14. Youth, discourse, and interpersonal management

Jannis Androutsopoulos and Alexandra Georgakopoulou

This chapter provides an overview of sociolinguistic and discourse-analytic studies of interpersonal management in youth communication. In the process, we align ourselves with recent, practice-based studies, which locate language choices in specific sites and activities that young people are engaged in. We structure our discussion around the social practices of aligning and converging on the one hand, setting boundaries and misaligning on the other hand. We more specifically look into language choices that are routinely mobilized in each case, that is, as part of interpersonal relationships of alignment and misalignment. In both cases, we stress the importance of the peer-group either in leisurely or in institutional settings as a focal site for the discursive (re-) affirmation of relations of intimacy and solidarity but also of conflict and hierarchy. At the same time, we highlight the importance of new types of interpersonal communication and community formation via digital media amongst young people.

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of sociolinguistic and discourse-analytic studies of interpersonal management in youth communication. Although we will make use of the terms *adolescents* or *teenagers* in the research reviewed in this chapter, our own preference is for *youth*. The use of the term $$adolescence$$ has come under recent criticism (cf. Bucholtz 2002; Wyn and White 1997) for two main reasons. Based on biological criteria, this term misleadingly suggests a homogeneous socio-cultural experience, which hardly corresponds to the real-life diversity of young people. Moreover, its rigid chronological boundaries ignore the increasingly fuzzy borders between life phases, as well as how social actors experience these borders. Adolescence is defined from the perspective of adults and adulthood as a transitional period marked by lack of autonomy and competence, judged against the normative benchmark of adulthood, and often associated with deviance from adult norms (cf. Bucholtz 2002).

As an alternative, the concept of $$youth$$ displays some conceptual difficulties too, depending as it does on age borders and social institutions such as schooling and the job market, but it nonetheless offers a more flexible starting point for discourse-based research. Static conceptualizations of youth as a fixed-boundary period and as a transitional, developmental phase are being replaced by relational approaches, which foreground the

relation of youth to adult, and child, categories. Youth is then determined "in relation to that which is interpreted as respectively childish or adult" (Fornäs 1995: 3). Such a relational concept of youth is well placed to integrate the fuzziness of youth, extended post-adolescence, and 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2006). Likewise, studies of youth culture have progressively shifted focus from class-based youth subcultures in Western societies to the diversity of youth-cultural expressions worldwide, and from deviation and resistance to life-style choices in a variety of ethnic groups and local communities (Shelton and Valentine 1998). Moving a step further, Bucholtz advances an approach that treats youth cultures not in relation to adult and child categories, but as social practices in their own right. Seen this way, the notion of youth emphasizes the here and now of experience, or put differently, "youth are cultural actors whose experiences are best understood from their own point of view" (Bucholtz 2002: 533).

Such a culturally focused notion of *youth* forms the backdrop for our examination of linguistic forms and discursive practices which have been found to typify the cultures of youth peer groups within sociolinguistics, ethnography, and conversation analysis. We structure our discussion around the discursive processes of aligning and converging on the one hand, setting boundaries and misaligning on the other hand. We depart from recent, practice-based studies, which locate language choices in specific sites and activities that the young people are engaged in (Section 2.). We then specifically look into language choices that are routinely mobilized in each case, that is, as part of interpersonal relationships of alignment (Section 3.) and misalignment (Section 4.). In both cases, we stress the importance of the peer-group either in leisurely or in institutional settings as a focal site for the discursive affirmation of relations of intimacy and solidarity, but also of conflict and hierarchy. We conclude by highlighting the importance of new types of interpersonal communication and community formation via digital media amongst young people (Section 5.).

2. Discourse sites and activities in youth communication

Earlier sociolinguistic research on adolescence focused on tiny linguistic items (mostly phonological variables), which were in turn mapped in a relatively straightforward way with the social identity aspect under study (be it age, gender, or social class). From Labov's (1972) seminal study of sociolinguistic variation onwards, it had been acknowledged that the level of formality would shape the choice of language variants. There was also an attempt to collect data in situations that seemed typical of the participants' lives in addition or juxtaposition to

those obtained from standard sociolinguistic interviews. It is notable that Labov (1982) himself also had data from the Inner City "hood" and Cheshire from the playground (1982). However, the site as the social space in which communication occurred was seen more as an independent variable rather than as constitutive of and mutually feeding with the actual communication. This has recently changed within the variationist ethnographic paradigm of which Eckert's study (2000) is a good example. Using ethnographic methods, which included extensive fieldwork, Eckert closely attended to the local understandings and cultures of the female High School students she investigated and linked those with language choices.

However, the emphasis on variables at the micro-linguistic level (e.g., phonological, lexical) has gone hand in hand with a relative neglect of the role of suprasentential units, e.g., episodes, extended sequences, types of text in the shaping of communication. Attention to such units is normally to be found in more discourse analytic or interactional paradigms. These recognize the importance of the type of sequence and type of activity for actual language choices as well as the fact that such choices are collaboratively produced between speaker and audience. The approaches here are too divergent to be made sense of in a homogenizing way. The concept of $$genre$$ alone has been defined variously in various paradigms, and our aim here is not to rehearse the debate over what constitutes a genre, a discourse type, etc. (see papers in Gruber and Muntigl 2005). Nonetheless, it is important to note that recently there has been a shift from predominantly text-based analyses to practice-based analyses, as illustrated, e.g., in Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2003). In practice-based analyses of youth communication, there is a focus on the socially and culturally recognized events in relatively stable (or typified) $$settings$$ dedicated to specific communicative purposes and eliciting relatively routine ways of speaking, the participants' roles and relations and their conventionalized expectations about what is to be done in those settings. The analysis then looks at language choices as being integrally connected with such genres (in a broad sense) or activity types. Put differently, $$activity types$$ are seen as providing "sites of lived experience in which locally motivated linguistic choices can be creatively related to extra-situational social categories and meanings" (Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003: 7).

3. $$Aligning$$ – converging – colluding

There is widely held recognition within socially minded linguistics that language varieties and repertoires play a vital role in the (re-)affirmation of a sense of belonging and of interpersonal

relationships of intimacy and solidarity. In the case of research on youth, the exploration of this view has been closely linked with the assumption that socialization within the $$peer-group$$ and leisure activities associated with it are of paramount importance in the particular life stage. As already suggested, within social sciences (particularly social psychology and anthropology), underlying this specificity of social and cultural practices is an emphasis on adolescence as a distinctive, biologically delimited, and transitional phase that inevitably presents certain differences and all too often conflictual relations with adulthood and adult authority (see Section 4. below). The assumption then is that adolescents tend to fashion their distinctiveness through formation and participation in close-knit groups of close friends.

Within earlier research on sociolinguistics, as we have suggested, this age-linked distinctiveness was explored in terms of linguistic variation: that is, through a focus on the frequency of certain variants in the speech of adolescents that set them apart from "adults". $$Phonological variants$$, particularly non-standard ones, were the ones that were mostly put under scrutiny in this respect. Again, there is an underlying assumption here that the speech of adolescents will somehow mirror their propensity for defying anything that is regulated, proper, and standardized, on the one hand, and for (re-)creating peer-group bonds through language convergence on the other hand. Cheshire's (1982) classic study of teenagers in Reading, England, is a case in point. In contrast to previous studies of sociolinguistic variation, Cheshire recognized the importance of social networks in the use of linguistic variants and clearly distinguished the participants she studied between core, secondary, and peripheral members in groups. In this sense, language variation was not only linked with an age-specific feature of socialization (i.e., the peer-group) but also with differentiated participation roles within the peer-group. In her study, $$language convergence$$ correlated with the degree of integration into the group. On another level, $$gender$$ proved to shape language use, which provided evidence for the by now widely held idea that it is impossible to talk about adolescence as an undifferentiated whole. In particular, adolescent boys were found to employ more $$non-standard forms$$, a finding which Cheshire linked with the covert prestige involved in this use in terms of a specific model of masculinity (based on machismo, sounding, and acting "rough") and of local allegiances. More recent studies by Cheshire and colleagues (e.g. Cheshire, Kerswill, and Williams 1999) have explored the role of adolescents in dialect leveling. The focus has been again on the use of non-standard variants by adolescents but with a comparative regional (three towns in England) and social class focus (working class vs. middle class).

Since the 1980s, sociolinguistic variation studies have become increasingly more contextualized and fine-tuned, and it is no accident that scholars nowadays talk about the current phase of inquiry as the "fourth wave" of $$variationist sociolinguistic research$$. It is also worth noting that many of these studies have employed data from "adolescents" (in the biological sense) whilst being interested in documenting how language variation shapes and is shaped by other identity categories, e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class. In this respect, adolescence has remained as a somewhat "hidden" or "unspoken" of category or perhaps as a "taken for granted" or "background" category (see Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003: 6).

The methodological ways in which peer-groups are being researched have also become more situated with an increasing emphasis on ethnographic studies that allow the researcher to develop a good sense of their subjects' emic understandings and local practices. In fact, language itself is increasingly seen as interwoven with social practices and the relationships between the two were documented. In Bucholtz's study (1999a) of high-school female students in California, two $$communities of practice$$ were identified: the "nerds" and the "popular girls". The participants were recorded in and out of school and a contextually sensitive analysis showed that each of the groups was not solely defined in terms of language choice and repertoires but also in terms of attitudes to and participation in academic life, dating practices, and a host of semiotic choices, including dress code, etc. The language use emblematic of each group was also located in different levels, not just the phonological one, but also lexis, including creative and playful uses of language. Finally, the language ideologies of each group were found to differ, that is, their local theories of how language connects with social life and what is evaluated as good or bad language. This study is a good example of the gradual move within studies of language variation towards an understanding of how we construct identities through language that is based on dynamic and situated views of identities.

At the same time, it has to be noted that studies that may be called post-variationist or $$variationist ethnographic$$ still work with quantifying language use in order to explore its relationships with social variables. There seems to be a tension then in the relevant literature between quantitative studies that involve a rather large number of participants and data, and qualitative, contextually sensitive studies that focus on how language is shaped within small peer-groups. The former employ phonological variation as their main point of entry inasmuch as they recognize that other language choices, e.g. discourse markers, are inherently multi-

functional and thus less amenable to neat categorizing and quantifying.

Micro-analytic studies of specific discourse phenomena on the other hand have found it difficult to yield comparative findings and generalizations. That said, it is notable that the semiotic phenomena that have been proposed by numerous studies as markers or indicators of peer-group $$alignment$$ and membership belonging form a relatively closed list (e.g., Andersen 1997; Corsaro and Eder 1990; Eble 1996; Eder 1993; Erman 2001; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Kallmeyer and Keim 2003; Kataoka 2003; Norrby and Wirdenäs 2003; Stenström 2003). The list includes:

- $$playful language$$, e.g., language puns, play with words, coinage of new terms and more generally creative uses of language, jokes-telling

- $$teasing$$

- $$nicknames$$

- more or less innovative and unexpected or incongruous (in the given co-text) mixings of language registers (e.g. formal – informal) and styles, mainly to humorous effects

- increased and innovative use of certain $$discourse markers$$ (e.g. *like*), interjections (e.g., *sort of, you know, I mean*), extenders (e.g. *and stuff like that*), invariant tags (*right?, innit?, yeah?*), addressee-oriented tags (e.g. *you know what I mean?*). It must be noted here that there is a lack of consensus as to what is labeled as what in the literature, and some of the terms above are employed with overlapping reference.

- increased use of "intensifiers" (e.g., *so, just, really* followed by a qualifier) and more generally of expressive and affectionate elements, including manipulations of the graphemic code in cases of written language (see Section 5.)

- insulting or obscene terms (e.g., *bitch, fuck, shit*) that are frequently recast as terms of endearment and $$in-group bonding$$.

Specific generic forms have also been flagged up as being closely associated with intimate relationships. For instance, collaborative narration (e.g. Eder 1998) that involves various signals of audience participation, ranging from verbal and non-verbal back-channeling to ratification and enhancement of certain story parts (e.g. the climax); moreover, overlaps in

turn-taking and various ways of "mirroring" or "$$echoing$$" the interlocutors' previous turn in order to stress agreement with the point made. In similar vein, it has been shown that linguistic choices that highlight in-group bonding and membership belonging (e.g. $$positive politeness$$ strategies) are frequently mobilized in peer-group communication, and that there is a tendency for implicitness and heavy reliance on $$shared assumptions$$ (e.g. Deppermann and Schmidt 2003; Schmidt 2004; Spreckels 2006). These are frequently alluded to more or less cryptically in order to reaffirm intimacy and sharedness through invoking the familiar, and to rejoice in the recognition of this sharedness. $$Media references$$, i.e., references to shared media experiences (e.g., songs, TV series), but also to shared stories from the interactional history of a group are hallmarks of an allusive style that can only be unpacked by the members of a close-knit group (see Georgakopoulou 2003a, 2007; Spreckels 2006; Shankar 2004). Such reaffirmations and repetitive uses of an $$in-group style$$ of dense referencing may seem to the outsiders as communication about "nothing" inasmuch as it occurs in leisurely settings that involve young people "hanging out". The liminal aspects of such communication as suspensions of the norms of everyday engagement have been duly noted (Rampton 1995).

Nonetheless, it is also important to add a word of caution about the fact that what may be significant, serious, reportable, ordinary, or extra-ordinary is relative to contexts and participants. $$Code-switching$$ phenomena are a case in point: studies of secondary school students in urban multi-ethnic environments have shown that not only is switching to a variety that is perceived as ours associated with affiliative acts, but also that speakers can perform alignments by crossing to a variety that is demonstrably not theirs (Rampton 1995). Such takings on of "other" voices have been found to complicate issues of membership authenticity and level ethnically inflected divisions in favor of local cultures that base their participation on factors other than traditional lines of ethnic or social class belonging. These "new ethnicities as sites of cultural crossing, thresholds that young people move across as they carry on with their cultural business" (Bucholtz 2002: 538) have been closely associated with the context of late modernity in urban multi-ethnic setting and have often formed part of a celebratory discourse that recognizes the agency, creativity, and power of social actors to transcend established boundaries. That said, it is also recognized that the valency of such phenomena is contextually bound. As we will see in Section 4., several of the very language choices that in certain contexts have been found to serve to highlight intimacy and convergence can also serve to accentuate boundaries and act disaffiliatively in other contexts.

4. Boundary marking – conflicting – excluding

We now move on to studies of processes of demarcation and conflict in youth conversational interaction. Young speakers may set themselves apart from a variety or relevant others in discourse, and a broad distinction between intra- and intergenerational boundary setting has been proposed (Deppermann and Schmidt 2003; Schmidt 2004). On the *intra*-generational side, boundaries are drawn to peer-group members or to other youth groups; in the *inter*-generational dimension, to family and relatives, (unknown) adults or persons of institutional authority such as youth workers or schoolteachers. For instance, the teenage male group studied by Deppermann and Schmidt (2001a, 2001b, 2003) delimited itself from: other male youth groups perceived as having "deviant" lifestyles (e.g., gays, students); girls (categorized by appearance and moral criteria); adult figures of authority (such as teachers and youth workers); persons with some kind of authority in the local society; family members; and public personalities (e.g. celebrities).

To begin with the youth peer-groups, rather than being characterized by an egalitarian ethos, they have been found to be shaped by hierarchies built and maintained through verbal interaction. Learning how to establish one's position in the group hierarchy is a major aspect of peer-group socialization; conversely, processes of status negotiation are important episodes in the social life of peer-groups. In this context, what has mainly attracted the attention of researchers is ritual conflict more than less unmitigated, on-the-record conflict talk. $$Ritual conflict$$ is defined as playful, non-serious verbal dispute that is not aimed at conflict resolution (cf. Stenström, Andersen, and Hasund 2002; Grimshaw 1990). Ritual conflict has elements of performance, being carried out in front of a knowing and judging audience; it is instantiated in different formats/genres, such as $$ritual insults$$, $$verbal duelling$$, or $$dissing$$; it typically is a multi-part activity, including sequential rules (such as initiation, audience reaction, reply, reaction to reply, etc.) and conditions for acceptable propositional content; it is competitive, resulting in "winners" and "losers", without however ending in socially disruptive conflict.

A well known instance of ritual conflict is $$ritual insult$$, introduced in the linguistics literature by Labov's classic study on the "sounds" and "dozens" of African American male teenagers (Labov 1972), which are well-elaborated sequences of ritual insults with strict formal and semantic regulations. In similar practices of $$verbal duelling$$ among Turkish boys (Dundes et al. 1972; Tertilt 1996) the focus has been more on the symbolic

sexual domination and humiliation of the opponent, which has to be asserted and countered in rhyming. Similar genres of ritualized verbal competition are common in other non-Western European languages and cultures, including the Mediterranean, Near East, Latin America, Africa, and Arabic countries. However, global population flows and popular media prompt an even wider spread, thus leading to localized, hybrid practices of ritual conflict among migrant offspring (Tertilt 1996) or even among youths from the majority group, as in the case of German youth appropriating "dissing" from the African-American hip-hop culture (Deppermann and Schmidt 2001b). Although ritual insult and verbal duelling are widely regarded as a specifically male adolescent practice, Stenström et al. (2002: chapter 8) identify a type of ritual conflict among working-class female speakers in London. Their "tough girls' talk" is not primarily competitive in nature, but it nonetheless resembles ritual insults in that it contributes to the development of self-defence strategies and verbal skills. Their playful disputes and staged fights also serve as a means to negotiate appropriate behavior for girls. That said, the line between playful and serious, non-mitigated conflict may be thin, and the choice between the two will often depend on social and contextual parameters such as age, social milieu, and the sort of territorial face-threat involved (cf. Cindark and Keim 2002).

Processes of hierarchy building and competitiveness within the peer-group have also been documented in Goodwin's (1990, 2006) study of African-American working class pre-adolescent groups of girls. Goodwin has specifically focused on a range of interactional activities such as assessment sequences, verbal duelling, stories as devices for sustaining and constructing the group's social and political organisation, as well as managing processes of inclusion and exclusion. Her study has been instrumental in debunking myths about boys' groups being competitive and girls' groups exhibiting a cooperative ethos (see also Branner 2003; Spreckels 2006).

An important type of resource for indexing and negotiating dissent in youth discourse is $$linguistic divergence$$ on different levels of linguistic description. A first area is socially marked vocabulary, including *jargon*, *argot,* and *anti-language* (Halliday 1978). Such lexis is often taken to indicate by itself, i.e., through its formation patterns (as Halliday's notion of anti-language suggests; cf. also Kießling and Mous 2006), a delimitation of its speakers from "normal" social values. However, concrete interactional analyses of *how* such forms are deployed in interaction are rare. In two studies examining the use of $$slang$$ in interactions between adolescents (slang speakers) and adults (non-slang speakers)—mother/daughter interactions (Augenstein 1998) and conversations between young people

and adult fieldworkers (Schwitalla and Streeck 1989)—the youngsters' use of slang leads to misunderstandings which are subsequently repaired by the youngsters by offering equivalent non-slang lexis. In the case of fieldworker communication, however, the non-slang lexis offered by the young speakers shifted semantically from soft drugs to alcohol, and in this way "translated" a concept from the world of the local youth sub-culture into a concept seen as comparable for the world of adults. Such translation, and its celebration by young participants, sets clear boundaries between young insiders and adult outsiders and offers a nice illustration of the double function of argot/slang lexis as both a sign of belonging and a means of boundary-setting for the outsiders.

$$Code switching$$ and style shifting are basic linguistic devices of signaling $$divergence$$ (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991), and studies of their use amongst youth people tend to concentrate on multiethnic or migrant peer groups, involving contrasts between mainstream colloquial varieties of the dominant language and minority (migrant) languages or ethnic styles of speech. For example, research on Turkish/German code switching and code mixing among young "ghetto" females (Keim 2007a, 2007b; Kallmeyer and Keim 2003; Keim and Cindark 2003) reported that negotiating the language of interaction is a fairly regular mechanism for indexing consent or dissent. In particular, when a mixed code is established as the base language of interaction, Code switching at turn-taking points is a conventional device for emphasizing a clash of opinions between interlocutors.

Another focal concern in the literature are interactions in which peer-group members jointly produce boundaries to (absent) third parties, such as adult figures of authority or other young people with differing lifestyle orientations. Such episodes are common in the unstructured situations of hanging out that are typical of youth groups (see also Section 2. above), and they draw on resources such as social categorization devices, $$intertextuality$$, and $$stylization$$. Speakers work on their group profile "ex negativo", i.e., through stylized representations of others. A key feature of such representations is that they tend to be heavily stereotyped, presenting out-group behavior as inadequate or even grotesque. The orientation of much youth group interaction to producing entertainment (Deppermann and Schmidt 2001, 2002) favors such stereotypical other-styling. In Schwitalla's study, a group of high school students differentiate themselves from working-class youth from the same neighbourhood through the interactive staging of the latter, drawing to that end on a variety of social-symbolic resources, such as non-lexicalized sounds, stereotypical lexis, and pseudo quotations (double voicing). Here, social difference is evoked and performatively reproduced rather than

explicitly discussed. Such stylized representations of the (supposed) voice of the other may be also achieved by style shifting to a (usually non-standard) variety, or by intertextually exploiting mass-media voices (cf. Deppermann and Schmidt 2003; Deppermann 2007; Georgakopoulou 2006; Spreckels 2006; Bierbach and Birken-Silverman 2007). However, media allusions and quotations can also be used to directly discriminate and exclude peer-group members (cf. Schlobinski, Kohl, and Ludewigt 2003).

As the preceding discussion suggests, processes of linguistic divergence and stylization may resort to $$language crossing$$, i.e., the use of linguistic resources that are felt to belong to other social groups (Rampton 1995, 1999). As already discussed (see Section 3.), language crossing may also be a resource in acts of alignment; the type of crossing most relevant to boundary-setting activities is *varidirectional double-voicing* (following Rampton's 1995 adaptation of Bakhtin's terms): here speakers use social voices (other languages, non-standard varieties of the same language, voices lifted from mass-media sources), but clearly dissociate themselves from these voices, indicating that they are putting them on rather than identifying with them. This enables speakers to do and say things they would never say with their own voice, including showing-off, sexist, and racist aggression. Putting on alien social voices is consonant with the ritual, playful conflict we have already discussed as typical of youth interpersonal communication. It frames on-going interaction, including the propositional content of the utterance conveyed through that voice, as entertaining and non-serious, thus enabling the speaker to withdraw and deny responsibility for their statements in case they are interpreted by addressees as offensive (see also Deppermann 2007; Pujolar 2001).

While language crossing always evokes stereotypical associations of the legitimate, "authentic" speakers of the code crossed into, the code's associative potential may vary by referent, interlocutor, or other aspects of interactional context. Thus Rampton (1995) found that London adolescents used Stylized Asian English towards adult interlocutors to disrupt their attempts to impose interactional order or to challenge them by evoking a relationship of dominance between the adult figure of authority and the pupils. But among peers, Stylized Asian English was used to mark certain behaviors as inappropriate, improper, or marginal, alluding thereby to stereotypical lack of competence. In two strikingly similar cases, Eksner (2001) found that „Stylized Turkish German" among Turkish youth in Berlin-Kreuzberg was used as a threatening device in conflict situations with German adults, but in in-group talk, where the default code for conflict talk was Turkish, it rather served to mock incompetence

and to regulate group activities. The Turkish-German female teen ghetto group studied by Keim (2002) used stylized learner's German (*Gastarbeiterdeutsch*) towards their mothers, the authentic speakers of that code, to accentuate intergenerational differences and underscore their criticism for their parents' lack of integration. Among peers, the use of stylized learner's German accentuated their distancing from the stereotype of uneducated migrant workers. Towards German adults, however, it ironically affirmed such stereotypes, thereby putting interlocutors' stereotypes to the test. Keim reports how she, as an adult fieldworker, was confronted with *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* in her first attempt to approach the ghetto girls group; this use of a devalued code was seen as subversive, to the extent that it disrupted the fieldworker's engagement by evoking a relation of inequality.

We move on to settings of institutional interaction, especially $$classroom discourse$$, which involve young actors in their specific situated identities (Zimmermann 1998) as pupils. Here, the focus is not just on what those situated identities dictate, but how they are taken up, managed, resisted, or undermined by the participants themselves. One strand here encompasses what might be viewed as prototypical cases of "classroom rebellion", i.e., verbal behavior that aims at sabotaging the interactional order in (urban) classrooms, e.g. through

- disruption of the $$initiation-response-evaluation pattern$$ or other expected patterns of institutional discourse

- choice of a dispreferred language or language variety that is tacitly unwelcome or even explicitly banned from classroom discourse, such as a regional dialect, a minority or migrant language, instead of the expected standard language delivery

- engaging in $$backstage communication$$, developing own agendas in the fringes of classroom instruction, thus subverting, more or less openly, the focus of attention and directionality of interaction as defined by the official agenda of the classroom.

Such practices are in sharp contrast to the requirements of task-oriented (pedagogical) communication. At the same time they do relationship work for the pupils, as rebellion may enhance one's status among classmates—i.e., as yet another case where affiliation and conflict are two sides of the same coin. And while these practices are probably as old as schooling institutions, the resources for doing so change over time. In contemporary Western societies at least, extra-curricular resources from techno-popular culture, such as singing,

humming, or engaging with digital technologies are being introduced into the school life (cf. Rampton 2006), and employed in backstage communication or in disrupting expected patterns of classroom discourse. However, negotiations of status and teacher-pupil relationship are at work in orderly classroom discourse as well, for example, with respect to the ascription of and resistance to stigmatizing social categories. In Hawai'i secondary schools, for instance (Talmy 2004), speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) reject stigmatized categories such as "fob" ("fresh off the boat", a colloquial label for recent immigrants), which are imposed on them by their teacher as part of the institutional routine (e.g. in the form of assignments). By challenging such institutional labeling, students subvert the conflation of language, culture, nationality, and identity (Talmy 2004). At the same time however, these students tease and humiliate recently immigrated classmates with poor ESL competence, thus reproducing in classroom discourse the stigmatized category they reject for themselves.

Overall, multi-ethnic settings emerge in much of the recent literature as sites of styling processes. For ethnic minority youth, multilingual switching, double voicing, and styling are resources for negotiating their relationship with their ethnic community as well as for resisting discrimination by members of the majority society (cf. the papers in Lo and Reyes 2004). Also, what emerges as youth-preferential practice across linguistic and cultural boundaries is a tendency for vivid and performative (as opposed to argumentative) ways of negotiating social boundaries.

5. Beyond face-to-face: mediating interpersonal communication

The expanding social spread and domestication of digital information and communication technologies (ICT) is transforming the ways in which identities and relationships are constructed and negotiated. While this is of course not restricted to the young, it is well documented that they have been innovative in "making connections" (Abbott 1998) through information and communication technologies (ICT), and still use these for social interaction more often than other age groups on an international scale (see, e.g., Bryant, Jackson, and Smallwood 2006 for the USA; van Eimeren and Frees 2006 for Germany). Depending on their affordances, ICT for interpersonal communication may be divided into different types:

- technologies for interpersonal interaction, termed as "socially interactive technologies" (Bryant et al. 2006), including mobile phones, internet telephone, texting, instant messaging

- formats of public multi-party interaction such as chat, web discussion boards, and three-dimensional environments; and

- spaces of self-presentation in which edited content is complemented by interaction formats, as is the case with personal homepages, weblogs, and social networking environments.

All of these, in turn, may host a multitude of genres (e.g., small talk, joking, greeting) and communicative purposes (e.g., flirting, problem solving, recommending, making arrangements).

The last few years have witnessed the emergence of a substantial volume of language-focused research on $$computer-mediated communication$$ (CMC) and texting, initially framed in descriptive linguistics and genre analysis, and increasingly positioned in discourse analysis and sociolinguistics as well. Even though patterns and regularities of CMC are often analyzed comparatively to face-to-face discourse, there is currently widespread consensus that CMC needs to be addressed not as a deficient substitute for face-to-face discourse, but as a social practice in its own right (cf. Georgakopoulou 2003b; Herring 2001). This applies to the notion of interaction itself: CMC exchanges display some key features of verbal interaction, such as sequentiality and contextual dependency, while others—e.g., multi-channel immediacy, turn-taking mechanisms, responsibilities for opening and closing interaction—may be much less rigid or altogether missing. Rather than viewing the resulting interaction as "less than genuine" conversation, the aim is to understand how new media alter the conditions for interpersonal communication by affording complex constellation of familiar and novel, medium-specific resources for interpersonal work. Having said that, it must be noted that the fundamental mechanisms of interpersonal management discussed above repeatedly emerge as valid for computer-mediated discourse as well. We find for instance the copy of elements of the previous message or turn to indicate alignment (cf. Section 3. above), the joint construction of virtual worlds in e-chat, the emergence of common repertoires for interpersonal work in the process of virtual community formation, or style-shifting to strategically converge to chat interlocutors (see, e.g., papers in Beißwenger 2001). On the other hand, there is evidence of code switching and style shifting in CMC in order to foreground contextually relevant social identities, to negotiate conflicts, or to accentuate dissent (see, e.g., Androutsopoulos 2006, 2007).

Most linguistic studies of CMC among young people focus on processes of identity construction or self-presentation, while the negotiation of interpersonal relationships has been relatively less attended to. One relevant question has been whether digital technologies are used by the young to sustain established face-to-face social networks, or rather to create new ones. Several studies have stressed the potential of going online to disrupt traditionally defined identities, to enable play with anonymity, to subvert rigid social features and transgress conventional boundaries (notably gender). Chat channels and newsgroups (and more recently virtual environments such as *Second Life*) in particular have been hailed as sites for the formation of "virtual" relationships and $$online communities$$, which transcend traditional geographical boundaries. By contrast, research on the use of mobile telephones, instant messaging, and texting attends to the ways in which these digital media extend interpersonal communication within existing social networks across space and time (Bryant et al. 2006; Kasesniemi and Rautiainen 2002; Schmidt and Androutsopoulos 2004; Thurlow 2004). Studies of $$texting$$, in particular, report its significance for phatic and expressive communication, the planning and coordination of joint activities, and notably for $$conflict resolution$$ as well, as texting is sometimes preferred to face-to-face exchange for reconciliation. Note, however, that the prevailing methods of data collection in this area, i.e., questionnaires and samples of text messages detached from context, leave little space for the study of texting-as-interaction (but see Schmidt and Androutsopoulos 2004; Spilioti 2006).

The repertoires for interpersonal communication are both constrained and enriched in settings of digitally mediated discourse. Constraints arise, as resources of face-to-face interaction have to be done without or compensated for, while at the same time additional resources may be afforded by each medium. The most well known instance of that process is smileys/emoticons, which emerged and were rapidly conventionalized as collective response to the channel reduction in text-only interactive written discourse. Not by coincidence, they do phatic and interpersonal, rather than "information" oriented, work (cf., e.g., Huffaker and Calvert 2005). On the other hand, emoticons are just a sub-case of a wider tendency to explore the shape of written discourse for identity- and relationship-related work. Creative, unconventional uses of $$spelling$$ and punctuation serve as a partial compensation of familiar channels (mimics, kinesics, prosody) as much as a resource that is inherent to the written mode and may now be explored in environments which are largely free from normative control over the form of written discourse.

The heavy reliance on code-centered choices, a tendency that has been found to be

characteristic of computer-mediated communication (see Georgakopoulou 2003b), ultimately depends on the manipulation of graphemic form to evoke codes and voices. They do $$contextualization$$ work in defining, reproducing, or revising relationships between interlocutors. All these processes look back to pre-digital traditions both at the level of expressivity and emotion (see, e.g., Kataoka 2003) and at the level of youth-culture affiliations and everyday micro-politics, i.e., acting as a means of "spelling rebellion" (Sebba 2003). $$Spelling$$ and punctuation present fuzzy borders with multimodality, the joint use of the verbal and visual mode in meaning making. However, $$multimodality$$ in CMC has mostly been discussed in terms of self-presentation and identity construction (see as early as Chandler and Roberts-Young 1998), and its relevance for interpersonal communication still remains unexplored. One avenue is to examine how multimodal expression might prompt, or provide occasions, for subsequent digital interaction; for example, self-presentation on graphic surfaces consisting of language, image, sound, and background color offers clues to be taken up in direct exchanges via the technologies offered in each case. The connection of multimodality to interpersonal communication is perhaps more obvious in the case of the enormously popular graphic emoticons, and even more so in still largely unexplored three-dimensional environments such as *Second Life*, where the looks of co-players are massively decisive in initiating interaction.

Information and communication technologies offer the option of editing interactive discourse (as in, e.g., chat lines, forum entries, text messages, etc.), and even though such editing must often be quite rapid in order to sustain the flow of mediated interaction, it may be strategically used to manage interpersonal communication. For instance, planning time affords the packaging of more than one response into the same entry; also, the time of response may be used as an index of interpersonal stance: a swift response is conventionally understood as indexing interest or urgency, a delayed response as indexing lack of interest (Jones 2005). Also, editing time may be used to make the message more appealing, by investing in language play and linguistic experiment involving the visual dimension of written discourse (see preceding discussion). But planning time can also be exploited, especially under conditions of anonymity, for its conflict potential, as in the practice of $$flaming$$, which may be viewed as a digital equivalent of unmitigated conflict talk. In an early study of flaming, Karlsson (1998) examined a Swedish chat environment in which a newspaper editor interfered in a youth e-chat, seeking to draw the chatters' attention to educational policy matters, to which young chatters reacted with irony. This culminated in direct confrontation

expressed as verbal aggression and flaming. Through flaming, participants disrupted the "orderly" flow of mediated interaction to defend their autonomy, in a manner somewhat equivalent to the disruption of institutional face-to-face discourse. This nicely illustrates the hybrid nature of interactive written discourse as a composite of both old *and* new resources for aligning and boundary setting.

6. Conclusions

Findings such as the above have gone a long way to shed light on the forms that convergence and alignment on the one hand, divergence and boundary marking on the other take within close-knit groups of young people at different semiotic levels. In fact, more recently, the focus has decidedly shifted away from the monopoly of linguistic choices in the formation of peer-group cultures to their synergy with other semiotic choices (e.g., dress-code, hair-style) as $$markers of group identity$$ (see, e.g., Eckert 2000; Wilson 2003). However, as we have shown, what remains unclear in studies such as the ones discussed above is exactly how specific to adolescent peer-group micro-cultures is language use of that kind as opposed to being closely associated with relationships of closeness and intimacy across the age span (cf. Kotsinas 1994; Karlsson 1998; Norrby and Wirdenas 2003). At the same time, it has to be noted that generalizing and forming one-to-one relationships between language use and social identities (in this case, age) has not been the stated aim of this line of inquiry. Instead, the aim has been to draw attention to and document the varying ways in which language use is shaped by and invokes social identities (in interaction with one another) in a multitude of sites.

The other factor that makes drawing generalizations hard is the multi-functionality of linguistic signs, as already mentioned. This means that the same language choice may perform certain social actions in one context and others in another; more locally, the same choice may be used and taken up differently in the same interaction or stretch of discourse, as we saw in the example of code-switching phenomena and more specifically language crossing (Sections 3. and 4.). By the same token, findings about solidarity as a prevalent ethos in peer-group communication should by no means be equated with a picture of social harmony or equally with a suggestion that social class, ethnicity, and other potentially dividing factors no longer work as structuring forces in young people's interactions (see Rampton 2006). Instead, existing studies should form the basis for further nuanced explorations of young people's communication in a multitude of sites.

Finally, a note of caveat is in order regarding the restrictions of available research literature. The aspect of age has not been sufficiently brought to the fore in sociolinguistics and studies of young speakers have often emphasized other social identities, in particular gender. Moreover, there is an unavoidable cultural and linguistic bias since most of the literature in the field deals with Western societies, while comparative studies tend to be missing (cf. Bucholtz 2002). In the light of this, there is an apparent need for further studies in as many cultural settings as possible that will broaden the scope of the inquiry into youth communication.

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Biographical Notes

Jannis Androutsopoulos is Reader in Sociolinguistics & Media Discourse, King's College London. His research areas are computer-mediated communication, youth language and youth cultures, language and popular culture, sociolinguistic aspects of orthography. His publications include *Discourse Constructions of Youth identities* (co-edited with Alexandra Georgakopoulou, 2003, John Benjamins) and *Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication* (guest editor, Journal of Sociolinguistics, 10/4)

Alexandra Georgakopoulou is Reader in Modern Greek Language & Linguistics, King's College London. She has published widely in the area of conversational narrative, computer-mediated communication and identities-in-interaction. Her books include 'Narrative Performances: A study of Modern Greek storytelling' (1997, John Benjamins), 'Small stories, interaction and identities' (2007, John Benjamins), and 'Discourse Analysis' (co-authored with Dionysis Goutsos, 2nd ed. 2004, Edinburgh).