It's kind of like uhm like what grades they make. Like if they slack off or not.

PMC: Are the people who, who act, who don't dress classy the same people who

Lizzie: No.

Lauren: No.

PMC: No?

Lizzie: I mean it's not really the way you dress but it's just like an overall look.

PMC: Uh huh.

Lizzie: And you can just kind of- I don't want to judge people but I'm like usually right.

PMC: So wait, what do you mean, so like if I laid out a bunch of pictures of people you would be able to determine who's ghetto, I mean people at school?

Lizzie: I mean, I wouldn't, I wouldn't say that they wouldn't be nice or anything. Oh, yeah, I would just say that maybe they don't have like as much money or they aren't trying as hard in school.

In descriptions of ‘sounding ghetto,’ white students tend to discursively bundle ghetto talk with other undesirable comportments that index ghettoness and by virtue of this association, African American English is semiotically emblematic of an entire mode of being. Within this system of meaning, language is the sine qua non of subjectivity and an emblem of ostensible ontological subjects. Further, because language works so effectively as a symbol for cultural/historical constellations (e.g., one nation, one
language), it is easy, within the meaning-making field of a particular context, to associate one subject type with one homogenous linguistic variety. This is why Lizzie can say, in one utterance, it is possible to determine if someone is ghetto, “by the way they dress,” and in her next utterance make the contradictory claim “it’s not really the way you dress.” The indexicality has already happened: language -> subject type, rendering all other empirical evidence irrelevant. An underlying subject is thus identified.

It is through this system of representation that language ideology works as a form of disciplinarity. Samantha, Payton, and Rebecca tell me about their friend, DeAndre, who they describe as an Oreo. According to them, DeAndre is compelled to “act his race” so that his status as ‘ghetto’ is not in question with other African Americans. DeAndre’s changes in racial styling are, for the girls, “messed up.”

Samantha: Like, DeAndre he’s one of, he would be considered an Oreo because he’s black skinned but he tends to hang out with all the white kids like us.
PMC: Yeah, uh huh.
Samantha: And so then, that all already causes people to look at him, like the ones who think they’re the best are gonna look at him.
PMC: [Yeah.]
Samantha: But so then when he wears something made, like not the right shoe, like he doesn't have real converses. They were bugging him about that the other day.
Payton: And I think that really gets to him, because I noticed that he really tries to act his race, like he really tries.
REBECCA: Yeah, he really **wants to be** uh—
Payton: Like, it's really annoying.
PMC: He really wants to be black?
Samantha: **Well I mean he IS**, but--
Payton: Yeah, like **he is black but like he really wants people to make sure that they know that he's like ghetto and like popular and cool.**
PMC: What does it mean to be ghetto?
Payton: Like, he'll be like, **awwww**, like, and run around and, like, do the dances, **like the rapping and stuff and he'll say stuff like slang like 'sho nuff,'** and stuff like that.
PMC: Uh huh.
REBECCA: [And like hustle a lot]
Payton: And like he [wants to make sure that whatever] **he says sounds**...
Samantha: And you can tell the difference, I mean, he's... it's like...
Payton: Like, he's completely changed. From sixth grade to eighth grade, like in sixth grade he didn't mind
REBECCA: [Cause he cares about what]
Payton: [being considered] like white and geeky and like hang, just cause he hung out with the white people but they, he sort of changed his personality because
REBECCA: [People started]
Payton: [people] didn't think he was like cool enough.
REBECCA: Yeah, and he like, you couldn't sit really when he like hangs out with the black people uhm that he's like, that he's like a totally, that he's like a totally different person then when, like, he's at a party with like white people.
[...]
Payton: **Yeah, that’s messed up.** Like, **he acts like totally different around us than them.**

DeAndre is thus disciplined by the system of representation in which language ideology links historically contingent forms of talk to subject positions. I understand DeAndre’s vacillations in ethnic styling, which may be taken in other frameworks as ‘identity choices,’ as subjectivization in progress. DeAndre must use the materials of identity in order to carefully negotiate its consequences. The belief in essential subjects is so steadfast that even a subject who has already broken from his assigned racial identity can be seen as instable when crossing boundaries in the subjective field of meaning.

One way in which students reinforce themselves as ‘proper,’ in opposition to other, ghetto students, is through linguistic imitation and parodic performances of ghettoness. Most of these parodies are actually quick, comedic examples of ‘ghetto talk,’ typically accompanied with laughter. Eddie, Hunter, and Andrew indulged in this form of parody when I asked them the social formations they identified – ‘advanced’ and ‘ghetto’ – had identifiable ways of talking. In the following passage, imitations are underlined.

PMC: Yeah, right. Right, right. So, uhm, is there a way of, is there a way of talking that you guys recognize as being like uhm, uh either advanced or ghetto or—

Hunter: Yes.

Eddie: Yeah, kind of.

PMC: Yeah?
Hunter: Yes.
Andrew: [When they speak—]
Eddie: [When they say \textit{that} \textit{won’t, that’s won’t}—
Andrew: \textbf{That won’t. That won’t be.}
Eddie: \textbf{That weren’t me. We say that all the time though.}
Hunter: Yeah, it's funny.
Andrew: Yeah.
PMC: OK, so you guys, oh like, say that thing that you told me that Spence said?
Eddie: Uhm, \textbf{girl you be booking it?} Like that.
PMC: Oh right.
Eddie: And uhm we just like play around all the time and stuff. And like when you talk like-
Hunter: \textbf{It be dumb cause—}
Eddie: More advanced, like uhm, more, like speaking clearly.
PMC: Uh huh.
Ronkin and Karn (1999) describe a similar phenomenon that they call Mock Ebonics, which they argue “exaggerates the hierarchical ordering of two language systems so that the nonstandard one grossly deviates from and is radically subordinate to the standard.”
Mock Ebonics involves four strategies: asystematic phonetic representations, the hyper-use of \textit{be}, semantic and pragmatic derogation, and the use of vulgar expressions. Some of these parodic strategies are not germane to my data, since Ronkin and Karn’s archive was based on Internet websites rather than speech. Nevertheless, one strategy they
identify – the hyper-use of be\(^1\) – is illustrated in the segment above between Eddie, Andrew, and Hunter. Linguists have recognized the grammatical and semantic distinctiveness of uninflected be in African American English for decades. However, given that the general public remains woefully unaware of even some of the most basic information about language variation, and provided that articulations of language ideology remain socially acceptable, be and other salient features of AAE are available as a means of mocking African American English and, by extension, its speakers. As Ronkin and Karn (1999) describe, part of what is problematic about Mock Ebonics is that it portrays AAE as unsystematic, irregular, and chaotic. The general use of uninflected be is to mark the habitual aspect, which other varieties of English do with adverbials (e.g., usually, often, never, etc.). However, be’s grammatical embedding is complex and in different grammatical and semantic frames, it is used to make subtle distinctions in meaning. I refer readers to Green (2002, 47-54) for a thoroughgoing discussion of these uses.

Although linguists have established that the use of be in African American English is highly constrained, Mock Ebonics tends to use be in ways that are ungrammatical in African American English. Consider the three cases of be from my conversation with Eddie, Andrew, and Hunter, reproduced below.

\(^1\) I discuss the non-parodic use of invariant be among African Americans and Latinos at Bedlington in great detail in section 5.3.
(a) That won’t. That won’t be.

(b) Girl you be booking it.

(c) It be dumb cause…

The grammatical status of ‘be’ in (a) is unclear, which is of no consequence to the parodic effect. However, adding almost any complement to (a) results in grammatical, if awkward utterances in Standard English (i.e., not aspectual). For example,

(a₁) Will that be going? It’ won’t be. [be + verb-ing]

(a₂) Will that be enough? It’ won’t be (enough). [be + predicate adjective]

(a₃) Will that be in Miami? It won’t be. [be + locative]

(a₄) Will that be her? It won’t be (her). [be + noun phrase]

Although Green (2002, 50) notes that the aspectual use of be in African American English can occur utterance finally, it is just as likely that (a) could be an utterance in Standard English. The use in (b) refers to a prior conversation I had Eddie and his friend Spence on the football field. As the story goes, Spence, a short white 7th grader with pale skin, wire-rimmed glasses, and shaggy brown hair, yelled out, during a track meet, “girl you be booking it” to one of his teammates during a race. This line was instantly popular, and Eddie reports that he, Spence, and other friends use the frame “____, you be booking it,” as a regular joke. The use of be in (b) is more than likely ungrammatical in African American English, its ostensible source, because the verb marks the progressive aspect and is, thus, non-iterative. More probable grammatical utterances in AAE for this
action include the utterances below, the first two of which are grammatical in non-vernacular varieties as well.

(b¹) Girl, you are booking it. [full copula; running fast right now]

(b²) Girl, you’re booking it. [contracted copula; running fast right now]

(b³) Girl, you θ booking it. [deleted copula; running fast right now]

Finally, the utterance in (c) is possible, since aspectual be can be used in AAE with inanimate or existential subjects (i.e., ‘it’) and with predicate adjectives (‘dumb.’) Despite its possible grammaticality, (c) is nevertheless still a parodic form, since it has no actual referent and no anchoring in any context other than the jocular frame established in conversation. The choice of ‘dumb’ for the predicate adjective, while possibly innocuous, could also be a meta-commentary on the language or its speakers.

Although many white students report having problems with “ghetto talk,” I observed several instances of those same students appropriating elements of either Mock Ebonics or African American English into their own speech. Two examples come from the same conversation with Eddie, Andrew, and Hunter. In addition to using the mock form “___ you be booking it,” Eddie admits that they also use another mock form – it weren’t me – “all the time.” Although it is possible that this usage is based on an attested use from a speaker of AAE at Bedlington, it is unlikely. In the linguistic analysis I present in section 5.3, I did find regularization of the copula in the past tense among some African American students, although it was always to was for both negative and
positive utterances. Preterit copula leveling with negative polarity (i.e., leveling to was for positive utterances and weren’t for negative ones) is more closely associated with the mainly white, coastal dialects of Virginia Eastern Shore and North Carolina varieties (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2006, 207). To the extent that past tense copula regularization to weren’t is found in African American English, such as in the variety studied by Wolfram and Thomas (2002) in Hyde County, North Carolina, it appears to be receding precipitously in the younger speakers (75,6). So while the selected forms effectively index African American English in the context of conversational parody, there is little indication that the dialect features used are used grammatically, or are even traits of the variety being mocked.

While some terms appropriated from “ghetto talk” into white speech actually come from Mock Ebonics, others are based on specific attestations of AAE from native speakers of AAE. Alice, whose description of “correct grammar” I discussed above, describes the way her [white] friends borrow from the speech of Jay, a popular African American 8th grade basketball player.

Alice: Uhm, Jay, who I mentioned, during basketball season, uhm, they were running and somebody said something to him and apparently, like I wasn't there, but apparently Jay was like, "I say no, brah." It was like really funny, so somehow it got out, and at the last basketball game they told us when they called Jay’s name we were supposed to go, "I say no, brah," and like yell it really loud, uhm, which we did. And it was like really funny, cause all the parents were like what? And all the kids were like cracking up.
PMC: Cause everybody knew what it meant.

Alice: So uhm, people will be like, I say no brah, and just like use his words. So that’s funny.

PMC: So everybody kind of does that?

Alice: Uhm, pretty much, yeah.

5.2.4 “They be like, me no speak no English!”

Spanish is discursively tied to Latinidad in complex, even conflicting, ways at Bedlington. The discursive formations, evidenced in conversation with non-Latino students, are both the agent and product of the Latino / non-Latino social and scholastic divide. That is, structural difference – the general absence of Latino students from advanced classes and over-representation in remedial classes, disproportionate representation in PASS (in-school suspension) and the scheduling effects of ESL – to a large extent separates Latinos from the rest of the school. This, in turn, makes possible the widespread circulation of misinformation about Latino students at Bedlington. This misinformation coheres discursively into racialized “facts” that reproduce the real and perceived Latino / non-Latino social divide. Language is the discursive fulcrum in racialized facts about Latino students.

The most widespread belief about Latinos at Bedlington is that they choose to be socially isolated from non-Latino students. The ‘choice’ to speak Spanish is commonly invoked as an explanation for this isolation. In the prior chapter, I introduced Montana, a 7th grade Latina “crosser” whose primary friendship group is comprised of popular 7th grade African American girls. Montana’s family is from Guatemala, but she and her
older brother Manny, who is also in 7th grade due to flunking a previous year, have lived in North Carolina since elementary school. In an interview I conducted with Montana and two of her friends, Mia and Pink, popular African American girls, Spanish is figured as an exclusionary, in-group code that insulates Latinos from non-Latinos. For Montana, a Latina “crosser” with no Latino friends, the discursive terrain between ‘they’ and ‘I’ must be carefully negotiated.

Mia: They just in their own little clique.
PMC: Mmmhmm.
Mia: Yeah you try to push you just cling to different people and she just cling to us.
Pink: And I be messing with them, they always in the bathroom.
Mia: If you don't speak Spanish, you don't be in their group.
Montana: I do speak Spanish!
PMC: Really?
Mia: That's basically it. That’s basically what it is. If you don't speak Spanish, you not in they group.
PMC: Oh, so you have to know Spanish?
Mia: I guess so, don't nobody else talk to them. That's what they speak.
Montana: No, cause I know Spanish and they don't let me in their group.
PMC: But are there any kids who are not Latino, who speak Spanish, who are in the group?
Pink: No.
Montana: No.
PMC: No, uhuh?
Mia: They all over each other.
Montana: No, yeah, you see.
Mia: They allll hang with each other. Sixth seventh and eight graders.
PMC: Uh huh. Why, why does—
Mia: They sit at one lunch table together, don't sit at nowhere else.
PMC: Uh huh.
Montana: They sit the same breakfast table.

As a crosser, Montana finds herself here walking a discursive tightrope, having to balance ‘racial authenticity’ and commitment to her own friendship group. With Pink and Mia arguing that knowing Spanish is necessary in order to hang out with Latinos, Montana must justify not having Latino friends without appearing to be a race-denier, which would be in violation of racial authenticity. In other words, Montana cannot agree unequivocally that knowing Spanish is coextensive with membership in a Latino friendship group, or she would find herself in the uneasy position of being read as inauthentic precisely because she is known to be a Spanish speaker. Instead, she constructs an argument in which she is “not let into their group,” for reasons she does not enumerate. Earlier in the conversation, Montana attempted what would have been a much easier discursive move – denying that she speaks Spanish. That move backfired, however, when Mia and Pink reminded her that they have seen her speaking Spanish with her mother. Montana’s full explanation of why she does not have Latino friends is provided in Appendix E. Eventually Montana can agree to Mia’s claim that Latinos are racially exclusive without the discursive wedge of Spanish that ties Latinos to the ‘racial exclusivity’ of which Montana is not a part. She agrees to Mia’s claim that “they sit at
one lunch table together." Mia and Montana take ‘sitting together’ as evidence of exclusivity, apparently forgetting that at lunch, students sit with their assigned classes. The ‘sitting together’ claim, while successful for Mia and Montana in their construction of Latino exclusivity, is actually problematic for two reasons. First, because students sit with their assigned classes, ‘sitting together’ is more of a sign of institutional segregation than it is of volitional exclusivity. Moreover, when Bedlington students are rewarded with free seating, and to the extent that it is possible within their assigned seating, white and African American students, by and large, also ‘sit together’ (i.e., sit with other students of the ‘same’ racial group).

When I tried to focus the conversation with Montana, Mia, and Pink specifically on the question of why Latinos sit together, Spanish was again invoked, this time as a mechanism to relate the situation to broader, extra-institutional discourses about racism and the nation-state.

PMC: So, why do, why do all the Latino kids hang out with each other and not mix?
Montana: Cause basically they they, I think they—
Mia: They just speak Spanish, they don't speak English.
Pink: They racist.
Mia: The problem is they don't accept us. We can't speak that, they can speak our language, we can't speak they language, I don't know what they talking about.
Montana: Some of them can't though, some of them can't though.
Mia: I mean like, they in America. They need to learn it.
Pink: Mia, you’re so rude!
Montana: I know, severe.
Mia: I mean like seriously.

Despite her strong attitudes about Latinos and Spanish, Mia, nevertheless, has a strong interest in learning Spanish.

PMC: Uh huh, no, tell me more. What do you—
Mia: I’m trying to, I’m trying to learn Spanish, like for real.
PMC: Uh huh. Uh huh.
Mia: For real, for real, for real.

Pink: Mia thinks she knows a little something-something.
Montana: I know she probably thinks she knows some.
Pink: She know more than Montana!

Mia’s interest in learning Spanish, despite her dismissal of it for Bedlington Latinos (“This is America”), is possible because Spanish has a legitimized institutional context, practically independent of the Spanish spoken by native Spanish speakers. Señorita Wilson, the Panamanian Spanish teacher I introduced in Chapter 4, is known as one of the teachers who actively discourages Spanish-speaking among native speakers, even while she struggles to teach it to non-native speakers.

Although the belief that Latinos at Bedlington “only speak Spanish” is widespread among whites and African Americans, Latinos tend to see the situation differently. Many Latinos commented on ‘losing their Spanish.’ … Jorge and Eric reflect on their use of Spanish vis-à-vis English:

Eric: I don’t think I talk that much Spanish, right? I don’t talk Spanish that much.
PMC: Really? Why not?
Eric: Mmm… not sure. At home-
Jorge: At home I talk Spanish.
Eric: I think yeah I think at home I talk more Spanish but-
Jorge: Like at home but when I’m with my friends outside I talk English
Eric: Yeah… I mean, I dunno to be honest, I can’t speak Spanish that very good.

**Pronounce stuff bad.**

Milk comments that he has trouble pronouncing words such as ‘tree’ (árbol), ‘car’ (carro), and ‘turtle’ (tortuga). Rubi reports that she cannot write in Spanish and has trouble speaking it, while Alfonso reports that he cannot read or write in Spanish at all. This is congruent with my own observations. While Spanish use is robust at Bedlington, Spanish monolingualism is rare. For example, while it was very rare to find students unable to access lexical items in English, switching from Spanish to English for lexical access was common.

Many Latino students, when asked which language they used most at school, said Spanglish. I told all Latino students at the start of interviews that we could talk in Spanish or English; it was there choice. The vast majority of the students spoke entirely in English. Of all the Latino students I talked to, Payasa was the only one to make Spanish the default language for the interview. Despite her preference for Spanish, she said that she has no problem understanding or speaking in English, and with other Latinos, she mainly speaks Spanlish (“Me gusta hablar tambien Spanglish porque it sounds funny.”) A general lack of understanding of bilingualism and mixed languages among
non-Latinos may be partly responsible for the belief that Latinos do not speak English. That is, it may be that as overhearers and eavesdroppers, what stands out to non-Latinos is a Spanglish discourse setting is the Spanish, not the English. Zentella (1988, 1996) remarks that the situation of Spanish in the U.S. is more complicated than it may seem because of the influence of English. The belief that Spanglish is really just Spanish, or that Spanglish speakers are semilingual or a-lingual is surely ideologically related to the culture of monolingualism in which these beliefs find currency.

Embedded in the trope of ‘Latino exclusivity,’ in which Spanish is the discursive fulcrum, is the notion that fluency in Spanish is equivalent to a lack of fluency in English. Spanish, rather than being a social, linguistic, or cognitive asset, is figured as baggage, an impediment to English. This underscores how class is tied to language ideology. For working-class and immigrant speakers, another language is an obstacle, while for middle class speakers, it is an asset. [See Wolford and Carter (forthcoming) for a description of the relationship between class, race, and Spanish/English bilingualism in South Texas.] However, the opposite can also be true: that Latinos actually speak ‘perfect English’ that they hide by speaking Spanish. The trope of surreptitious English was pervasive in my conversations with non-Latino students at Bedlington, and concurrent with this line of talk was a great deal of suspicion about what was being said in Spanish. Students tended to articulate this suspicion in one of two ways, which I
paraphrase here: 1) ‘we don’t know what they’re saying; they could be saying anything’ or 2) ‘they could be talking about me.’

In Chapter 4 I introduced Jenna, a white, 7th grade crosser, whose best friends are Sakina and Dashawna. I conducted two interviews with these three girls and at the end of the first one, Sakina, when asked about popularity, had this to say about “the Mexicans:” “Them Mexicans ain't nobody's like popular, don't nobody like the Mexicans.” We were out of time and could not substantially follow up on what Sakina meant, so I started the second interview with that topic:

PMC: And we were talking about the Latino kids and Spanish?
Sakina: Oh.
Dashawna: Hmm?
PMC: Yeah, and you were saying something about that. What were you?
Sakina: They annoying!
Dashawna: They're have, they have attitude problem.
Sakina: They annoying, they, look this girl on the bus—
Jenna: They be like, me don't speak English!
Sakina: I was just like, who you callin retarded? Yeah, and they be like, me no speak no English.
Jenna: And then they be speaking perfect English. I said—
Sakina: I know they act like they can't understand when they about to get in trouble
Dashawna: And then they can't say nothing to your face, they got to be like speaking Spanish.
Jenna: I know, they speak in Spanish.
Sakina: Yes, they all speaking Spanish. I just see them, 'ka ta ta da da da, Sakina!'  
Sakina: I'm like, what you talking bout?  
Dashawna: They don't be saying anything about me.  
Sakina: OK, come, come here.  
Jenna: Come, come here-a.  
Sakina: **Say to me in English. Yeah, say it to me in English.**

With respect to language ideology, it does not matter that the belief in surreptitious English and the trope of Spanish monolingualism are contradictory and that the boundaries between these tropes are discursively permeable. Attitudes, therefore, may contradict, but do not disqualify, so long as the attitudinal content is plausible. In conversation about Spanish, non-Latinos oftentimes incorporate a mock rendering of spoken Spanish. These linguistic representations draw on stereotypes about Spanish phonology, including its ‘machine-gun’ rhythm and simple consonant vowel syllable structure. For example, Sakina, in demonstrating how she overhears her name in Spanish conversations, represents the language with [ka-ta-da-da-da-da-da]. The syllable-timed prosodic rhythm of Spanish is, apparently, linguistically salient to non-Spanish-speakers and is therefore available for social parody. Similarly, Pink tells a story about “catching” Montana speaking Spanish when she called her house and overhearing Montana and her mother converse in Spanish.

Pink: Now, Montana, Montana she be fronting.  
Mia: One time Montana told me she didn’t speak Spanish. And then I caught her.  
She was on her—
Pink: Her mama was just speaking Spanish!
Montana: I said I don’t, I don’t really understand big words.
Mia: "Ello!"
Pink: I was like may I speak, 'OK!'
((Laughter))
Pink: All right. Yeah!
Montana: I told her, I told them I don’t really understand big words, like, I don’t know how to sophisticated in Spanish.
Pink: Montana but yo momma was on the phone, she was like “bluh bluh luh-luh-luh-luh” and you was like “bluh bluh luh-luh-luh-luh.”
Montana: No I was not, that was only a little bit.

In addition to Pink’s phonetic, mock rendering of Spanish (“bluh bluh…”), she also represents the English of Montana’s mother as overly accented. It is possible that the mother answered the phone in Spanish, but this is not clear in Pink’s representation, which uses both English and Spanish phonology – the [ɛ] from the English word ‘hello’ and the monophthongal [o] from the Spanish word ‘aló.’ Mia, who was not actually involved in the phone call, responds by adding “ello,” (phonetically [e-jo]) a hyper-hispanicized (and unrealistic) rendering of the salutation. ‘Ello’ is actually a very rarely used neuter pronominal form (3rd person, singular) that co-occurs only with neuter subjects (eso, lo, aquel, esto). I cannot attribute intentionality to Mia’s utterance, but given that ‘ello’ sounds ambiguously like ‘hello’ / ‘aló’ and is similar to the high-frequency pronominal form ellos (3rd-p, pl, nominative), it was likely an emblematic
usage that contributed to the racialization of the discursive context. Finally, Pink represents the agreement marker ‘O.K.’ with “hispanicized” phonology, including a hyper-backed, monophthongal [o] and short, monophthongal [e]. Lest the reader think I am belaboring the point, I would argue that these renderings jointly produce a context in which the power of representation lies with subjects who do not actually know the language (i.e., monolingual English speakers). I also call the reader’s attention to the laughter that follows the turn-of-talk by Pink that ends in ‘O.K.’

Forms such as these, called “Mock Spanish” by Hill (1993, 2001), in this context, elevate English-speaking subjects by positioning Spanish as either a corrupted form of English or as incoherent linguistic material. Hill (1993, 147) details the use of Spanish among monolingual Anglos in the Southwest U.S., arguing that these adaptations – which she calls “parodic pejoration” – are mobilized in “registers of jocularity, irony, and parody.” Unlike Mock Ebonics, which amplifies the differences between standard and non-standard as a means reinforcing the subordinate status of the latter, Mock Spanish forms racialize Latinos through “indirect indexicality,” which Hill considers “covert racist discourse.” (2001, 455).

Similarly, Mock Spanish contrasts with what van Dijk (1993) terms “elite racist discourse,” which is similar to the use of “disclaimers” as a “semantic move,” as outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2003, 57). Hill, following van Dijk, suggests that although it is possible to say, “I’m not a racist, but I really resent it that all those Mexicans come up
here to have babies so that American taxpayers will support them,” it is not possible to produce forms such as the following (2001, 456):

*I’m not a racist, but no problemo.

*I’m not a racist, but adios, sucker.

The latter forms are pragmatically infelicitous since parodic or mock forms achieve racialization covertly. I observed emblematic and parodic forms of Spanish by non-Latino, English-speaking monolinguals, including staff and students.

While the use of Spanish by Bedlington Latino students is seen by non-Latinos as problematic, either because it inhibits communication (‘they don’t speak English’) or provides a furtive mode of communication (surreptitious English), the use of English by Latinos is not ideologically neutral, particularly when the variety they speak does not correspond with assigned identity and subject position.

PMC: Mmhmm. Right, right, uhm ok, so is there a style of talking that you would say characterizes Latino kids?
Destiny: Yeah, they try, they know they speak Spanish, but then if they come up to us they try and sound all like how we speak, like, black and how like other people be like 'Eh,' and all that. They don’t say, they try and be like, 'hey, yeah,' just trying to talk to us, but really they’re embarrassing theirselves. Trying to act black and you just can’t do that.
PMC: Why do you think they act black?
Destiny: I think, I don’t really know.
There are a number of Latino students at Bedlington, mainly girls, who are generally mute. Graciela and Alma told me about these students early on, and Ms. Kowalski (the assistant principal) acknowledged the problem of silent students when she asked me to translate for the mother of a boy who does not talk. I interviewed a group of five Latino 7th graders who described the silent students and explained why they do not talk.

Andrea: **Algunos hispanos no hablan.**

PMC: Que has dicho, que algunos hispanos no hablan?

Andrea: **No, no hablan,** como

Alfonso: [They’re nervous.]

Milk: [embarrassed]

Alfonso: They’re nervous.

Andrea: Porque, **nunca hablan,** yo nunca

Alfonso: **Like they’re afraid** [that]

PMC: [ni en espanol ni en ingles?]  

Andrea: Uh-huh, **no hablan.**

Alfonso: [cuz they’re afraid.]

Andrea: Cuando le habla, cuando le habla la maestra pues [apenas]

Alfonso: [they’re afraid that that people are really gonna like, that know, like, English really well, they’ll make fun of them.]

PMC: You mean kids who aren’t Latino?

Andrea: [Yes]

Rubi: [yeah]

Alfonso: That’s what they heard last time.
PMC: Really, does that happen? Do people make fun of them?
Alfonso: **Yeah, and like when we speak Spanish, they’re like, ‘speak English, this is America!’**
Andrea: And some people are racist.
Rubi: Sometimes they be like ‘go back to Mexico.’

While most students deal with language ideology and the forces of subjectivization through some degree of conformity or rebellion, these students, form whom language is the crisis of identity, cope by withdrawing.

**Official Prohibitions on Spanish**

A number of students discussed explicit prohibitions on the use of Spanish at Bedlington. The names of three teachers recurred in student stories about Spanish prohibition: Señorita Wilson, the Spanish teacher, Mr. Houston, the AVID teacher, and Mrs. Fowler, the “Life Skills” teacher. I had a long conversation with Milk, the most popular 7th grade Latino boy, and two of his friends, Eric and Jorge, also Latino boys. I asked them to describe when they use English and when they use Spanish.

Eric: Yeah but then they say get back to work cause they think that we’re talking about something bad or something.
Milk: Yeah. Like Life Skills, she doesn’t even want us like, to say a word in Spanish.
PMC: Really? What does she say?
Milk: She’s like, I don’t know what you’re talking about, but we speak English so can ya’ll please speak Spa-um English, not Spanish.

PMC: Really?

Milk: And that’s sorta how we can’t go to the-tomorrow to the-to the um, what’s it called? What are they doing outside?

PMC: So but for the whole Life Skills thing they said that you can’t…

Milk: Speak Spanish. She said it’s dangerous.

PMC: It’s dangerous?

Eric: Yeah cause uh [we’re sew]

Jorge: [She bein’ racist]

Eric: Yeah we’re sewing, and she wants to know that we know the parts in

English cause she doesn’t know if we know them if-we do know them. I don’t

know them in Spanish but now I do in English.

PMC: But I don’t understand why she thinks it’s dangerous.

Milk: Because um maybe you don’t know how to use the machine and you don’t speak-you’re speaking Spanish, and she doesn’t know, like you know, you might like, put your hand in it.

Prohibitions on Spanish-speaking are framed differently by different teachers. Mrs. Fowler, the ‘life skills’ teacher, apparently frames it in terms of personal and group safety. Mr. Houston, the AVID teacher who I discussed at length in the prior chapter, frames it in terms of respect, according to Hector.

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2 Milk is referring here to a pep rally.
PMC: I’ve heard that some teachers don’t like it for students to speak Spanish in class.

Hector: Yeah, but they say it in a good way. Like they tell us, how would you like it if someone speaking in Chinese and you don’t know if they’re talking about you.

PMC: Oh really, someone said that to you?

Hector: Like I have a teacher, Mr. Houston, he says that we have to talk in English because like no one knows Spanish.

Mateo: And you could be talking about them and they don’t know. Know what you’re saying.

Hector: Yeah.

PMC: Hmm-hmmm.

Hector: So like, I understand. Like at lunch or when we go outside or something sometimes we talk in Spanish but like in class we rarely [talk in Spanish]

Mateo: [rarely]

Despite the complicated attitudes about Spanish among non-Latinos, it is entirely possible that Spanish is covertly prestigious (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1972) among Latino Spanish-speakers. I raise this possibility in light of the fact that Spanish is still widely spoken at Bedlington and, in general, Latinos report positive attitudes about Spanish.

Shawny is an African American 7th grader who I interviewed while he was in PASS (in-school suspension), where he spends quite a bit of time for getting into fights. I asked Shawny about what kinds of talk he noticed at Bedlington. Right away, he mentioned “the Mexicans” who “talk their own language,” eventually describing the same class that Milk, Eric, and Jorge described above.
PMC: I’m interested in learning from you if you think there are different styles of talking at school?
Shawny: yeah, I guess you could say that. Like some people, like the Mexicans, they talk their own language to other Mexicans. **We really don’t understand them, so.** We just like “hi” or something like that, but we don’t really hang around with them.

PMC: You said the Mexican kids kinda stick together. Tell me about that.
Shawny: They just hang around each other; they don’t go around nobody else but them. Their own ethnic group. And just talk Spanish. **Except in Mrs. Fowler class, you have to talk English in her class so she can understand.**

PMC: How does she enforce that? What does she do?
Shawny: **She just says, if you speak Spanish you’re not safe.**

PMC: What does that mean?
Shawny: **Like, well, not, if you speak Spanish in her class, like, you’re not safe, because we have stoves and stuff.** Really just everybody talks English but if you talk Spanish, like the Mexicans be talking Spanish, then, um, you probably deemed unsafe. [pause] because, you don’t know what they’re saying. So, she doesn’t really know what they’re saying, so she don’t know if it could be good or bad or what they could be doing. So she just tell everybody just to speak English and everybody can understand each other.

PMC: Do you think that’s a good policy?
D: **Yeah, cuz they speak Spanish, we don’t know what they saying. We don’t know they could be plotting something.**
5.3 Linguistic Variation: Variables and Methods

In order to understand the way that linguistic variation coincides with other social formation processes, I conducted quantitative analysis on four morphological and morphosyntactic features commonly associated with varieties of African American English, but also attested in Latino varieties. I selected variables associated with AAE since the majority of the speakers I interviewed were African American or Latino, and given that African American English is the variety I heard most among students at Bedlington. The four variables I examined are: 3rd person singular –s absence, copula absence, past tense copula leveling, and invariant BE, as illustrated in the following examples:

- 3rd person singular –s absence: The dog bark-ø for The dog barks.
- Copula absence: You ø nasty for You’re nasty or You are nasty.
- Past tense copula leveling: We was at the beach for We were at the beach.
- Invariant BE: My mom be coming home late.

There is no direct equivalent in “standard” varieties of English for the final example provided, but in this context, the invariant form of BE is aspectual and marks the verb ‘coming’ as habitual. Speakers of other varieties of English might mark the habitual aspect using temporal adverbials such as ‘always’ or ‘usually.’ As such, a possible equivalent in non-AAE varieties might be “my mom is always coming home late.”

Analyses of all four features were conducted using the data interface and data-coding (“tabbing”) tool provided by the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis Project.
(Kendall, 2007, 2008, 2009). The SLAAP interface allows the researcher to code variables while listening to archived interview data. Possible linguistic conditioning factors that may influence the realization of a particular feature are provided in SLAAP in drop down menus, yielding data sets that are consistently coded and ready for quantitative analysis. The conditioning factors that SLAAP provides are based on prior sociolinguistic findings for a given variable, as will be discussed in full detail in the sections that follow. For example, linguistic factors that condition the presence or absence of the copula (i.e., independent variables) include preceding grammatical environment (pronoun, noun phrase), plurality (is or are), and following grammatical environment (noun phrase, predicate adjective, locative forms, verb + ing, quotative like, future gonna, etc.). Variationist analysis for these types of linguistic features works by considering every case where the dependent variable could emerge. A ratio of observed cases of the dependent variable to possible cases is then calculated. Although this procedure sounds straightforward, a number of contextual issues make the tabulation of certain variables tricky, as will be discussed below. This general procedure was used for three of the four variables considered here: 3rd person –s absence, copula absence, and past tense copula absence. Invariant BE required a different method of calculation since usage conveys a range semantic and grammatical meanings, making it impossible to analyze possible cases, only those cases of the dependent variable that were actually observed. As such, a rate of usage will be reported for invariant BE.
Statistical tests of significance were conducted for copula absence and verbal –s absence. The rate of use measure for invariant BE does not lend itself to statistical analysis, and the limited number of tokens of past tense copula leveling prevented statistical testing. In all, I observed 784 tokens of the present tense copula (copula absence), 458 tokens of 3rd person singular verb forms (3rd –s absence), 162 tokens of invariant be, and 75 tokens of leveling to was in the past tense.

To study the social patterning of these variables in the Bedlington community, I categorized each speaker according to the following independent factor groups: ethnicity (African American, white, Latino), sex (male, female), grade (6th, 7th, 8th), gang membership (including ‘wannabes’), and popularity. I assigned all students a level of popularity – 1, 2, or 3, from most to least popular – and this judgment was based strictly on my knowledge of the students from ethnographic observation and interviews. In the statistical analysis, popularity levels 2 and 3 were combined, making the distinction one between ‘most popular’ and everyone else. I only analyzed data for the three white students who were interviewed with their African American friends: Jenna, the crosser whose friends are Dashawna and Sakina, and Andrew and Hunter, who is friends with Eddie. As expected, Jenna was the only white student to demonstrate use of any of the linguistic features I examined. These three white speakers were excluded from statistical analysis.
5.3.1 Copula Deletion

Variation in the copula between full, contracted, and zero (absent) forms is one of the most well-attested features of varieties of African American English. Rickford (1999, 63), for example, writes that “the AAVE copula is a showcase variable in American dialectology and quantitative sociolinguistics. It is one of the most studied variables in the quantitative paradigm and one of the best-known to linguists in other subfields.” In the United States, numerous studies have examined copula absence in African American communities throughout the country (Labov 1969; Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972; Wolfram 1974; Baugh 1980; Rickford 1999). It has also provided valuable evidence in the debates over the possible creole origins of African American English; Poplack and Sankoff (1987), for example, have studied copula absence in the so-called ‘black transplant’ communities from the United States. Rickford (1999, 61) points out that “AAVE\(^3\) resembles some Caribbean creoles in its patterns of copula absence, especially as effected by following grammatical categories.” Although some Southern white varieties of English show modest amounts of *are* deletion, only African American varieties have been found to delete *is* (Wolfram 1974; Bailey & Maynor 1985).

Wolfram (1969, 166) notes that “in the quantitative measurement of copula absence, it is essential to separate environments where there is no variability from those where there is legitimate variation between the presence and absence of the copula.”

---

\(^3\) AAVE, African American Vernacular English. For a discussion on the issues involved in labeling this variety, see Green (2002, 5) and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006, 211-13).
Failure to distinguish these environments would skew the figures of systematic variation.” That is, considering tokens in contexts where the copula is obligatory will yield a false picture of the way the copula varies. Correspondingly, much work has been undertaken to establish where realization of the copula is variable and which forms can be taken. Blake (1997) presents a meta-analysis of the methods used to analyze the copula in African American English, paying particular attention to “count” and “don’t count” cases. There is now general consensus about the following environments and grammatical forms.

- Preterit forms (was / wasn’t) are categorically present, and therefore not included.

- First person singular (am) is categorically present.

- Is and are may alternate with contracted in full forms, but only in environments where contraction is possible (Wolfram & Thomas 2002). This excludes the copula in clause-final position.

- Copula forms in homorganic environments are not included, since it is impossible to distinguish, for instance, contracted ‘s from an initial s (e.g., She’s sad vs. She sad).

- Questions and ain’t are excluded.

- Invariant forms of BE are excluded. Blake (1997, 70) points out that He be bad is not semantically equivalent to He ø bad. Further, invariant forms such as BE in You got to be good cannot be contracted or deleted.

In the Bedlington corpus, I followed these exclusions, taking into analysis those tokens of is and are in contractable environments. Non-absent forms include contracted forms (He’s mean) and full forms (He is mean). Each token considered was coded according to
copula form (is or are) and actual realization (full, contracted, zero). I also coded each token for preceding grammatical environment and following grammatical environment.

5.3.2 Third Person Singular –s Absence

Like copula absence, deletion of the inflectional morpheme –s on present tense verbs for third-person subjects is a “core” feature of African American English, having been studied prolifically in seminal variation studies such as Labov et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969), and Fasold (1972). Since that era, 3rd person –s absence has been examined in countless studies of African American English. Rates of inflectional –s absence from selected previous studies are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Verbal –s Absence in Prior Studies of AAE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Verbal –s Absence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harlem (adults, informal)</td>
<td>Labov et al. 1968</td>
<td>Working class: &lt; 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington D.C.</td>
<td>Fasold 1972</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>Wolfram 1969</td>
<td>Middle class: 1-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working class: 57-71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde County, N.C.</td>
<td>Wolfram &amp; Thomas 2002</td>
<td>51-60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For my analysis of inflectional (verbal) –s absence at Bedlington, the dependent variable was coded for presence or absence (i.e. The dog barks vs. The dog bark-ø). Independent variables included preceding phonological environment (vowel or consonant), following phonological environment (vowel, consonant, or pause), and grammatical subject type (noun phrase, pronoun).
5.3.3 Past Tense Copula Leveling

Though the copula is not prone to deletion in the preterit, the inflectional paradigm, in which was is used for 1st and 3rd persons singular and were for everything else in non-vernacular varieties, can undergo leveling to was. The result is a single form – was – throughout the number / person inflectional paradigm, or variation between was and were where was would be expected in non-vernacular varieties. Invariant was has been documented to be a feature of African American English (Labov et al., 1968; Weldon 1994; Wolfram & Thomas 2002), and generally of English vernaculars around the world (Chambers 2003). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2003, 210) remark that alternative patterns for preterit copula leveling have been documented, including varieties where were is the ‘pivot form’ in positive and negative utterances (e.g., I were home; I weren’t home.).

For the analysis of preterit was-leveling, I coded all possible instances of leveling to was (e.g., We was there for We were there). Because previous studies (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1994; Tagliamonte & Smith 1999; Wolfram & Sellers 1999) of preterit copula have shown that a subject constraint may condition leveling, with was favored by subject noun phrases more than subject pronouns, I also coded each instance for subject.

5.3.4 Invariant Be

Deletion of the copula (are only), preterit copula leveling to was, and verbal –s absence, while prolific in African American English, are also found, if sporadically, in other vernacular varieties, including some Southern white dialects. Wolfram (1991:108)
provides a list of eight linguistic features that seem to be distinctive or nearly distinctive to African American English. Two distinctive features of AAE are high frequency for many speakers: *is* absence, which I have already discussed, and the use of invariant *be*. The invariant form is commonly used to mark habitual aspect, which is accomplished in other English varieties through the use of adverbs or adverbial phrases. In addition, Alim (2001) shows that invariant *be* can also be used for existential emphasis. Green (2002, 47-54) provides an overview of the aspectual uses of *be* in AAE, noting that it is never inflected and never deleted; removing an aspectually-marked *be* from an utterance would render it ambiguous or change the meaning. She offers the following examples to illustrate this point: (a) *Bruce run*; (b) *Bruce ø running*; (c) *Bruce be running* (47). Each sentence is semantically disambiguated from the others in African American English; (a) and (b) show shades of present tense (‘runs,’ ‘is running,’ respectively), whereas (c) marks habituality (‘usually runs’ or ‘is usually running').

For the analysis of invariant *be* among Bedlington speakers, I recorded every instance of uninflected *be*, excluding infinitives (*to be*) and invariant forms with co-occurring verbal markers and adverbials (*will be, would be, should be, must be*). Subjects of the verb were coded for animacy (animate, inanimate, existential). If the habitual form occurred with another verb, that verb was coded for transitivity (transitive, intransitive). Predicate complements were also coded for each token of *be* (predicatie nominative, predicate adjective, verb + *ing*, prepositional phrase).
5.4 Linguistic Variation: Analysis

Figure 19 presents the percentages of absence (3rd person –s, copula) and leveling (past tense copula) for African American and Latino Bedlington students interviewed. Interactional effects for coded social and linguistic independent variables will be presented in the sections below corresponding to each variable. Only statistically significant or nearly significant interaction effects will be presented as graphs. Figure 19 provides only a cursory look at the use of these vernacular features, and I encourage the reader not to draw many conclusions, as there is significant intra-group variation. In general, the graph indicates that core features of AAE are used in the speech of Latinos and African Americans at Bedlington. With the exception of Jenna, the 7th grade white crosser, these features are categorically absent in the speech of the white students at Bedlington who I interviewed. For each of the variables reported below, I will provide raw data (N, percent absence) for Jenna’s speech for the purposes of comparison. The only African American not included in the quantitative tabulations is Taylor, the 8th grader, who I introduced in the prior chapter, who referred to herself as an “Oreo.” The only other crosser for whom I have linguistic data is Montana, the 7th grader from Guatemala whose friendship group is comprised of popular African American girls. Data for Montana is included in the quantitative tabulation, since the features are found in the speech of Latinos and African Americans.
5.4.1 Copula Deletion

Table 5 presents the main effects for copula absence in the speech of the Bedlington students in this analysis. Two logistic regression analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 17. Both models included all social and linguistic main effects as reported in Table 5. In the table factor scores denoted as (*) are significant at a p=.05 level; (**) are significant at p =.01 level, and (†) are marginal, p = .06. Ethnicity, popularity, and following environment were all contributed to deletion, with African Americans, unpopularity, and several environments (predicate adjective, noun phrase, and verb + ing) favoring the deleted forms. Following are examples extracted from the data.
illustrating copula deletion in the context of various following grammatical environments. Underlined forms favored deletion.

(a) *Don’t tell nobody, but they ø having problems.* (verb + ing)
(b) *You ø gonna make the lord even more mad!* (gonna)
(c) *And he ø gay too.* (predicate adjective)
(d) *They ø perverts, for real.* (noun phrase)
(e) *When they ø in school.* (locative)
(f) *She ø like, “just don’t do it again.”* (quotative like)

The second model included all possible two-way interactions between social variables and linguistic variables. Two interaction effects were significant – ethnicity and sex (Figure 20) and ethnicity and copular form (Figure 21). African American males and females delete the copular more than male and female Latinos. Within ethnic groups, the sex division is a mirror image, with African American females deleting more than males and Latino males deleting more than females. With respect to ethnicity and copular form, African Americans show the expected pattern, with more deletion of *are* than *is*. Latinos, on the other hand, show a rare pattern in which *is* gets deleted more than *are*.
Table 5: Main Effects for Copula Absence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Type</th>
<th>Factor group</th>
<th>Factor level</th>
<th>Percentage Absence (N)</th>
<th>Total N of tokens</th>
<th>Factor score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Preceding environment</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>23.4% (109)</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
<td>18.4% (32)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is/Are</td>
<td>Is</td>
<td>18.7% (53)</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are</td>
<td>25.1% (86)</td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Following environment</td>
<td>Predicate adj</td>
<td>18% (51)</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
<td>14% (23)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ving</td>
<td>38.5% (40)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>17.2% (10)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>38.7% (12)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.66*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet like</td>
<td>29.4% (5)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>14.7% (35)</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>26.6% (106)</td>
<td>399</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19.2% (56)</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24.6% (83)</td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Unpopular</td>
<td>26.3% (94)</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>16.8% (47)</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.1% (129)</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15.3% (12)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 20: Percent Copula Absence by Ethnicity and Sex.

Figure 21: Percent Copula Absence by Form (is, are) and Ethnicity.
5.4.2 Verbal –s Absence

To examine interactions among independent variables, two logistic regression analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 17. Both models included all social and linguistic main effects as reported in Table 6. In addition, the first model included all possible two-way interactions among the social variables. This analysis yielded no significant interaction effects, although the interaction between ethnicity and sex approached significance. Specifically, among Latinos, rates of absence did not vary across males (23.6) and females (18.4). Among African Americans however, rates showed more variability across sex, with males (14%) showing lower rates of verbal –s absence than females (30.7%). This non-significant relationship is depicted in Figure 22.

The second model included all possible two-way interactions between social variables and linguistic variables. This analysis yielded two significant interactions. First, an interaction between ethnicity and subject type emerged, reflecting that among Latinos, rates of verbal –s absence were higher in noun phrases (32.3) than pronouns (20.4). The opposite was true for African Americans, whose rates of absence were slightly higher in pronouns (27.8) than noun phrases (25%). This relationship is depicted in Figure 23.

Finally, a significant interaction emerged between following environment and gang membership. It should be noted that all gang members (4) in this corpus are Latinos. For non-gang members (all African Americans and non-gang affiliated
Latinos), absence was higher when the following phonetic context was a consonant (27.5) than a pause (22.2). For gang members, absence was higher in pre-pausal contexts (50) than pre-consonantal ones (31.1). Although statistically significant, some caution should be given to the latter effect due to the low number of pre-pausal tokens for gang members (n = 4). Figure 24 depicts this relationship.

Table 6: Main Effects for Verbal –s Absence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Type</th>
<th>Factor group</th>
<th>Factor level</th>
<th>Percentage Absence (N)</th>
<th>Total N of tokens</th>
<th>Factor score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>24.4% (84)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
<td>29.1% (16)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preceding environment</td>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>26.3% (86)</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vowel</td>
<td>20.5% (18)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clause</td>
<td>Matrix</td>
<td>24.5% (95)</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>33.3% (9)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Following environment</td>
<td>Pause</td>
<td>25.0% (10)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>28.2% (69)</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vowel</td>
<td>19.2% (25)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>22.3% (43)</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>.58*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>27.5% (61)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21.4% (40)</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28.1% (64)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Not popular</td>
<td>22.3% (54)</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>.55†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>28.9% (50)</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang member</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>29.2% (80)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36.9% (24)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 22: Verbal Absence by Ethnicity and Sex (not statistically significant).
Figure 23: Verbal $s$ Absence by Ethnicity and Subject Type.
5.4.3 Past Tense Copula Leveling

Figure 24: Verbal –s Absence by Gang Affiliation and Following Phonetic Environment.
As I wrote in the introduction, the limited number of tokens of leveling to *was* prohibited statistical analysis. The number of tokens and percentages of leveling according to linguistic and social factors are presented in Table 7. I found leveling to *was* for all possible person/number permutations, though most leveling was with 1st person plural (*we*) and 3rd person plural pronoun (*they*). This was commensurate with the overall distribution of tokens (leveled and non-leveled), which is probably a reflection of the topics of conversation (i.e., friends talking about each other and about others exogenous to the conversation). There are not enough tokens to make any assessment about whether or not a subject constraint between NPs and PNs is operational.

With respect to social factors, the main finding is that Latinos level to *was* in the preterit far less than African Americans. This is interesting in light of the fact that their levels of verbal –s absence were similar, and for copula absence, Latinos deleted less than African Americans, but the difference is not as precipitous. There may be a slight effect of popularity, with popular students leveling more than non-popular students but, again, more data is needed.
Table 7: Raw Data for Preterit Leveling to *was*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Type</th>
<th>Factor group</th>
<th>Factor level</th>
<th>Percentage leveling (N)</th>
<th>Total N of tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; plural</td>
<td>19.1% (9)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; singular</td>
<td>50% (1)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; plural pronoun</td>
<td>30.8% (8)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; plural NP</td>
<td>20% (2)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ex there/it</td>
<td>100% (1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>37.7% (20)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20.5% (9)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28.6% (12)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Not popular</td>
<td>11.6% (5)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>37.2% (16)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang member</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.6% (20)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.4 Invariant *be*

In all, I observed 162 tokens of invariant *be* across all recorded interviews. This excludes a few parodic uses of *be* by white kids (and Eddie) who were imitating “ghetto talk.” Exactly half of the total tokens (81) come from one interview I conducted with Joel, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade gangbanger I talked about earlier in this chapter. His unusually high usage of invariant *be* warrants some explanation.
First, the verbal construction that Joel uses most frequently for the present tense is BE + V-ing (e.g., be saying, be wearing, etc.). Almost every present tense action assumes this form. The high frequency may, in part, be a reflection of the grammatical temporality of the interview, a sort of ‘generic present,’ where Joel described his observations of Bedlington in general. These forms would seem to mark the habitual aspect. The following are examples culled from my interview with Joel illustrating his use of ‘habitual, generic present.’

(a) Mostly he be somewhere else.

(b) That group prolly be popular.

(c) They be with each other.

Not all of Joel’s uses of invariant be, however, mark habitual aspect, or even present tense. The following examples show be marking either a single, non-habitual event or points in time that are outside the temporal range marked by be in the speech of other students. While the use in (b) could mark habituality, I include it here because its semantic status is not entirely clear.

(a) Some dudes, they be taught me that language.

(b) He said there was gonna be three police be checking on me.

(c) We be knowing each other for like a week.
In addition, Joel uses be forms with stative verbs, which was very rare among other students, who use be with non-stative (activity, event) verbs. The following examples illustrate this usage:

(a) People be thinking that fun.
(b) You’re supposed to be knowing Spanish.
(c) And the cortez, they be costing $80 too.
(d) The black, they be thinking they more powerful.

Finally, Joel’s use of be forms were frequently paired with co-occurring adverbials, including supposedly, too much, and just. Too much is interesting, as it seems to have a semantic range that includes ‘quantity marker and ‘positive evaluation.’ The latter could be a calque based on the Spanish demasiado (‘too much’) that can be used as a quantity marker, as in English (e.g. ‘too much homework’) but may also be used in vernacular Mexican Spanish to indicate a positive assessment (e.g., Me gustó demasiado; ‘I liked it too much [a lot].’). The following examples illustrate the most frequent co-occuring adverbials.

(a) Supposedly the Blacks be having more cooler stuff.
(b) I just be telling him we will never get to that.
(c) I be drawing too much and I be under a car too much, too.
(d) They be hanging out too much with Montana.
Among the other students, there is a wide range of vernacularity with respect to invariant *be*. Dashawna, whose friends include Jenna and Sakina, uses *be* prolifically with a variety of verbal complements and subjects. The following example shows Dashawna using *be* with two different subject types (3rd person singular, animate and inanimate, and first person singular), two different verbal complements (predicate adjective and verb + ing) and with the verb + ing, stative and non-stative verbs.

*Anthony be saying stuff but I don’t be thinking it be true.*

Other speakers use *be* only in specific grammatical constructions. For example, Keandra (7th grade African American) and Rubi (7th grade, Latina) only show *be* with quotative *like*, as in:

(a) Some white girls be like ‘oh my god, I broke a nail.’ (Keandra)

(b) I really be like ‘why you calling him black when you’re black?’ (Keandra)

(c) Sometimes they be like ‘go back to Mexico.’ (Rubi)

(d) And I be like ‘I’m not from Mexico.’ (Rubi)
Two other Latino students use *be* only with quotatives: Lazy, an 8th grader, and Mateo, the 6th grader from Argentina. Other than Keandra, no African American student demonstrates quotative-only invariant *be*. Kohn and Franz (2009) report on the use of *quotative be like* in the speech of adolescent Latino and African American speakers in two North Carolina communities. Finding extensive use in both groups, they argue that *
*quotative be like* is a grammaticalized marker of reported speech in these varieties.

Table 8 presents a list of speakers in the Bedlington corpus, the number of invariant *be* tokens, if any, and a rate of usage. The table orders speakers according to rate of usage, highest to lowest. Speakers with no observed tokens are listed in alphabetical order, by grade. A higher rate does not necessarily indicate more observed instances of invariant *be*, since the rate is a function of time (e.g., five tokens in 25 minutes will yield a higher rate than 6 tokens in 50 minutes). The rate measure is calculated in SLAAP and predicts the number of times an invariant form would be used in an hour, based on observed use in observed time. This measure should be taken with great caution, however, since there are no controls on independent situational or conversational variables across interviews. Students interviewed in groups had fewer turns-at-talk each than students interviewed individually, for example. Conversational topic and narrative structure also varied greatly across interviews. In an interview with Pallasa and Lazy, two 8th grade wannabe gang girls, Pallasa spoke mostly Spanish, while Lazy switched between Spanish and English.
Table 8: Token Count and Rate of Use for Invariant *be*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rate (N / hour)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julio -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>87.37</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashawna -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>29.06</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17.09</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15.26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawny -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14.86</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubi -7</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>13.68</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krystal -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12.46</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trix -6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12.33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy -8</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo -6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana -7</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfonso -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keandra -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakina -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis -6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley -6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordo -6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector -6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia -6</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin -6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie -6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole -6</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samiyah -6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.C. -6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea -7</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie -7</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variationist analysis provided here shows that the sociolinguistic patterning of African American English at Bedlington is complex. While Latinos and African Americans recruit from the same pool of linguistic resources, the way in which those linguistic resources are deployed is ethnically nuanced. For example, African Americans and Latinos both use invariant *be* constructions, but the use by Latinos seems somewhat more restricted to quotative contexts, whereas the range of contexts for African Americans appears wider. African Americans used past tense copula-leveling, verbal –*s* absence, and copula absence more than Latinos, but there are additional social and linguistic difference between the groups for each feature. For instance, a significant gender difference was observed between Latinos and African Americans for the use of verbal –*s* absence and copula absence, where African American females used the vernacular features more than African American males, but Latinos more than Latinas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>#be</th>
<th>#absent</th>
<th>#cop_absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunter -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa -7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paco -7</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice -8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payasa</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payton -8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca -8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha -8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor -8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relatively low use of AAE features by Latinas at Bedlington may be related to the use of Spanish, as there is some evidence that girls used Spanish more and in more contexts than boys. With respect to copula absence, the sociolinguistic literature points to *are* as the more commonly deleted copular form. This holds for African Americans at Bedlington, but the opposite is true for Latinos, who are more likely to delete *is*. The grammatical context favoring deletion of verbal -*s* is also significantly different between Latinos and African Americans, with the former group deleting more with noun phrase subjects and the latter more for pronominal subjects.

Differences in the use of linguistic resources are effects of the processes of subjectivization and subject formation that take place both within and outside of the institutional context. Even insofar as individual subjects consciously or “agentively” make use of these features to “construct” their identities, the language features they use – like the identities themselves – have histories of meaning *prior to* their deployment by any given subject in any given moment. That is, categories such as ‘popularity’ and ‘nerdiness’ were meaningful prior to any individual inhabitation of them. Further, that the meaning of those categories and the linguistic features tied to them changes slightly with every use or inhabitation does not undo the histories of meaning that made those categories and features available in the current moment in the first place. Moreover, the very obligation to ‘have’ an identity, to ‘be’ a type of entity, and, indeed, to speak that identity using the resources inscribed by it is itself a culturally and historically
determined act. Identities – ‘popular,’ ‘Mexican,’ ‘nerdy,’ ‘sporty’ – are deeply important to the subjects who dwell within them, but as attachments to subject positions, they are temporary.

5.5 Conclusion: Language and Subject Formation

This dissertation has offered a sustained, interdisciplinary engagement with linguistics and poststructuralist theory of subject formation. Over the course of this engagement, I have made connections with a wide range of intellectual traditions and academic disciplines, including linguistic historiography, feminist theory, variationist sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. In the process of assimilating and integrating material from these traditions, I have made an ongoing meta-disciplinary commentary that has performed its own critique of disciplinarity through its refusal of the boundaries that demarcate consolidated forms of knowledge.

The primary purpose of this interdisciplinary engagement and its attendant meta-disciplinary commentary has been to open up an intellectually rigorous way to escape identitarianism. The specific pathway I have identified involves a critical integration of language study and poststructural theory of subject formation that has yielded a framework grounded in speaking subjects.

I began this dissertation in a somewhat atypical manner. Rather than stating a problem and looking forward, I stated a problem and spent quite a bit of time looking
backward into the history of the discipline. This move may have been unexpected, in light of two facts: 1) that the history of linguistics has very little to say about identity qua identity and 2) contemporary linguistics disarticulates its past so thoroughly that at times it seems as though there was no such thing as linguistics prior to 1963 or 1957 or, perhaps, 1933, depending on one’s theoretical orientation. However, I was committed to the idea that the way disciplines produce their objects – through epistemology, theory, and even ideology – has everything to do with the theoretical scaffolding that gets erected around those objects. Harris (1980, 55) consolidates this view in the context of language.

...a concept of a language cannot stand isolated in an intellectual no-mans land. It is inevitably part of some more intricate complex of views about how certain verbal activities stand in relation to other human activities, and hence, ultimately, about man’s [sic] place in society and in nature. The moment we try to ask ourselves what a language is without situating the question in such a perspective, we ask a question which may sound as if it leaves open a whole range of possible answers, but to which it turns out to be impossible to give any answer at all.

I would add that theorizing language beyond an “intellectual no-man’s land” also involves identifying the disciplinary, historical, and epistemological conditions under which a particular intellectual project is articulated. Wiegman (1995, 1) puts it more concisely: “As critical debates about disciplinary study in the past twenty years have stressed, the practices we engage to define and explain social complexities condition whatever conclusions we might reach.”
In Chapter 1, I attempted to trace the conditions that made identity possible and influential by focusing on three periods: pre-Chomskyan approaches to language, the Cartesian turn, and the Labovian turn. I argued that the evacuation of social analysis and the implementation of Cartesian mentalism by Chomsky set up an intellectual environment in which the reintroduction of sociality into linguistics would necessarily be bounded by the terms of generativism. It was under these conditions sociolinguistics dropped its theoretical anchor within the generatively restricted discipline, thus limiting the possibility for interdisciplinary engagement and the development of sophisticated social theory of language.

In Chapter 2, as a means of illustrating poststructuralist theory of subject formation, I worked through a limited archive of U.S. feminist theory. I showed how U.S. feminism and, later, feminist theory shifted its theoretical-epistemological starting point from one that questioned patriarchy, the origins of women’s oppression and, in general, took women as the subject of feminism, to one in which women were as effects of historical and cultural processes that produced the possibility of linguistics. It particular, I introduce the work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault who offer, in complementary ways, a productive framework for theorizing subject formation within the context of language. I argued that linguists, by focusing their attention on identity, have dwelled long enough on the surface of the relationship between language and its users. In addition, I argued that by continuing to study identities as causes rather than
effects, we run the risk of continuing to dwell on the surface, provided that identities will always proliferate in new and unpredictable ways according to the conditions of their possibility. I suggested, instead, that linguists and other language scholars think more broadly about the role of language in the production of subjectivity, including, but not limited to, identity. For scholars in the humanistic disciplines already familiar with poststructuralist theory of subject formation, I suggested that engagement with the empirical study of language could be a productive way of grounding theory and providing empirical data. I noted that although Butler and Foucault have given contemporary theory subjects, they did so without giving much subjectivity. Engagement with linguistics and other language-oriented disciplines provides a mechanism to populate theory of subject formation with subjects who have subjectivities.

In Chapter 2 I also discussed the linguistic turn in theory, which created a conjuncture between philosophy, critical theory, comparative literature and related fields. I argued that linguistics could contribute to and benefit from engaging with the critical conversations about the subject and subjectivity that the linguistic turn instantiated. I suggested that engagement with this conversation could help linguistics move past the problem of the Western liberal (or ‘humanist’ or ‘modernist’) subject, which identitarianism reinscribes through convergence with neo-liberal politics and Enlightenment philosophy. The philosophical anchoring in Enlightenment humanism is
problematic, I maintained, because of its claims of universality, a self-constituted, ‘free’ individual, and independence of social processes. I outlined several Foucauldian theoretical formations that are productive for making the move from identitarianism to subject formation, including discourse, biopower, disciplinary power, governmentality, and subjectivization. I also attempted to disambiguate a set of terms crucial for this framework: identity, subject position, and subjectivity.

Within sociolinguistics, and particularly within variationism, the individual is an undervalued point of analysis. This is problematic for thinking about language and subject formation, provided that subjectivity is necessarily an individual attribute, at the same time that it is a social one. However, some sociolinguists have begun to reconsider the role of the individual in linguistic analysis. For example, Wolfram and Thomas (2002, 165), preeminent variationists, call for a re-examination “the role of the individual in language variation on a methodological and theoretical level.” In Chapter 3 I attempted to show how individual-level analyses can be theoretically productive by presenting a case study that drew upon poststructuralist social theory without compromising variationist techniques or linguistic sophistication. With ‘Maria’s’ story, I wrote against the tradition of identity, in which the linguistic changes I presented would be understood as identity choices. Instead, I placed the analysis on social processes, including racialization, interpellation, and ultimately, social formation. Rather than contending that Maria used language to ‘construct’ or project her identity through social
practice, I argued that language was evidence of the effects of the social processes operating upon her, *even though* her language is also clearly related to her identity.

Coupland (2007, 110-111) offers a useful distinction between projecting an identity and inhabiting an identity that is subjectively-embedded. He also offers a measured critique of practice- and descriptivist-approaches to language and identity, which both have currency in contemporary sociolinguistic theory.

> Projecting a social identity is not the same as feeling or living a social identity with personal investment in it and felt ownership of it – if identities can in fact be ‘owned.’ The subjective/affective/affiliative dimension easily gets lost in practice-oriented theories of social identity, just as practice and achievement, and process as a whole tend to get lost in both descriptivist and cognitive approaches.

Much of the discussion in linguistics around social practice and ‘doing identity’ has to do, naturally, with the question of agency. For this, I turned to Butler, who considers agency to be *recognition* of determinate constraints on the part of subjects. Maria’s agentive act, I claimed, was not in changing her language and forms of ethnic stylization, but in recognizing the context in which these changes were subjectively necessary. If her act of agency is recognition, her ‘identity work’ was allowing the requisite identity formation, whose terms were in place prior to Maria’s inhabitation of them, to attach to her subject position.

In Chapter 4, I introduced my ethnographic study of Bedlington Middle School, a project designed to examine up close the role of language in the processes of social formation. Following Foucault’s (1967, xix) injunction that “discourse is something that
necessarily extends beyond language,” I examined the institutional discourses of ‘choice’ and ‘exchange value,’ analyzing evidence of their manifestation on campus and paying attention to the effects of those discourses on the way students frame the terms of their conversations. In addition to institutional discourses, I considered the subjectivizing effects of physical space and interpellative forces. My focus on the minutia of sociality at Bedlington was intended to facilitate the analysis of social processes, which both produce subjects who speak (students) and subjects who do not (Graciela and Alma).

In the final chapter, I considered students’ talk about language, which I analyzed as manifestations of language ideology, as a disciplinary force. As Bonfiglio (2002, 17) argues, “…a particular dialect or pronunciation has no ontological status per se; its status is acquired by its association with prestigious images and figures.” Through detailed discourse analysis, I examined the ways in which ways of speaking at Bedlington achieve their respective statuses through the constant recycling of language ideology in daily conversation. I also analyzed parodic and mock forms of African American English and Spanish and considered their role in the elevation of certain [mostly white] subjects. Latinos and African Americans also parodied African American and Latino Englishes, respectively, underscoring the hierarchizing, disciplinary effects of language ideology. I provided examples of a number of “crossers” for whom language was the crisis of identity. Some crossers found themselves justifying why they abandoned their first language (Montana) while for others the crisis was negotiating the
use of the right dialect – and all its semiotic, representational baggage – at the right time with the right people. At the end of the chapter, I looked at the social and linguistic patterning of four core features of African American English in the speech of Latino and African American students. The social patterning was complex, with ethnicity, sex, and popularity playing different conditioning roles on the realization of different dependent variables. This sociolinguistic complexity reflects the conditions and coincidences of history and culture that produced the current historical-cultural moment, the subjects who inhabit it, and the materials and artifacts of subjectivity. I will end this dissertation by providing a final, short quotation from a recent book, *Style: Language Variation and Identity* (2007, 110-111; 188), written by a sociolinguist – Nikolas Coupland – that I have cited throughout this work.

The future agenda for sociolinguistic stylistics should be to analyze the social conditions in which ways of speaking come to be naturalized or demanded of speakers.

This gives me hope that the interdisciplinary engagements I have made in this work will be intelligible and theoretically and practically useful. To Coupland’s suggestion I would only add that a complementary agenda should be to analyze the social conditions in which ways of *being* come to be naturalized or demanded of discursive subjects. The conjunction of these two agendas is the intervention I have imagined making with this outline of speaking subjects.
Appendix A

Parental Permission Form

My name is Phillip Carter and I am a graduate student at Duke University. I would like your child to take part in my research, which is about the way that adolescents interact with one another, and how they talk to one another about those interactions. I’m interested in learning how adolescents use language to make friends and to talk about others who are and are not in their friendship groups.

During the course of the Spring 2009 semester, I will be spending quite a bit of time at _______Middle School. During that time, I’ll be observing the everyday routines of students to help me understand how students use language to do normal, everyday things, like planning after school activities and talking to friends. Eventually, I’d also like to talk to students about their everyday experiences. If you agree that your child may participate in research, I will ask you child if he or she is willing to talk with me. If your child agrees, we will talk during lunch hour or at another time and place at the school that we agree on ahead of time. There we will talk for about thirty minutes about your child’s peer group, who is in it, and who is not in it. I will audio-record our conversation.

Following our first interview, I may want to talk to your child again, possibly with some of your child’s friends. I will probably ask your child questions about his/her
friendship group and the friendship groups of his/her classmates. I might also ask about who your child thinks is “cool” and who isn’t “cool.” I may also find out other private things about your child’s life and I will protect your child’s privacy in the following ways:

1. I will not let other people listen to the tapes or read transcripts or notes based on our conversation unless your child gives me permission for them to do so. I will keep the recordings and writings locked up in a safe place in my home, where only I can access them. I will not tell your child’s friends, teachers, or family members what is said in our conversations.

2. I also will not ask you child about sensitive subjects. If you child brings up a subject inappropriate for their age, I will change the topic of conversation.

3. In writing and talking about my study, I will never use your child’s name or any other names that could give away their identity. Your child will choose a name that I will use to refer to him/her. I will also use invented names for other people in your child’s life so that no one can use that information to figure out who he/she is. Papers with your child’s real name on them, including this form and a paper reminding me what his/her invented name is—will be locked up in my home, separately from each other and from the tape-recordings and transcripts. In addition, the note reminding me what your child’s invented name is will only have his/her first name on it.

After my research is complete, I will likely save my research notes and our recorded conversations for use in future research. I will protect everyone’s privacy in all future projects in the same way that I will protect it during this study.

It is completely your choice whether to allow your child to talk with me. I will not interview children who do not have permission. If you decide to give your
permission, then it is also your child’s free choice. Your child might choose not to talk
with me, even if you give your permission. Your child can also choose to talk with me,
and can decide to answer some questions and not others, or can decide to stop at any
time. Your child’s choices will have absolutely no effect on his or her standing at school.
In fact, the teachers and staff at the school will not know who decided to participate and
who decided not to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, you may call me, Phillip Carter,
at_____. You may also contact my faculty supervisor, Professor Julie Tetel at ______. If
you agree that your child may take part in this research, please return a signed copy of
this form to me in the stamped envelope or give it to your child to return to me. Please
keep the second copy of the form so that you have this information about my research
and how to reach me.

Your signature below indicates that you give your child permission to participate in the
study.

Name of your child:___________________________________________________

1. I agree that my child may take part in this research.

Parent/Guardian signature:_______________________ Date:__________
2. I give permission for parts of transcripts of conversations with my child to be used for teaching purposes and for presentation of the research at conferences. I understand that my child will not be identified.

   Parent/Guardian signature:_______________________ Date:__________

3. I give permission for samples of recorded conversations with my child to be played at professional research conferences. I understand that my child will not be identified.

   Parent/Guardian signature:_______________________ Date:__________
Appendix B

Carta para los Padres

Mi nombre es Philip Carter y soy un estudiante de post-graduado de la Universidad de Duke. Me gustaría que su hijo participara en un estudio que estoy realizando sobre la manera en que los adolescentes interactuan y como se comunican entre ellos. Estoy interesado en aprender como utilizan el lenguaje para hacer amigos y hablar sobre otros que están o no en sus grupos de amigos.

Durante el semestre de la primavera del 2009, pasaré bastante tiempo en ______Middle School. En ese periodo, observaré las rutinas diarias de los estudiantes para entender cómo usan el lenguaje para hacer cosas normales como planear las actividades escolares o charlar con los amigos. Eventualmente, me gustaría hablar con los estudiantes sobre sus experiencias diarias. Si Usted está de acuerdo en que su hijo/a participe en este estudio, le pediré que hablemos durante la hora del almuerzo o en algún otro momento en la escuela. Hablaremos una media hora sobre su grupo de adolescentes, quien está o no en su grupo. Grabaré esta conversación.

Después de nuestro encuentro, es posible que quiera hablar con su hijo/a otra vez, y tal vez con sus amigos también. Es probable que le pregunte a su hijo/a sobre sus amistades y las amistades de sus compañeros de clase. También le preguntaré sobre quien es ‘cool’ o quien no lo es. Le haré otras preguntas sobre temas privados en la vida de su hijo/a. Protejeré su privacidad de la siguiente manera:
1. No dejaré que otras personas escuchen las cintas o lean las transcripciones o las notas basadas en nuestras conversaciones a no ser que su hijo/a me de permiso para hacerlo. Mantendré estas grabaciones o escritos bajo llave, en un lugar seguro en mi casa, al que solo yo tengo acceso. No divulgaré el contenido de estas conversaciones ni a maestros, ni a amigos, o a familiares.

2. No le haré preguntas inapropiadas a su hijo/a. Si su hijo/a saca un tema que no es apropiado para su edad, cambiaré el tema de la conversación.

3. Al escribir o hablar sobre mi estudio, nunca usaré el nombre de su hijo/a o ninguno otro nombre por el que se pueda deducir su identidad. Su hijo/a inventará un nombre por el que yo me referiré a ella o él. También inventaré otros nombres para las otras personas en la vida de su hijo/a para que nadie pueda usar la información para saber de quien se trata. Los papeles con los nombres verdaderos de su hijo/a, inclusive esta forma y otro que me recordará cuáles son los nombres inventados estarán bajo llave en mi casa, separados de las grabaciones y transcripciones. Adicionalmente, la nota recordándome cual es el nombre inventado de su hijo/a tendrá solo su nombre, no su apellido.

Después que mi estudio esté terminado, es posible que guarde mis notas y grabaciones para usarlos en estudios futuros. Protegeré la privacidad de las personas en futuros estudios de la misma manera en la que lo haré en este.

Es enteramente su opción permitir que su hijo/a hable conmigo. No me encontraré con aquellos estudiantes que no tengan permiso. Si Usted decide dar permiso, el paso siguiente será la libre opción de su hijo/a. Su hijo/a puede decidir no hablar conmigo, incluso si Usted dá su permiso.
Su hijo/a también puede decidir hablar conmigo y contestar a algunas preguntas y no a otras, o puede decidir parar en cualquier momento. Estas decisiones no afectarán en absoluto su posición académica en la escuela. Los maestros ni siquiera sabrán quién está participando en el estudio.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta sobre el estudio, me puede llamar, Philip Carter, al _______. También puede contactar a mi supervisor en la facultad, Profesora Julie Tetel, al_________. Si usted está de acuerdo en que su hijo/a participe en este estudio, por favor firme esta forma y devuélvala en el sobre, o désela a su hijo/a para que me la devuelva. Por favor, quédese con la segunda copia para que usted tenga esta información sobre este estudio o para contactarme.

Su firma abajo indica que da su permiso para participar en este estudio.

Nombre de su Hijo/a: ______________________________________

1. Consiento que mi hijo/a participe en este estudio

Firma del Padre/Guardian:________________________ Fecha:__________________

2. Doy permiso para que partes de las transcripciones de las conversaciones con mi hijo/a sean usadas con fines de enseñanzas o para presentaciones en conferencias.

Entiendo que mi hijo/a no será identificado.
3. Doy permiso para que ejemplos de las grabaciones de conversaciones con mi hijo/a sean escuchadas en conferencias profesionales. Entiendo que mi hijo/a no será identificado.

Firma del Padre/Guardian:________________________ Fecha:__________________
Appendix C

My name is Phillip Carter and I am a student at Duke University. I think you’ve probably seen me around the school. I’m here at _____ because I want to study the way that students your age interact with each other, and how they talk to each other in normal, everyday situations, like talking to friends. I am mostly studying by listening and talking with young people. When I’m done with my study, I will write a report about it.

So, in addition to hanging out and listening to people here at the school, which Principal Sawyer said was OK, I am asking some students if they would be willing to talk with me. I would ask you some questions, but it’s more like having a casual conversation, not like someone asking you questions in a classroom or the school office. Can I tell you a little bit more about my study project, so you can decide if you want to talk with me? Do you have a few minutes now? [If the student indicates interest but doesn’t have time for the assent information process right now, now, I will ask him/her later.]

If you decide that you would like to help me with my study by talking with me, I will ask you to talk to me for about half an hour. I will probably ask you questions about your friendship group and the friendship groups of your classmates. I might also ask about who you think is “cool” and who you think isn’t “cool.” We will talk during your lunch, before school, after school, or another time that we agree on. I will also ask you to
talk to me with some of your friends, if their parents have given permission. I will record our conversations with a digital audio-recorder.

When we’re talking, you might say some private things about your life. On the other hand, you might not, because what you say is up to you. But anyway, you may not want others to find out about these things, and I also don’t think anybody should know who says what, even if what you say isn’t a big deal or secret. So I will protect your privacy in the following ways:

1. I will not let other people listen to the tapes, including your friends, your teachers or your family. I will write down what is on the tapes so that I have good notes for my study report—that’s called making a transcript. No one except me will be allowed to read the transcripts. The only exception is that in my written report, I would like to include small quotes of things people have said—but without their names. I would also like to make a recording with small samples of what people say—again without using their names—for when I give presentations at conferences. If you choose to talk with me, you can decide if those written and taped samples are OK or not OK.

2. I will also never use your real name when I talk about my study. You will make up a name for yourself during our first interview. I will also make up names for other people you talk about. That way no one can identify you or them. Any papers I have with your real name will be locked up in a safe space, and only I will have access to them.

3. If at any point in the study you want me to erase from the recording anything that you’ve said, just tell me, and I will erase it in front of you.

Your parent [or guardian] has already said it’s OK. But it is still completely up to you whether to talk with me. If you say OK now, but want to stop later, that’s okay too. All you have to do is tell me. What questions do you have? [Answer any questions the
If you decide to talk with me, I encourage you to ask me questions while we talk, after we talk, or at any other time. And even if you decide not to talk with me, you can ask me questions at any time!

Do I have your permission to talk to you today? YES or NO (researcher circles one)
[If ‘no,’ I will stop here, say that it is fine, and thank the student.]

Do I have your permission to make a written transcript of our conversation for my research, and to use parts of it in my report or my teaching? YES or NO (researcher circles one)

Do I have your permission to play samples of our conversation when I talk about my research? YES or NO (researcher circles one)

RESEARCHER NOTES & STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

Participant’s Name: ____________________________________________

Signature of Researcher: ________________________ Date: ____________
Appendix D

Mi nombre es Phillip Carter y soy un estudiante de la Universidad de Duke. Usted probablemente me ha visto por la escuela. Estoy aquí en_______ porque quiero estudiar la forma en la que los estudiantes de su edad interactúan, y cómo hablan en situaciones normales, diarias, como hablar con los amigos. Mi investigación consistirá principalmente en escuchar y hablar con los jóvenes. Cuando termine mi estudio, voy a escribir un informe acerca de ello.

Además de escuchar a la gente aquí en la escuela, lo que ha sido aprobado por Director Escolar Sawyer, voy a pedir a algunos estudiantes que charlen conmigo. Les preguntaría algunas cosas, pero sería parecido a una conversación casual, no como alguien que hace preguntas en un salón de clases o en la oficina de la escuela. ¿Puedo hablarte un poco más acerca de mi proyecto de estudio, así puedes decidir si quieres hablar conmigo? ¿Tienes unos minutos ahora? [Si el estudiante indica interés, pero no tiene tiempo para el proceso de información ahora, pídele más tarde.]

Si decides que te gustaría ayudarme con mi estudio, te pediré que me dediques una media hora. Probablemente te haré preguntas acerca de tu grupo de amigos y de los grupos de amigos de tus compañeros de clase. También podría preguntar acerca de quien usted cree que es "cool" y quien piensas que no es "cool". Vamos a hablar durante el almuerzo, antes de la escuela, después de la escuela, o en otro momento que podamos
marcar. También pediré que hables conmigo con algunos de tus amigos, si sus padres han dado permiso. Registraré nuestras conversaciones con una audiograbadora digital.

Cuando estemos hablando, puede que digas algunas cosas privadas de tu vida.

Por otro lado, puede que no, porque lo que digas dependerá de tí. Es posible que no desees que otros descubran estas cosas, y yo también pienso que otras personas no tienen que enterarse de estas cosas, incluso si lo que dices no tiene gran importancia o es secreto. Por lo tanto, protegeré tu privacidad de las siguientes maneras:

1. No permitiré que otras personas escuchen las cintas, inclusive tus amigos, maestros, ni tu familia. Voy a escribir lo que hay en las cintas para tener buenas notas para mi informe del estudio – lo que se llama hacer una transcripción. A nadie excepto a mí se le permitirá leer las transcripciones. La única excepción es que en mi informe escrito, me gustaría incluir pequeñas citas de las cosas que la gente ha dicho - pero sin usar sus nombres. También me gustaría hacer una grabación con pequeñas muestras de lo que la gente dicen - sin usar nombres - cuando doy presentaciones en conferencias. Si eliges hablar conmigo, puedes decidir si éstos escritos y las muestras grabadas son ACEPTABLES o NO ACEPTABLES.

2. También nunca utilizaré tu nombre real cuando hable de mi estudio. Tu me darás un nombre ficticio durante nuestra primera entrevista. Yo también dare otros nombres a la otra gente de la que hables. Así nadie se podrá identificar. Todos los documentos que tengan los nombres verdaderos serán encerrados en un espacio seguro, y sólo yo tendré acceso a ellos.

3. Si en cualquier momento en el estudio quieres borrar de la grabación cualquier cosa, apenas dime, y la borraré delante de usted.

Su padre [o guardián] ya ha dicho que está bien. Pero es tu decisión hablar o no conmigo. Si dices BUENO ahora, pero quieres parar más tarde, está bien también. Lo único que tienes que hacer es decírmelo.
¿Qué preguntas tiene? [Conteste cualquier pregunta que el estudiante tenga]. Si decides hablar conmigo, te animo a hacerme preguntas mientras hablamos, después de que hablemos, o en cualquier otra hora. ¡E incluso si decides no hablar conmigo, me puedes hacer preguntas en cualquier momento!

¿Tengo tu permiso para hablar contigo hoy? SÍ o NO (el investigador marca uno)
[Si ’no’, pararé aquí, diré que está bien, y le agradeceré al estudiante].

¿Tengo tu permiso para hacer una transcripción escrita de nuestra conversación para mi investigación, y utilizar partes de ella en mi informe o mi enseñanza? SÍ o NO (el investigador marca uno)

¿Tengo tu permiso para reproducir las muestras de nuestra conversación cuando hable de mi investigación? SÍ o NO (el investigador marca uno)

NOTAS Y DECLARACIÓN DE INVESTIGADOR

He discutido los puntos anteriores con el participante. Es mi opinión que el participante entiende los riesgos, beneficios y procedimientos de la participación en este estudio de investigación.

Nombre del participante: ______________________________________
Firma del Investigador:_______________________________Fecha:_____________________
Appendix E

PMC: Yeah, so but I'm interested in why you don't, I mean like, because most of the Latino kids sit together, how did you end up not, and you say they didn't talk to you or whatever—

Montana: They never talked to me. So then Mia came over—

PMC: Do they see you as different or something?

Montana: I don't know. I don't know, I don't know what their problem is with me, I don't even talk to them, I didn't even talk to anybody barely last year. The only person I really stuck with was Mia, you know, cause she was a good friend.

PMC: Uh huh.

Pink: And we've been friends since last year and then I met Pink and—

PMC: Uh huh.

Pink: And she really I don't know, I think she black on the inside.

(Laughter)

Montana: Needless to say!

Amber: She doesn't, she's not like them!

Montana: One day, one day, they decided that they just had enough of me for some reason.

Mia: They said, they were talking, she they said she was talking about the Mexicans, she is a Mexican too.
Montana: Yeah, I don't even know cause I didn't even say a word that had
Mexican or Latino in it, cause I'm part of that, I'm Hispanic, and I know it, so
why would I talk about my own race? Come on now. So then it just decided it
was funny and they started coming up to me at breakfast and they were talking
all that stuff, how they were gonna fight me and stuff, so we went out to the
busstop, I think it was one day, and they had like a whole bunch of—

Mia: Wasn't it uhm Sami?

Montana: It was— I don't know, I don't even know their names.

Mia: The one you say you don't like.

Montana: The one with the curly hair? I don't know.

Mia: Jessi's sister.

Montana: I don't know who Jessi is-- my cousin.

Mia: Never mind.

Montana: I don't even know, but it's like--

Mia: No, Jessi in seventh grade.

Montana: Jessi? No.

Pink: Oh, I know Jessi, she look like you.

Montana: She looks like me?

Pink: From behind she do.
Montana: You mean the one with the long hair that's kind of black and it's straight down?

Mia: Yeah.

Pink: Mmhmm.

Montana: Oh, yeah, I think I seen it before.

Mia: Yeah, her sister, the one we were looking at on like the second day.

Pink: She got a sister? Oh, I know her sister.

Mia: When you were like you don't like her and Manny went with her?

Montana: Oh, yeah. So they decided that, they were like they tried to punch me and stuff like that. But I didn't, I didn't let them do it, cause first of all I have I didn't do nothing to them, I didn't say nothing to them, I didn't talk about their race, they could come from Pluto, for all I care, I wouldn't care. I really didn't care. So, i just minded my own business and they decide it was funny to come up to me and start screaming in my face so I did the same thing. But--
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Biography

Phillip M. Carter grew up in Cary, North Carolina. As an undergraduate, he attended North Carolina State University, majoring in Spanish Language and Literature with minor areas of study in Linguistics and Women’s and Gender Studies. He graduated in December 2001, and after a semester abroad, he returned to NC State University to study sociolinguistics with Walt Wolfram. Under the direction of Erik R. Thomas he wrote an MA thesis entitled The Emergence of Hispanic English in the Raleigh Community: A Sociophonetic Analysis and graduated in May 2004. In the fall semester of 2005, Phillip matriculated in the English Ph.D. program at Duke University, graduating in December 2009 with the successful completion of this dissertation. Phillip also completed the Graduate Certificate in Feminist Studies during his time at Duke. He has co-authored publications in peer-reviewed journals such as English World Wide and Journal of Sociolinguistics, in addition to authoring chapters in volumes such as Historical, Cultural, and Social Aspects of Southwest Spanish and Theoretical and Experimental Approaches to Romance Linguistics. During his time in graduate school, Phillip has won several awards for his research and teaching, including the Reza Ordoubadian Award for Best Student Paper at the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics (2005), the Cambridge University Press Award for Best Student Paper at New Ways of Analyzing Variation (2006), and the Dean’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (2009). He was also awarded a Julian Price Dissertation Fellowship from the Duke University Graduate
School in 2009. Beginning in the spring semester of 2010, he will be a Mellon Post-
doctoral Fellow in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Phillip is a member of Linguistic Society of America, American Dialect Society, Modern Language Association, and American Anthropological Association.