

Girlz II women: Age-grading, language change and stylistic variation¹

John Rickford and Mackenzie Price

Stanford University and Georgetown University, U.S.A.

Informed by abstract models of language change or stability over time, we present a longitudinal study of two African American females, first interviewed as teenagers, and re-recorded twenty years later. As teenagers, they used morpho-syntactic features of AAVE voraciously. But as working adults, these women distance themselves from their teenage activities and social networks, and display a considerably reduced vernacular usage that accords with their articulated concern to get ahead. The diachronic interpretation that best characterizes their transformation is age-grading rather than generational change, since change at the individual level is accompanied by stability at the community level. The picture is complicated by intermediate recordings showing that one of the speakers is a stylistic chameleon, capable since her teenage years of varying copula absence rates depending on addressee, topic, and projected persona. But the age-grading interpretation of change at the individual level remains valid based on the evidence of her reduced use of habitual *be*2, and third singular present tense *-s* absence. The case highlights the importance of paying more attention to stylistic variation and including more than two time points in sociolinguistic studies of change in real and apparent time.

Informado por modelos abstractos del cambio de lenguaje o estabilidad con el paso del tiempo, presentamos un estudio longitudinal de dos mujeres afro-americanas, a quienes les hicieron entrevistas por primera vez cuando eran adolescentes y grabado de nuevo veinte años después. Como adolescentes, utilizaban características morfo-sintácticas del AAVE vorazmente. Pero, como adultos que trabajan, éstas mujeres marcan distancia de sus actividades adolescentes y redes sociales, y demuestran un uso vernáculo bastante reducido que está de acuerdo con la preocupación articulada de progresar. La interpretación diacrónica que más caracteriza la transformación de las dos es el cambio de edad en vez de un cambio de generación, ya que el cambio al nivel individual es acompañado de la estabilidad al nivel comunitario. La situación es complicada por las grabaciones intermedias que muestran que una de las hablantes es un camaleón estilístico, capaz desde sus años de la adolescencia de índices variados de la ausencia de cópula reducida dependiendo del destinatario, tema, y imagen proyectada. Pero la interpretación del cambio de edad del cambio al nivel individual permanece válida basado en la evidencia de su uso de cópula habitual, y la ausencia de la tercera persona singular *-s*, el

presente. Este caso destaca la importancia de prestando más atención a la variación estilística y incluyendo más de dos puntos de tiempo en los estudios sociolingüísticos del cambio en tiempo real y aparente. [Spanish]

KEYWORDS: Age-grading, real time change, apparent time change, stylistic variation, African American Vernacular English, quantitative methods, panel study

INTRODUCTION

Quantitative sociolinguistics achieved its central breakthroughs in the study of linguistic variation by liberating mainstream linguistics (structuralist **and** generativist) from the limitations of conditioned and free variation in two fundamental respects:

1. Allowing for *quantitative* as well as *qualitative* conditioning, revealing a finer structure to what was often dismissed as 'free variation.'
2. Extending the search for 'conditioned variation' to social and stylistic contexts as well as language internal environments.

One of the first publications to exemplify quantitative sociolinguistics in this sense, Fischer (1958), is now more than fifty years old. In his study of variation between *-in* and *-ing* as present participle suffixes in a New England village (*walkin* vs. *walking*), Fischer showed that considering the frequency with which variants occur, and the social and stylistic contexts in which they were embedded, led to new insights about the structure of linguistic variation. As he put it, 'the choice between the *-ing* and the *-in* variants appears to be related to sex, class, personality ... and mood ... of the speakers ... to the formality of the conversation, and to the specific verb spoken' (1958: 51).

In the fifty-plus years since Fischer (1958), the field of quantitative sociolinguistics (or variation theory) has developed by leaps and bounds, facilitated by Labov's groundbreaking (1963, 1966) studies of Martha's Vineyard and New York City, and by hundreds of other community studies since then. But, while statistics are now commonplace in many kinds of synchronic studies, quantitative sociolinguistics as an integral approach (attending to frequencies and internal as well as social/stylistic contexts) found its most ready acceptance in mainstream linguistics in the study of language change. For instance, the work of Labov and other sociolinguists is regularly cited in texts and papers dealing with historical linguistics (e.g. Campbell 2004; Hock and Joseph 2009; Crowley and Bowerman 2010), but **not** in texts and papers on syntax or phonology.² And Labov's massive three-volume theoretical synopsis of the field (1994, 2001, 2010) is not entitled 'Principles of Language Structure,' but *Principles of Linguistic Change*.

One area of language change in which sociolinguistics has made a significant impact is in the study of change in progress. Initial advances

included the strategy of studying change in apparent time (cf. Labov 1963), by comparing usage among different age groups in the present. The importance of seeking confirmatory evidence of change in *real time* (e.g. from earlier descriptions or samples) was emphasized and exemplified in the earliest work of Labov (cf. Labov 1966). However, as Sankoff (2005a, 2005b) has noted, longitudinal studies of real-time change, in which researchers return to the site of a previous sociolinguistic study to see what has happened in the interim, are rare and recent, relative to the larger number of synchronic, apparent-time studies. Most of the longitudinal studies are *trend* studies (e.g. Cedergren 1988; Trudgill 1988; Blake and Josey 2003), which draw on a later sample of the community. The later sample usually does not include individuals in the earlier sample. By contrast, *panel* studies (e.g. Baugh 1996; Cukor-Avila 2002; Hernández-Campoy 2003; Sankoff and Blondeau 2007) specifically return to the same individuals at later points in time.

In this paper, we report on a longitudinal, primarily panel study of stability and change in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), as spoken in the low income, minority community of East Palo Alto, California. As the title suggests, we will focus on two girls (Foxy and Tinky – pseudonyms) who became women in the twenty-odd years between our earliest and latest recordings of their speech, as exemplars of age-grading, language change, and/or stylistic variation. But before turning to their data, let us consider the possible relations between apparent and real time depicted in Table 1.

This table represents a slightly modified version of Sankoff and Blondeau's (2007) model, which was itself a modification of the template first developed by Labov (1981, 1994). Column one shows the synchronic patterns (flat or sloping) that we might find when we look at the use of a linguistic feature by different age groups at one point in time. The next two columns show the possible diachronic correlates of these synchronic patterns at the level of the individual and community. The final column represents the linguists' label or

Table 1: Patterns of language change or stability in the individual and the community. Adapted from Labov (1994: 83, Table 4.1) and Sankoff and Blondeau (2007: 562, Table 2)

Synchronic pattern (age distributions at one point in 'apparent' time)	Diachronic correlate (between two or more points in real time)		Linguist's interpretation or characterization
	Individual	Community	
Flat	Stability	Stability	1. Stability
Regular slope w/ age	Change	Stability	2. Age-grading
Regular slope w/ age	Change	Change	2a. Lifespan change
Regular slope w/ age	Stability	Change	3. Generational change
Flat	Change	Change	4. Communal Change

interpretation for each synchronic/diachronic correlation: stability, age-grading, generational change, or communal change. Sankoff and Blondeau (2007: 563, Table 2) also include a fifth pattern – 2a Lifespan Change.

Sankoff and Blondeau (2007: 561–562) describe possible diachronic correlates and interpretations of the ‘flat’ synchronic pattern as follows:

If a synchronic study shows no age differentiation (the ‘flat’ pattern), we can infer either that no change is occurring – both individual speakers and the community as a whole are stable (interpretation #1), or that all the speakers in the community are changing together at the same rate – both older and younger generations are at the same stage in a change affecting them equally (interpretation # 4).

The communal change possibility is usually limited to lexical innovations (Labov 1994), like the adoption of *google* as a verb by virtually all age groups in the metropolitan U.S. over the past decade. For most phonological and grammatical features, a flat synchronic pattern suggests stability in real time, in both the individual and community.

Diachronic correlates and interpretations of a regular slope with age are more varied, and relevant to this paper. Sankoff and Blondeau (2007: 562) characterize these as follows [square brackets enclose our notes]:

A regular slope with age [synchronously] may mean that generation after generation, individuals change as they get older, yet the community remains stable over time. According to this interpretation (# 2, age-grading), as each cohort of speakers ages, it steadily increases [or decreases] its use of one variant of the variable. ... Alternatively, individuals may retain their childhood patterns, with each age cohort of speakers registering an increasing [or decreasing] use of the variant upon entering the community. This generational change corresponds to the classic apparent-time interpretation (#3) of change in progress. ... But another possibility is ‘lifespan change’ [Interpretation 2a] in which ‘individual speakers change over their lifespans in the direction of a change in progress in the rest of the community’ (Sankoff 2005a: 1011).

The fundamental difference between the age-grading (#2) and change patterns (#2a, 3) is that age-grading is *cyclic* – today’s teenagers who use high frequencies of a stigmatized feature will become tomorrow’s adults who use it less frequently or not at all, much as their parents may have done before them. The end result is that while some individuals show ‘change’ between two points in time, the community pattern remains stable. By contrast, in generational change (#3), the increased frequency with which children or teenagers use a particular feature is retained as they become adults, this stability at the level of individuals bringing about linguistic change at the level of the community. In lifespan change (#2a), exemplified by the recent change from dorsal to apical /r/ in Quebec, some individuals change their usage over their lifespans in the direction of the more general community change. But the pattern is not cyclical, and the community is not stable. Wagner (2012) elaborates on the

distinction between age-grading, generational, and lifespan change, but notes that consensus on the validity of lifespan change and its distinction from age-grading and generational change, may require more longitudinal studies.

EAST PALO ALTO USAGE IN 1986/87

AAVE has received far more attention within sociolinguistics than any other ethnic or regional dialect (Schneider 1996: 3), but it has been the subject of only a handful of longitudinal studies, all within the last sixteen years. We'll report on these studies, but let us first introduce Foxy Boston and Tinky Gates (pseudonyms). First interviewed in 1987 when they were 13 and 15 years old respectively, these African American teenage girls used very high, almost categorical frequencies of the canonical AAVE forms, like invariant habitual *be*, copula absence, and third singular present tense *-s* absence, as in the following examples:

- (1) Invariant habitual *be*: 'I *be* wakin' up ... and I *be* goin, "Dang, that's serious"!' (Foxy)
- (2) Copula/Auxiliary *Is/Are* absence:³ 'If you \emptyset talkin to me, you better shut up.' (Tinky)
- (3) Third sg. *-s* absence: 'My mama think \emptyset we at this show party.' (Tinky)

As shown in Table 2, in comparison with other speakers of AAVE, Foxy and Tinky's vernacular usage of these variables outstripped that of the male peer group or street gang members in Labov et al.'s (1968) Harlem study, who were often regarded as the archetypal speakers of AAVE. For instance, in her 1986

Table 2: Habitual *be* as used by Foxy and Tinky, E. Palo Alto 1986/7 compared with 1960s male peer groups, Harlem

Community	Individual or group (N)	<i>be</i> ₂ *		<i>be</i> ₁ **	
		N	%	N	%
East Palo Alto, CA1986/1987 (Rickford 1992)	Foxy Boston, EPA 7 and 8(310)	146	47	164	53
	Tinky Gates, EPA 12 and 13(397)	50	13	347	87
Harlem, NY All styles and linguistic environments combined***	Jets(914)	129	14	785	86
	Thunderbirds(863)	95	11	768	89
	Cobras(725)	101	14	624	86
	Oscar Brothers(519)	27	5	492	95

*Invariant habitual *be*, all subjects, first, second, third, singular and plural

**Inflected forms of *be* and their absence: *am*, *'m*, *is*, *'s*, *are*, *'re*, and \emptyset

***Based on Labov et al. (1968: 236, Tables 3–20)

two-and-a-half-hour long recording, Foxy single-handedly used more tokens of invariant habitual *be* (146) – which Labov et al. referred to as *be*₂ – than the total (129) used by all 17 members of the Jets, or any of the other Harlem peer groups. While *be*₂ may have accelerated in frequency and evolved in function across the U.S. between the 1960s and the 1980s (Bailey and Maynor 1989), Foxy and Tinky owned and exploited it from the ‘git go,’ dramatically demonstrating that girls could ‘represent’ at the vernacular table. Table 2 also shows the relative frequency in the present tense of *be*₂ vs. *be*₁ (inflected *be* in full, contracted and zero forms of *am*, *is* and *are*), revealing that Foxy is the more innovative of the two EPA girls. Tinky’s percentage use of *be*₂ in present tense copula contexts (13%) is comparable to that of the three younger Harlem peer groups (11–14%), but Foxy’s percentage use is more than three times higher (47%).⁴ At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the present tense copula and auxiliary contexts involving *be*₁ don’t provide an adequate envelope of variation for studying habitual *be*₂. On the one hand, some of the *be*₁ variants in Table 2a (see Notes) refer to **non**-habitual events (e.g. ‘Ma, we Ø on the tape recorder’ – Foxy EPA7 – meaning, at the moment of speech). On the other hand, habitual *be*₂ alternates with other means of expressing habituality besides *be*₁, like present tense main verbs (e.g. ‘The one who *work* up at Mickey’s, he *be tryin* to talk nice,’ Tinky, EPA 12) and will + Verb (e.g. ‘I’ll walk’) as Richardson (1991) has shown.⁵ For this reason, in subsequent tables, we’ll follow Labov et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969) and most subsequent researchers in **not** combining *be*₂ quantitatively with *be*₁ and its variants, but reporting its absolute frequency separately.

As Figure 1 shows, Foxy’s vernacular use of other variables was also higher than that of the Harlem peer groups studied by Labov et al. (1968). Foxy and Tinky’s third singular present tense *s*-absence percentages were in the high nineties (97% and 96%), while the percentages for the Harlem groups were in the

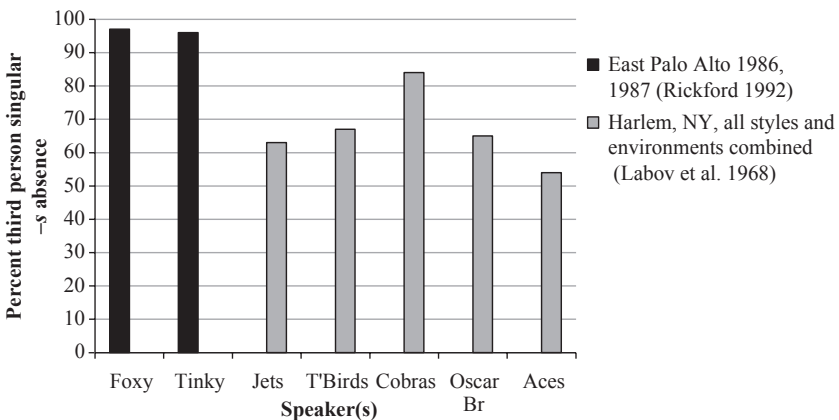


Figure 1: Third person singular *-s* absence for Foxy and Tinky compared with Harlem peer groups

sixties, with only the Cobras (84%) even approaching their levels. Similarly, for *is*-absence, shown in Figure 2 (Labov did not include *are* absence), Tinky and Foxy's rates were 67% and 79% respectively, while the corresponding rates for Labov's Harlem street gangs ranged from 32% (Oscar Brothers) to 51% (Cobras).

Figure 3 shows Foxy and Tinky's use of the vernacular in a different way, by comparing their *is* + *are* absence rates with those of the 24 lower and upper

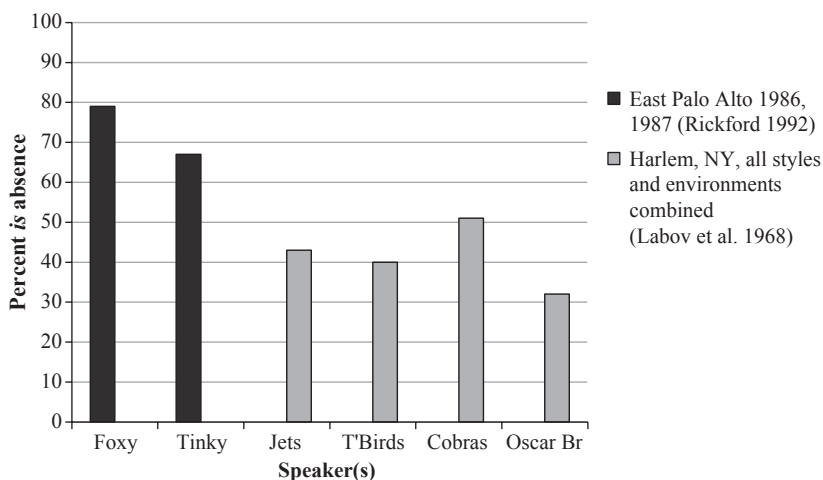


Figure 2: *Is* absence for Foxy and Tinky compared with Harlem peer groups

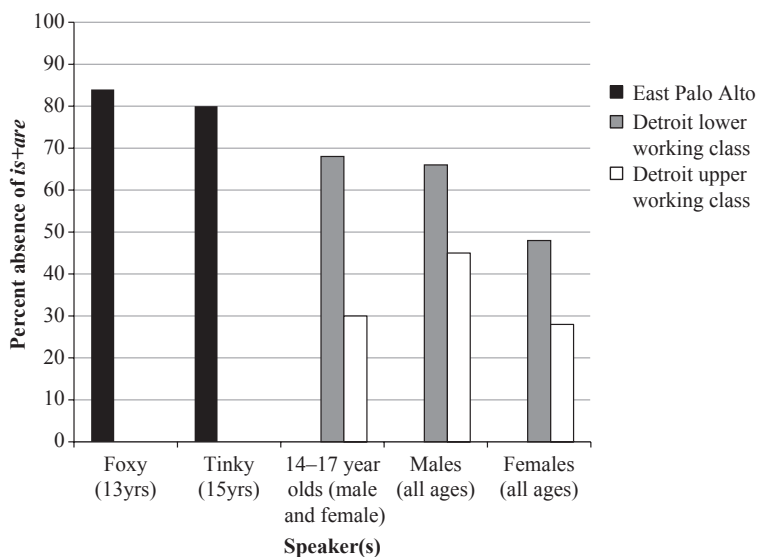


Figure 3: *Is+are* absence rates – Foxy and Tinky (East Palo Alto) vs. Detroit working classes (Wolfram 1969)

working-class speakers in Wolfram's (1969) study of Detroit. Whether compared with Detroit teenagers, or with Detroit males and females across all age groups, the EPA teenagers' rates are substantially higher. It is worth noting, in passing, that the females in the Detroit study were about 17 to 18 percent less vernacular than the males. By contrast, female teenagers in our EPA study were generally more vernacular than our males, in part because of the interviewing skill of Faye McNair-Knox, an African American woman who had lived in EPA since her teenage years, and interviewed most of the female adolescents in our sample. Among other things, she recorded Tinky and Foxy in the company of her adolescent daughter RaShida, as part of excited discussions of contemporary adolescent life. For more on this, see Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994).

Before going on to consider Foxy and Tinky's more recent usage of vernacular features, let us compare their mean usage in 1986 and 1987 with that of other African Americans from East Palo Alto. Figure 4 compares Foxy and Tinky with two working adults (their mothers) and two older retirees (John Carbon, 88, and Penelope Johnson, 76) who were recorded contemporaneously (see Rickford 1992 for details). And Table 3 provides the frequency data corresponding to Figure 4. The six individuals in Figure 4 and Table 3, representing three age groups or life stages, are a subset of a larger sample of EPA speakers recorded in the 1980s as part of the East Palo Alto Neighborhood Study [EPANS]. Note that although the number of *speakers* on which Figure 4 is based is relatively small, their recorded samples are long, and the number of *tokens* for the variables is large enough to allow for robust comparisons. For instance, the difference between the usage of the Retirees vs.

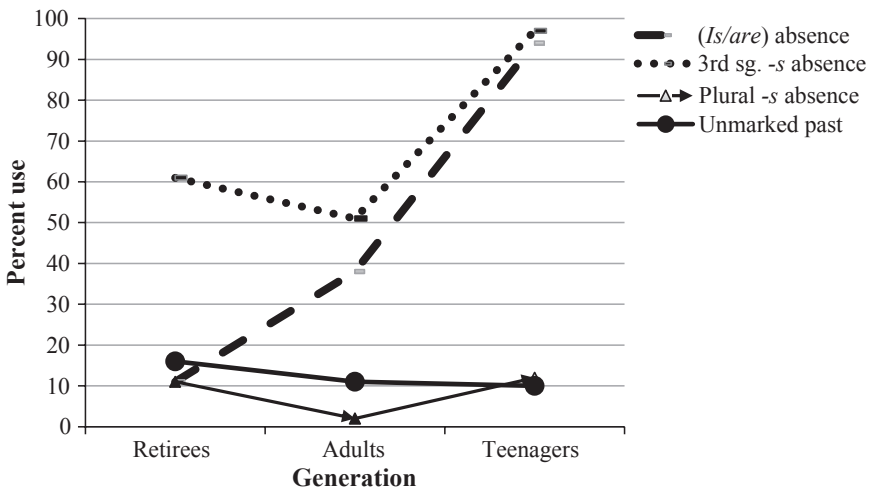


Figure 4: African American Vernacular English features over three generations in East Palo Alto, California (based on data from Rickford 1992: 178, Table 1)

Table 3: Frequency data corresponding to Figure 4 – African American Vernacular English features over three generations in East Palo Alto, California

Variable	Retirees % use	Adults % use	Teenagers % use
<i>is/are</i> absence	11 (31/278)	38 (72/192)	94 (139/154)
3rd sg. <i>-s</i> absence	61 (117/192)	51 (50/99)	97 (121/125)
Plural <i>-s</i> absence	11 (37/354)	2 (6/269)	12 (32/274)
Unmarked past	16 (96/617)	11 (23/204)	10 (28/279)

Teenagers in Figure 4 is statistically significant for all variables except plural *s*-absence. And for third singular *-s* and plural *-s*, the combined token count for the six EPA speakers in Figure 4 is 416 and 897 respectively, compared with 176 and 560 respectively for the seventeen members of the NYC Jets (Labov et al. 1968: 161, Tables 3–10a).

Bearing in mind the abstract patterns we considered earlier in Table 1, we might interpret the relatively flat synchronic age distributions for plural *-s* absence and unmarked past tense in Figure 4 as indicative of stability or the absence of change in community norms over time. However, the pronounced upward slopes in Figure 4 for the relative frequency of third singular *-s* absence and copula absence between the oldest, the middle and youngest generations are ambiguous between interpretations as age-grading or generational change (compare Table 1, where a regular slope with age has three distinct interpretations). And to disambiguate them we'll need to turn to longitudinal evidence in real time, beginning with the panel study re-interviews of Foxy and Tinky in their mid-thirties.

THE 2006 AND 2008 RE-INTERVIEWS

A few years ago, we were fortunate to have Foxy and Tinky re-interviewed by RaShida Knox, the daughter of Faye McNair-Knox, who conducted the original EPA interviews in 1986 and 1987. RaShida, about the same age as Foxy in the first interview, had been present at the first interviews as co-interviewee. To help us introduce our 'Girlz II Women,' we'd like to cite some of the lyrics from 'It's so Hard to say Goodbye to Yesterday,' a song made famous by their namesake group, Boyz II Men:

- (4) How do I say goodbye to what we had?
 The good times that made us laugh
 Outweigh the bad.
 I thought we'd get to see forever
 But forever's gone away.
 It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.

Interestingly, although both of our female re-interviewees do have some fond memories of yesteryear, they present themselves as contrasting with Boyz II

Men, **and** with the boys and men of their community, in that they quickly outgrew the lifestyles of their male friends and partners. Foxy reflects these sentiments in (5) below, discussing why she first began to think about ending her six-year relationship with a young man from East Palo Alto (Int. = Interviewer):

- (5) Foxy: It's because it got to that point [pause] where I could be saying, 'Oh let's, let's go to Monterey for the weekend.' Or, you know, 'Let's go to Napa' or 'Let's go do this.' But he was like, 'No, I don't wanna do that.' I'm like- I'm like, 'You know what? I'm outgrowing you.'

Int.: Right.

Foxy: That's where the change became. It's like, you know, I'm thinking of moving on. I wanna do this, I wanna do that. Not just stay around the hood and hang out with your boys. And go to this person house for a fish fry. You know? I'm like 'You know, you see, I need to go to a higher level. I need, I need more.' It was like I was growing, outgrowing him and I needed more. I needed more.

Part of the change dynamic that drives Foxy and Tinky as women is the sense of responsibility to their children, and the desire to model a lifestyle different from the one they grew up with. As the adult Foxy and Tinky say quite explicitly:

- (6) Foxy: I think about, you know I'm grown, I have kids. This is the lifestyle I wanna have my kids to have. I wanna be a role model for them. You know, and you know, they- You know they [the guys] still hanging out. They still hanging out. They still partying. They, like I said, they still having fish fries and everybody rolling blunts and da da da this and da da that. And I'm like 'Oh no!' (Adult Foxy, 2008)
- (7) Tinky: And that's, that's, that's where I wanna be. I wanna be in that comfort zone. To where [pause] I don't wanna be like my mom at fifty-seven, and don't have nothing to stand for. I wanna be sociably and retirement-ly okay. I wanna have investments that's gonna work for theirselves, to where I don't have to work that hard. If my children *do* need my help, I can help them. If I'm in a position to do so, or trying to give them the areas where they *can* get in those positions to help them. I think every parent wants to help their kid, you know what I'm saying? And make them be in a ver- better social and economical stance, in some point. I think. (Adult Tinky, 2006)

It should be noted that the EPA in which Foxy and Tinky grew up was an economically depressed place, a haven for the purchase and sale of crack cocaine, and a city that in 1992 was classified by the FBI as the murder capital of the U.S. insofar as it had the highest per capita murder rate. Tinky and Foxy were, through their boyfriends, tangentially involved in the drug scene. But as adults and parents, they wanted to pursue legitimate occupations, and go

places, both literally and figuratively. It's significant that both now live outside of EPA, Tinky indeed now out-of-state.

The first of our two informants to be re-interviewed (in September 2006) was Tinky Gates. She was now thirty-five, and married, with five children. The recording was nearly three hours long and yielded a typed transcript of nearly one hundred pages. RaShida proved herself to be a superb interviewer in getting Tinky to speak freely and animatedly about changes in her life since the 1980s, providing lots of encouraging back channel cues ('Mm hm,' 'Ah-ha,'), breaking into peals of laughter when appropriate, and interrupting only to ask brief follow-up questions or comments. We provide these details to emphasize that if the speech of Tinky and Foxy comes across as less vernacular in these recordings than they did in 1986, it's due to neither the interviewer nor the interview, which was an intimate, insider *tour de force* that would be difficult if not impossible for sociolinguistic researchers from the outside to approximate. At the end of the interview we learned that Tinky and her family were planning to move to Kansas, where Tinky hoped to realize her dream of investing in real estate.

Foxy Boston, then thirty-five, was re-interviewed in January 2008 by RaShida. Foxy was also allowed to speak freely, with little interruption. The conversation again lasted for three hours. Foxy provided a detailed account of her life, starting immediately after graduating from high school. Among other things, she described her long-term relationship with a 'baller' (a major drug dealer), how it broke up, and how she studied and practiced nursing for a while. She left nursing to start her own burgeoning day-care center, and now has two kids, whom she is determined to send off to college, to get the college experience she never had. Foxy's occupation as a day-care proprietor and teacher, who has to impress parents sufficiently to convince them to enroll their preschool-aged children in her preschool rather than in its competitors, is certainly one that would encourage greater standard language use in terms of the 'linguistic market' concept (cf. Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975; Sankoff and Laberge 1978). A career in real estate of the type Tinky envisaged would presumably also encourage greater standard language use, but at the stage at which she was last interviewed (2006) it was more of an aspiration for Tinky than a reality.

Table 4 displays Tinky and Foxy's vernacular usage in their most recent recordings, compared with their usage in their earlier, 1986/87 interviews. It is clear that on all three variables both women have moved away significantly from the vernacular highs of their teenage years, and closer to mainstream or standard usage, Foxy even more so than Tinky (with respect to third singular *-s* absence, at least).

At the same time, it is important to note that while Tinky and Foxy may be somewhat less vernacular, they have not become invariantly standard speakers. And, as Table 5 shows, while their current usage is much more similar to that of their mothers' usage in 1986/87, it is not completely so. That is, our erstwhile teenagers have not quite 'become' their mothers, at least not yet. (The one

Table 4: Tinky and Foxy's teenager vs. adult use of vernacular features

Variable	Tinky Gates		Foxy Boston	
	Age 15, 1987	Age 35, 2006	Age 13, 1986	Age 34, 2008
Invariant <i>be</i>	50 (25 per hr)	10 (3 per hr)	146 (97 per hr)	27 (10 per hr)
3rd sg. <i>-s</i> absence	96% (56)	57%* (201)	97% (69)	23%* (109)
<i>is+are</i> absence	81% (256)	54%*(464)	90% (154)	35%*(376)

*Foxy and Tinky's adult use is statistically different from their respective teenage use, for 3rd sg. *-s* absence and for *is+are* absence, $p < .0001$ (by Fisher's exact test, two-tailed).

Table 5: Tinky and Foxy's adult vernacular use, compared with that of their mothers at comparable ages

Variable	Tinky Gates compared with her mother		Foxy Boston compared with her mother	
	Tinky at 35 (2006)	Paula Gates at 38 (1987)	Foxy at 34 (2008)	Dotsy Boston at 42 (1987)
Invariant habitual <i>be</i>	10 (3.4 per hr)	0	27 (10 per hr)	1
3rd sg. <i>-s</i> absence	57% (201)	44% (34)	23% (109)	54% (65)
<i>is+are</i> absence	54% (464)	35% (115)	35% (376)	18% (77)

exception is Foxy's new third singular *-s* absence rate, which is even lower than her mother's. Foxy has, on this feature, out-mothered her mother!

Although Foxy and Tinky's diminished vernacular usage does not exactly approximate that of their mothers, it is still true that it might be most fairly characterized as an example of age-grading. Returning to the patterns of Table 1 that involve a regular synchronic slope with age, we can eliminate interpretation #3, of generational change, because this would require stability (no change) at the *individual* level over time, and Tinky and Foxy have **not** remained stable in the 20-year interim.

But we can also eliminate the interpretation of lifespan change that follows the contours of an ongoing change in the community because of data from Alim (2004) on the vernacular usage of today's African American teenagers in Sunnyside, which is essentially the same as EPA, shown in Table 6. Although Alim's (2004) sample does not include all the age groups of Rickford's original EPA study, it includes extensive data from four 17 year olds, essentially

Table 6: Use of AAVE features by four Bay Area teens from 'Sunnyside' (Alim 2004: 154, 170, 179)

Variant	Interacting with familiar Black peer groups (2004)
Invariant habitual <i>be</i>	20 tokens per hour
Third singular <i>-s</i> absence	85% (52/61)
<i>is+are</i> absence	80% (190/235)

allowing us the perspective of a *trend* study, a replication in the same area at a later point in time with different informants. When recorded in interactions with familiar African American peer-group members, similar to the contexts in which Foxy and Tinky were recorded in the 1980s, Alim's four 'Sunnyside' teenagers (two males, two females) show high rates of third-singular *-s* absence (85%) and *is/are* absence (80%), approximating if not exactly matching Foxy and Tinky's teenage usage.⁶ Since the 'Lifespan Change' interpretation requires evidence of 'Change' at the community level over time, and today's teenagers in 'Sunnyside' show us evidence of 'stability' rather than 'change' in comparison with the EPA teenagers of the 1980s, 'Age-Grading' rather than 'Lifespan Change' or 'Generational Change' is the most plausible interpretation.

The evidence from Tinky and Foxy also matches the three-part 'Life Stages' model of Chambers (2003: 171), especially the third-stage movement from vernacular to standard that accompanies the transition from adolescence to young adulthood:⁷

First in childhood, the vernacular develops under the influence of family and friends ... Second, in adolescence, vernacular norms tend to accelerate beyond the norms established by the previous generation, under the influence of dense networking ... Third, in young adulthood, standardization tends to increase, especially for the subset of speakers involved in language-sensitive occupations in the broadest sense of the term.

Interestingly enough, Chambers (2003: 199), noting that 'there have been no developmental studies documenting the stages in which some young adults adjust their adolescent accent to accommodate the pressures of the marketplace,' outlined what such a study might look like:

Such a study would ideally involve tracking a large sample of adolescents from the time of their most peer-dominated year, around 15, through the increasing maturity of their late teens and early twenties, when occupational aspirations normally develop, and then into the mid-twenties or perhaps early thirties, as they settle into the workforce and begin to realize their ambitions. The study would require observations of speech in 'official' contexts (school and work) and in casual contexts (hang-outs and home) in order to contrast the use of variables.

Although our study does not fulfill *all* the dimensions of Chamber's ideal study (it does not involve a large sample, and it does not include recordings in casual and official contexts), it does provide the essential contrast he envisaged between individuals recorded in their teens and thirties, with (as we'll show later) information about their stylistic range. And it does show the 'linguistic retrenchment' that Chambers (2003: 195) anticipated, defined by Wagner (2012: 375) as 'a retreat from the non-standard variants used in youth followed by stabilization.'

EVIDENCE FROM OTHER LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF AAVE

Apart from our work in East Palo Alto, we know of only three other longitudinal studies of African American English, and they are all panel studies:

- Cukor-Avila's (1995, 2002, and with Bailey, 2007) research on changes in Springville, Texas;
- Baugh's (1996) follow up of four speakers from Pacoima, Los Angeles, eleven years later; and
- Van Hofwegen and Wolfram's (2010) study of fluctuations in the vernacular usage of 32 children in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, from preschool to grade 10.

Baugh's (1996) study is most comparable to ours in focusing on the transition between teenage and adult usage, and attributing the linguistic change at the individual level to age-grading. He compared the vernacular use of four African American males, Russell, Leon, Jojo and Carlos, whom he had originally interviewed as teenagers in the LA area in 1976, with their usage when re-recorded as adults in 1987. The overall conclusion he reaches, in line with earlier generalizations about AAVE, is that:

young African American men [adolescents, teenagers] maintain the vernacular dialect that is most different from standard English; adults drift closer to Standard English through their lifetime. (Baugh 1996: 409)

This conclusion, which would also confirm Chambers' (2003) life-stages model, is based in part on evidence from the probabilities for following grammatical constraints on *is*-absence, which, for the most part, decline from 1976 to 1987. And it is based, even more tellingly, on the differential rates of non-standard negation used by the four males as teenagers and as adults, shown in Figure 5.

Although Jojo, Russell, and Russell's brother Leon all show dramatic **decreases** in vernacular usage between their teenage and adult recordings, comparable to what we saw for Tinky and Foxy, Carlos (JoJo's brother) does not. Baugh attributes this to the fact that the former three have solid middle-class jobs that require them to interact with people who are ethnically and economically diverse (Russell did an MBA and owns a hardware store,

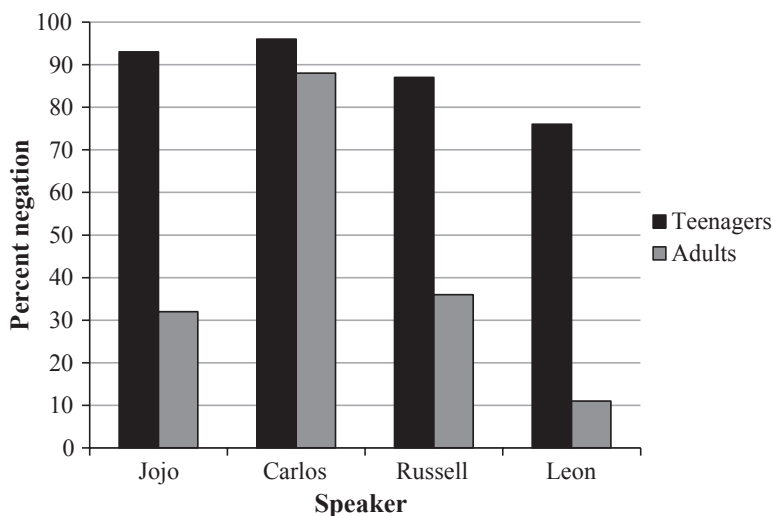


Figure 5: Declines in non-standard negation of four Pacoima/LA males between their teenage and adult years (adapted from Baugh 1996: 411)

Leon is an executive with IBM, and Jojo is a sergeant in the army). By contrast, Carlos (Jojo's brother) is serving a life sentence for murder and robbery and his associates are other prisoners among whom the vernacular is much more highly valued than the standard.

As Baugh notes, in a passage that recalls the concept of the *marché linguistique* (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975) or linguistic market (Sankoff and Laberge 1978):

... blacks who have greater day-to-day contact with Standard English are more likely to speak it themselves, particularly if individual blacks find themselves in social circumstances where their professional opportunities and identities are tied to occupations where dominant linguistic norms prevail. (Baugh 1996: 412)

The second set of longitudinal studies is based on fieldwork conducted by Patricia Cukor-Avila and Guy Bailey in the small rural community of Springville, East Texas, from 1986 to the present. It thus matches the time frame of the East Palo Alto study, but reaches very different conclusions. Although the project has looked at 98 informants, 63 of them African American, the most interesting longitudinal results come from three children born between 1979 and 1982 who were recorded multiple times between 1988 and 2002. For this paper, we'll draw on the very comprehensive report of Cukor-Avila and Bailey (2007). Figure 6 shows the steady increase in the use of three innovative forms – invariant habitual *be*, the use of *had+past* as a preterit, and the use of *be like* as a quotative introducer – in Brandy, one of the multiply recorded Springville youth, between the ages of 6, 12, and 20. The authors argue that these increases represent clear instances of change in

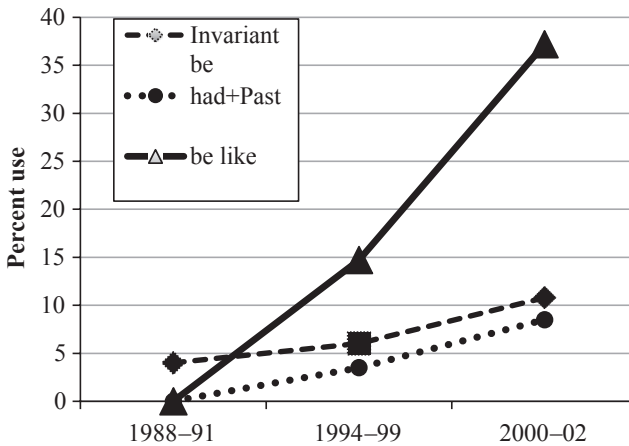


Figure 6: Rise of innovative forms in the speech of Brandy (b. 1982), Springville, Texas (Cukor Avila and Bailey 2007)

progress, the features emerging in the speech of Springville adolescents as they came into increasing contact with nearby urban centers where they had established themselves earlier. Although age-grading plays a role, as it often does in generational change, there is no evidence of age-grading in the traditional cyclic sense, since the older generation of Springville adults had not used these innovations, and the younger speakers like Brandy have not shown any *decrease* in their use of these forms as they have grown out of their teenage years. (At the same time, they are not in their mid thirties, with kids, and making concerted attempts to get ahead socio-economically, as Tinky and Foxy are, so it remains to be seen whether they will maintain their innovative vernacular usage as they get even older.) Since Brandy and her peers do show change over their lifespans rather than the stability at the individual level associated with generational change in progress, the situation in Springville is best characterized as lifespan change (in the models of Table 1), with individuals showing change over their lifetime in the direction of a change in progress in the community as a whole.

The final AAVE longitudinal study to be cited here is also the newest, a panel study of 32 African American speakers in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, from preschool to tenth grade reported on by Van Hofwegen and Wolfram (2010). Using different measures, the authors find several different trajectories of vernacular peaks and valleys, depending on whether the children's vernacular usage increases or decreases over time. However, a common pattern is the one shown in Figure 7, in which a high vernacular rate at the preschool level is followed by a dip between grades 1 and 4, in which the standardizing effect of schooling is manifested (cf. Craig and Washington 2004), followed by increasing use in the early adolescent and teenage years. This is not generational change, but age-grading in the classic sense. As with the

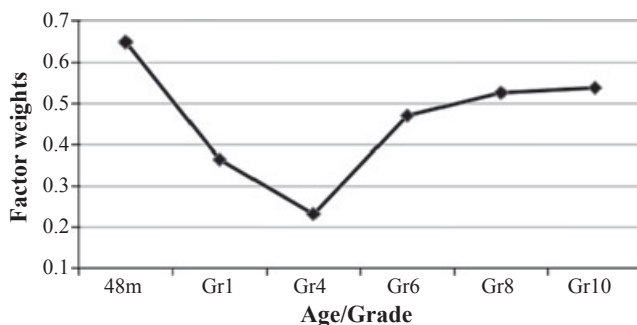


Figure 7: Copula absence factor weights across age/grade in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010: 444)

Cukor-Avila study, we are eager to see whether these teenagers will **reduce** their vernacular usage as they enter the world of work and parenthood, as Foxy and Tinky appear to have done.

To summarize: of the three longitudinal studies of AAVE available, one (Cukor Avila and Bailey 2007) shows evidence of lifespan and generational change, while the other two (Baugh 1996; Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010) show evidence of variability across age levels that we would typically classify as age-grading. Baugh's study is most similar to ours insofar as it spans the transition from teenagers to adults, and shows the kind of diminution in vernacular usage that we would expect from entry into the workplace and interaction with a broader range of people, many of whom speak varieties closer to Standard English.

ACOUSTIC ANALYSIS OF FOXY AND TINKY'S VOWELS

While we have focused on the changes manifested by Foxy and Tinky in their use of stigmatized *grammatical* forms, we have not yet asked whether their *vowel systems*, representing an area of language typically less subject to overt comment and correction and at a much lower level of consciousness, show similar changes. Figures 8 and 9 show that this sort of change has NOT taken place. In Figure 8, most of the differences between Foxy's teenage and adult vowel configurations are inconsequential; the positions of the BEET, POOL, BUT, PUT and BAT vowels are all very similar. Foxy's PIN/PEN vowels are nearly merged, as is the tendency in AAVE before nasals (Thomas 2007: 461). Her COT/CAUGHT vowels are not as merged as they are in California more generally, but in either case, the positions don't shift much between her teenage and adult years.

Like Foxy, Tinky's overall vowel plot remains virtually unchanged. Tinky's vowels, shown in Figure 9, show little change between her teenage and adult recordings as well. She shows even less participation in the COT-CAUGHT merger than Foxy exhibited in Figure 8. There is perhaps a little indication that PIN is separating itself from PEN, but in terms of being further front rather than higher. Overall, however, Tinky's vowel plot, like Foxy's, remains unchanged.

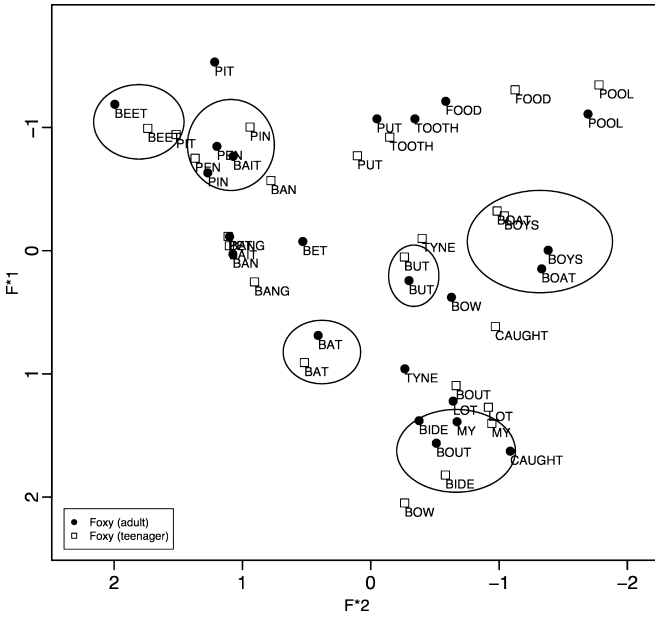


Figure 8: Lobanov normalized formant values for Foxy Boston as a teenager (1986) and an adult (2008)

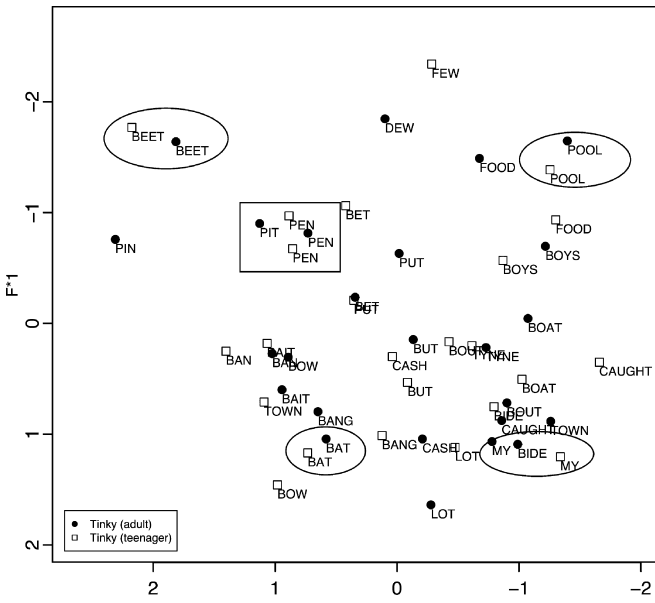


Figure 9: Lobanov normalized formant values for Tinky Gates as a teenager (1986) and as an adult (2008)

STYLISTIC VARIABILITY IN FOXY AND TINKY

To summarize the story as we've told it so far: Foxy and Tinky were two West Coast teenaged African American girls when we first interviewed them in the late 1980s, who impressed us as avid exploiters of the vernacular. They employed key grammatical AAVE features even more frequently than male street gang members in Harlem did two decades earlier, and they presented themselves as hip participants in the tough youth culture of their day. But twenty years later, as grown women with jobs, family responsibilities and high ambitions for themselves and their children, they have changed their networks, and curtailed their use of AAVE grammatical vernacular forms significantly, while their vowel systems, less subject to stigmatization and conscious control, are essentially unchanged.

Here we could simply let the matter rest, if we had only the initial and final data points characteristic of most longitudinal studies. But between their earliest and most recent interviews, we had actually **re**-recorded each of these women, and the data from **those** interviews add some new twists and turns to our story.

Let's begin with Tinky, for whom we have only one intervening recording, EPA123/4, made in 1992, five years after her first interview, when she was 20. By this date she was out of school, but she already had two kids. And as Table 7 shows, she had already begun to make statistically significant reductions in her use of all the features, foreshadowing the additional downward adjustment she would make in vernacular usage over the next 15 years. For instance, her use of habitual *be* has already become vestigial, occurring only 14 times overall, and at a rate of nine tokens per hour, less than half of its relative frequency five years earlier. This linear diminution of Tinky's vernacular usage over three time points (1987, 1992, and 2006) parallels the similarly linear increase in the use of the simple plural pronoun forms (e.g. *nous* vs. *nous autres*) among Montreal French speakers recorded in 1971 (8%, factor weight 0.269), 1984 (22%, factor weight 0.482), and 1995 (29%, factor weight 0.640), as reported in Blondeau (2001: 468).

Table 8 displays Tinky's variability by topic in that intermediate recording in the three variables we have been tracking throughout this paper. Third singular *s*-absence remains relatively high, at 80 percent overall, but this is still statistically lower than in her 1987 interview. While *-s* absence shows some stylistic variability, it is relatively stable (80–88%) for most of the topics; the reductions to 50–61% in topics K, D and E are not statistically significant, partly because of the low *n*'s involved. The topic shifting in her *is/are* absence is more interesting, partly because it includes more statistically significant variability. The difference between Tinky's *is+are* absence rate of 48 percent in topic B and Tinky's 74 percent in topic H or 90 percent in topic G **is** statistically significant. The *is+are* absence data are also more interesting because they reveal that she draws on this feature especially often in what we

Table 7: Tinky Gates' vernacular usage across her multiple interviews

Interview date	Age	Interview	Interviewer and co-interviewee (where recorded; duration)	3rd sg. present <i>-s</i> absence	<i>is+are</i> absence	Invariant habitual <i>be</i>
Jan 1987	15	EPA 12,13	Faye and RaShida (at Tinky's home; 2h 33m)	96% (56)	81% (256)	50 (19.6 per hr)
Mar 1992	20	EPA 123, 124	Faye and RaShida (at Tinky's home; 1h 33m)	80%* (128)	70%* (286)	14 (9.0 per hr)
July 2006	35	EA 127	RaShida (at Tinky's home; 2h 57m)	57% (201)	54% (464)	10 (3.4 per hr)

*Tinky's 1992 usage differs significantly from her 1987 usage by Fisher's exact test, (two-tailed), both for 3rd sg. *-s* absence ($p = .0018$) and *is+are* absence ($p = .0039$). Her 2006 usage also differs significantly from her 1987 and her 1992 usage, both for 3rd sg. *-s* ($p < .0001$ in both cases), and *is/are* absence ($p < .0001$ in both cases).

Table 8: Style shifting by topic and embodied quotation in Tinky EPA123 (1992)

Topic (time)	<i>Is+are</i>	<i>Is+are</i>	Habitual <i>be2</i> overall	3rd sg. <i>-s</i> absence overall
	absence overall	absence in 'Embodied Quotation'		
A: (0:12–9:19) What T's been doing last 5 years	2/5	0/0	0	0/0
B: (9:19–19:06) Kaya, Kaya's man, mom and drugs	14/29	1/1	0	15/17
C: (19:06–30:50) Surviving, money, babies	40/52	2/2	0	18/22
D: (31:20–36:44) Future, and lessons from past	9/14	0/0	1	3/5
E: (36:45–51:40?) Marriage to B and its problems	23/34	9/10	6	14/23
F: (51:40–57:44) How met B, and his annoying womanizing cousin	9/16	6/10	2	6/8
G: (57:45–1:07:54) Relationship with her dad	18/20	10/12	2	5/6
H: (1:07:55–1:27:08) Annoying grandma and family	75/101	37/42	0	39/45
K: (1:27:10 to end) Teenage relationship with PW	9/15	5/7	3	1/2
TOTAL , all topics	70% (200/286)	82% (69/84)	14	80% (101/128)

will call 'Embodied Quotation,' voicing the words of African American friends and family members (and sometimes herself) who people her narratives, through direct quotations, as in these examples:⁸

- (8) 'Girl, you know you all Ø DOIN' it!' [22:19]
 (9) 'either you Ø gon do right by me or you Ø gon get out ...' [37:52]
 (10) 'And your woman is a lab technician.' [1:06:45]
 (11) 'T[inky] Ø jus' fas!' [1:24:42]
 (12) 'Them Ø the only people supposed to know where I'm at.' [1:25:47]
 (13) 'I'm not over there bein' no ho' on the corner like y'all Ø talkin'!' [1:27:05]

As a comparison of columns two and three in Table 8 demonstrates, copula absence in such Embodied Quotations is almost always higher than copula absence overall. And indeed, the difference between Tinky's total copula absence **in** Embodied Quotations (82%, 69/84) and total copula absence **not in** Embodied Quotations (65%, 131/202) is statistically significant ($p = 0.004$ by Fisher's exact test, two tailed).

Foxy's interim recordings in Table 9 require even more discussion, because there are three of them, and they show more dramatic fluctuations in use. For instance, if our only evidence of Foxy's *is/are* absence as a teenager had come from her 1988 and 1992 interviews, at age 14 (36%) and 17 (40%), and we had then compared those figures with her *is/are* absence in 2008 at age 35 (36%), we would have found no significant statistical difference, and would have concluded that this area of her grammar was stable, with no evidence of change, not even of **age-grading**. But if we took her recordings in 1986 at age 13 (90%) and in 1990 at age 16 (70%) as teenage anchor points, and then compared those with her copula absence in 2005 at age 36 (36%), we would find evidence of *change* at the *individual* level, corresponding to a *stable community* pattern of age-grading, the conclusion we have already reached above.

Foxy's data teach us several lessons about assessing how individuals change over time. The first is that we need *multiple recordings*, ideally with different interlocutors, and on different topics, to 'plumb the sociolinguistic competence' of our speakers and appreciate the range of their sociolinguistic repertoire in its full richness and complexity (Rickford 1987). Chambers (2003: 171–174), citing studies from Scotland, England and the United States, has shown that style-shifting begins at a very early age – not only in adolescence and pre-adolescence, but perhaps as young as three or four years old. The samples of individual and group speech that sociolinguists use in studies of synchronic variation and especially in longitudinal studies of diachronic change therefore need to take the potential for style-shifting into account – much more so than they do now. Gregersen, Jørgensen and Møller (to appear) is one of the few studies to do this, its authors showing that the assessment of change or stability in their panel study re-interviews of the same individuals twenty years later depends crucially on *which* interviews are used for the earlier point in time, influenced by where the interview takes place (home vs. work), who the interviewer is, whether it is an individual or group recording, and other factors.⁹ Typically, longitudinal studies of change use just two time points (Blondeau [2001] and Sankoff [2005a] are among the rare exceptions that use three points); but our research, like that of Gregersen, Jørgensen and Møller, suggests that if you have three or more time points, they may or may not show a linear trajectory of development. This is an important, general methodological implication for the study of variation and change.

A second lesson is that we need more than one variable. If our *only* evidence were copula absence, our inferences about whether Foxy had changed individually would be inconclusive, depending on which interviews we took as our earlier points in time. (Not so with Tinky, for whom the evidence of change over time is unambiguous.) But the evidence from Foxy's invariant habitual *be2* use is clearer, its relative frequency plummeting to 3.7 tokens per hour (like Tinky's) in the mid-30s adult re-interview. And so is the evidence from Foxy's third singular present tense –s absence. Even if we took the September 1988 and February 1992 interviews as our teenage anchor points – recall that

Table 9: Foxy Boston's vernacular usage across her multiple interviews

Interview date	Age	Interview	Interviewer and co-interviewee (where recorded; duration)	3rd sg. present –s absence	<i>is+are</i> absence	Invariant habitual <i>be</i>
Dec 1986	13	EPA 7, 8	Faye and RaShida (at Foxy's home; 2h 29m)	97% (69)	90% (154)	146 (97 per hr)
Sep 1988	14	EPA 42, 43	Faye and RaShida (at Faye's home; 0h 56m)	47% (36)	36% (77)	75 (81 per hr)
Jun 1990	16	EPA 55, 56	Faye (with RaShida and another teenager; 1h 55m)	73% (114)	70% (283)	385 (201 per hr)
Feb 1992	17	EPA 114	Beth (White, unfamiliar Stanford grad student, at Foxy's home; 1h 15m)	36% (124)	40% (176)	97 (78 per hr)
Jan 2008	34	EPA 128	RaShida (with occasional interruptions from Foxy's daughters, at Foxy's home; 2h 44m)	23% (109)	35% (376)	27 (10 per hr)

these showed low rates of copula absence, statistically indistinguishable from Foxy's 2008 rates – the relatively low rates of third singular present tense –s absence Foxy displayed therein (47% and 36% respectively) are still significantly different than the even lower rate (27%) she displayed in 2008. (The difference between Foxy's 47% (17/36) rate of third singular present tense –s absence in 1988 and her 27% (33/121) rate in 2008 is statistically significant at $p = 0.0029$ by Fisher's exact two-tailed test. The comparable difference between her 36% (45/124) rate in 1992 and her 2008 rate is statistically significant at $p = 0.0072$, also by Fisher's.) These variables reinforce our conclusion that stylistic variability notwithstanding, Foxy, like Tinky, shows indisputable evidence of age-grading, and accommodation to mainstream linguistic norms, over time.

A third lesson, however, is that individuals differ, and that while it is true that there are no single-style speakers (one of Labov's [1972] famous 'principles'), some are more nearly so than others. Following the ethnographic principle of trying to get at the perspective of the insider, we've had long discussions about Tinky and Foxy with RaShida, who has known them for decades. We don't take her remarks at face value, but considered in the light of the linguistic evidence at hand, they add a useful perspective.¹⁰ To RaShida, Foxy differs from Tinky in being a 'perpetual chameleon,' appearing in different linguistic guises depending on the personas she considers most appropriate to project to the people around her, and the situations she is in. (Compare Woody Allen's character in the 1983 movie *Zelig*, in which his appearance and sometimes accent vary to match that of the people he was interacting with, from African Americans to Asians.)

Certainly Tinky shows the regular diminution of vernacular usage with age over longer time spans (ages 15, 20, 35) that, when not accompanied by corresponding changes in the community, we associate with age-grading. And certainly, as Table 7 indicated, her vernacular usage in any one interview varies by topic, more or less depending on variable. But we have no evidence for Tinky of the dramatic fluctuations from one year to the next (ages 13, 14, 16, 17) that Foxy displays in Table 9, and in the light of this, RaShida's contention that Tinky is less of a chameleon is not unreasonable.

The sociolinguist sampling the speech of individuals in a community to study variation and change is like a fisherman throwing a net into a sea. What the net yields will depend to some extent on the relative mix of chameleons and 'almost single style speakers' there are in the sea (i.e. community) on a given day. The chameleon analogy is also apt, because the changing appearance of chameleonic animals in nature is systematic and purposeful rather than random, and this is also true of Foxy.

Before going on to our fourth lesson, it should be noted that our discussion of individual differences between Tinky and Foxy is perfectly in line with Fischer's (1958: 49–51) observation that sociolinguistic variation is related to personality and mood of the speaker in addition to sex, class, formality, and internal linguistic factors. Although sociolinguists have focused on the latter rather

than the former, differences in style-shifting penchant and pattern may be one of the 'personality' features of variability that are worth increased attention.

The fourth lesson is that we should not be deluded into thinking that Foxy's fluctuating vernacular usage in Table 9 is random, or that despite considering frequencies and social context, we are back in the prison of 'free variation' from which quantitative measures and contextual considerations were designed to free us. Although we will not try to explain *every* instance of inter-interview variation in Table 9, we will attempt to do so for a few of the most salient interviews.

The exceptionally high vernacular usage of Foxy in our first (1986) interview with her, when she was 13, reflects in part her status as a 'popular' middle school student at the time in this community of color, with tons of friends, male and female, some older than her, some of them drug dealers, and all of them active participants in the hip hop, vernacular culture of the day. (In her teen years, Foxy often talked about her personal friendship with *Too Short*, the Oakland rapper whose sexually explicit themes helped him fit in with the gangsta rappers of the day.) But, Foxy's high vernacular usage in this 1986 recording is also a reflection of the high degree of one-up-manship going on between RaShida and herself in this initial interview with Faye MacNair-Knox, which was held in Foxy's home, giving her an edge in terms of familiarity and comfort. Faye is RaShida's mom, and the teenagers were clearly competing to show that they were 'cool,' in touch with teenage norms, anti-adult, hooked into larger networks of friends, and *au courant* with the latest trends in terms of slang, dating patterns, and so on.

The exceptionally low vernacular usage of Foxy in 1992, at age 17, is attributable largely to the fact that she was interviewed by Beth, a White graduate student with whom she was totally unfamiliar. The contrast between this interview and Foxy's 1990 interview at age 16 is the subject of Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994), which demonstrates the relevance of both topic and addressee-influenced style shift, in the context of a larger discussion of Bell's (1984) audience design model. In this connection, note the dramatic range of stylistic variation shown by the Sunnyside youth analyzed by Alim (2004), depicted in Figure 10. There must be several linguistic chameleons in there, since the *range* of copula absence by interlocutor that these youth exhibit as a group (69%, from 11% [84/718] with Unfamiliar Whites to 80% [190/235] with Familiar Black Peers, with Unfamiliar Blacks in between at 37% [310/819]), exceeds the 30 percent range that Foxy exhibits between her 1990 Black interviewer and 1992 White interviewer recordings (70% to 40% copula absence, respectively). It also exceeds the 54 percent range (from 40% to 90%) that Foxy covers across all the interviews in Table 9.

The aspect of Table 9 most in need of explanation is the relatively low vernacular usage that Foxy exhibited in her second, 1988, interview when she was 14. This was at first an enigma, since the interviewer was Faye, the familiar African American woman who conducted the 1986 and 1990 interviews,

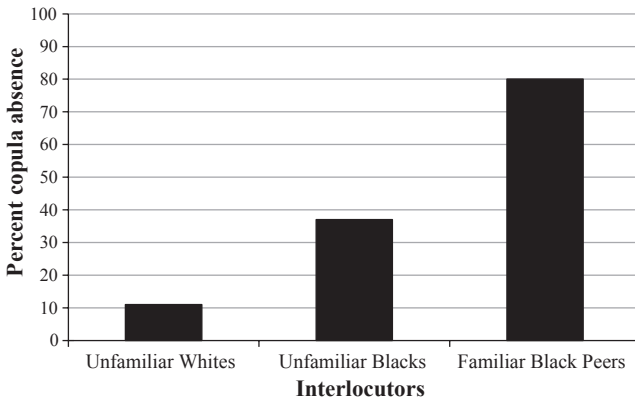


Figure 10: Stylistic variation, by interlocutor, among today's African American youth in 'Sunnyside,' near EPA (from data in Alim 2004: 154–155)

which elicited much higher percentages of the vernacular variables. RaShida was also present in all three interviews as a co-interviewee and conversant. But the interview was conducted in Faye's home, rather than Foxy's, and Faye's roles as mother, older figure and authority were much clearer in this context (like when she ordered RaShida's younger sister, who had been interrupting the proceedings, to leave the room: 'This is an interview! Out!'). The interview was also short (less than half the length of the other interviews done by Faye – see durations in Table 9) and much more taken up with discussions of school, partly because the school year had begun only two weeks earlier, and Foxy was a starting sophomore. Indeed Faye began by saying 'Let's start with high school, since that's the newest experience,' and it was not until fifteen minutes later that she tried to switch the topic from school to boys, the much more vernacular-producing topic of the other interviews. Even so, she gave up on that effort relatively quickly, conceding that 'I see I ain't getting no information outa y'all bout the boys, so I'm a drop that subject.'

Moreover, Foxy had by this time, spent a couple summers in Upward Bound and other enrichment programs at Stanford and like most students from EPA, had started attending Carlmont in Belmont, a primarily White high school that was rife with racism and ethnic conflict, and the real-life setting for the book *My Posse Don't Do Homework*, subsequently made into a movie, *Dangerous Minds*.¹¹ So it would not have been surprising if Foxy had begun to assimilate some of the less vernacular speech used by Whites in her new environments. She herself said that some of her African American peers were beginning to say that she talked like a White girl, although we have not yet pinpointed the features of her speech at the time that might have led them to that assessment. One exception was her persistent *r*-fulness in unstressed syllables where neighboring kids might be *r*-less (e.g. saying 'Everybody an dey mother' with a clearly enunciated post-vocalic *-r*.)

An additional factor is that in her 1988 interview, more so than in any other, Foxy was trying to project the persona (cf. Podesva 2007; Eckert 2008) of a 'model girl,' comparable to Fischer's (1958) 'model boy.' Regardless of whether it was true or not, Foxy told Faye that she'd had little if anything to do with boys, had joined the Black Student Union and the Bible Club, was taking Modern Dance, and was enrolled in programs like Higher Horizons and MESA that encouraged students to go into Math and Engineering. She declared her interest in becoming a doctor – although she had received a more immediate invitation to try out to be a model. Faye kept responding to the news of these developments approvingly: 'Oh, wonderful!' 'You been getting off into some real positive things,' 'Oh, you into some wholesome things' and 'Looks like you staying outa trouble.' And Foxy's less vernacular and more standard usage matched this persona.

Note, finally, that although Foxy's Embodied Quotations in this interview show higher rates of copula absence ($8/14 = 57\%$) than her speech that did not include direct quotes ($20/63 = 32\%$), as is usually the case, the difference is not statistically significant, in part because the n's are relatively small, and because they include, for the first time in her recorded history, quotes of copula-using *White* people, representing the increasing contact with *White* speakers that high school had facilitated:

- (14) 'I don't want any – I don't want any of you guys to be upset, but we have, we *are* having some racial problems here. DON'T get upset.' (White policeman on bus, speaking to African American and Latino kids from EPA who will encounter racist graffiti on the walls of the school once they leave the bus.)
- (15) 'Oh! What grade are YOU in?' (White narc, an undercover cop who focuses on drug use and sales; emphasis added.)

Foxy even has a mock-quote of a copula-using light-skinned, middle-class African American girl from Belmont, the only 'Black' person to make the cheerleading 'spirit' squad, and someone whom Foxy seems to be marking/mocking as 'acting White:'

- (16) "'Well, my mom and dad is a doctor, and I am proud of it. I don't care what no one says!' ... And ... she goes, "And I do this, and I do that, and I don't care what no one says!" [Everyone laughs] And she REALLY cracks me up!'

Beyond demonstrating her versatility at *addressee*-triggered style shifting in the shift to a *White* interviewer in her 1992 recording with Beth, Foxy also displays a complex overlay of *topic*-based style shifting, as demonstrated by fluctuations in copula absence in her 1990 interview, when she was 16, shown in Figure 11.

Now since we know that variation is the engine of linguistic change, a point also made by Fischer (1958), we can assume that stylistic variation of the kind

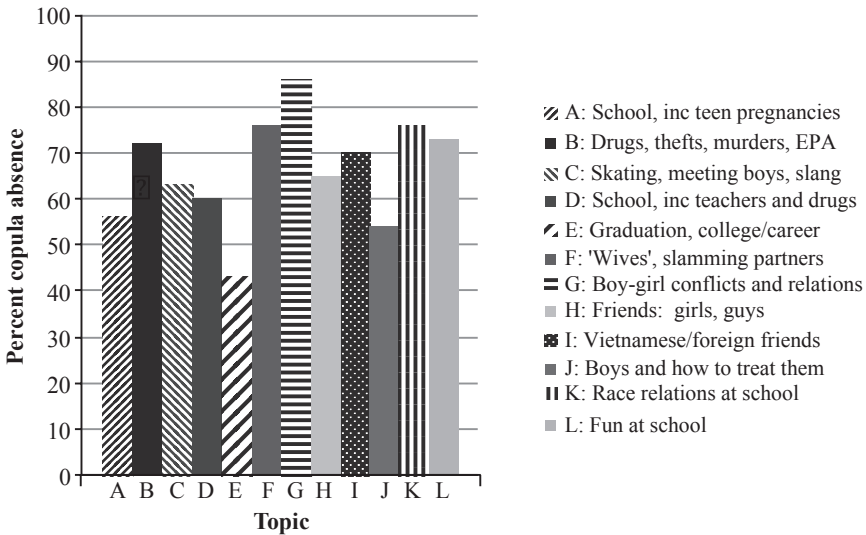


Figure 11: Foxy's zero copula use by Topic, Interview III, with Faye and RaShida (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994)

exemplified by Foxy must be part of many ongoing changes, and that it may have been part of many completed changes, even if historical records fail to show them in their richness and complexity. A recent panel study of change in progress in Montreal French by Blondeau (2001) **does** attend to stylistic variation by topic, and the result, shown in Figure 12, is similar in some respects to that of Foxy in Figure 11.

Blondeau's study examines the increasing use of simple plural forms, *nous*, *vous*, etc. instead of the compound forms with *autres*, as in *nous autres* ('us others'), *vous autres* ('you others'), and so on. Drawing on the powerful Montreal corpus, which includes interviews done in 1971, 1984 and 1995, she finds that, as noted above, there has been a linear increase in the percentage of simple forms (from 8% to 22% to 29%). But in combining data from the two time periods, she also finds the significant style variation depicted in Figure 12, in addition to significant social effects of sex/gender, social class, and social mobility. Very importantly, the change in progress is favored in more formal contexts, where discussion focuses on topics like school and work. Without the data on style shifting by topic, we would have known only the overall increase in the use of simple forms, but not the fact that it was favored in – indeed may have begun in – more formal contexts.

Blondeau's study is a good model for those of us attempting to study change in progress, but the more general role of stylistic variation in change in progress (and vice versa) remains to be fully explored and articulated. For instance, it seems very likely that change, whether of the generational change or age-grading variety, begins in particular styles and spreads to others, much

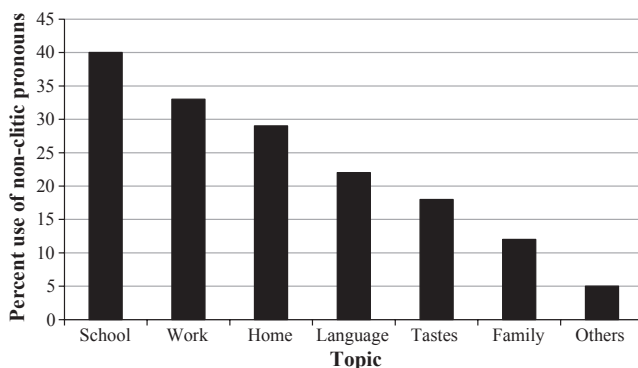


Figure 12: Variation in use of simple non-clitic pronouns in Montreal French, by topic (Blondeau 2001)

as it might begin in particular linguistic environments or with particular features (invariant habitual *be*, third singular *-s* absence) and spread to others (copula absence). Contrariwise, a ‘synchronic’ study of stylistic variation may include features that, without knowledge of their imbrication with age-grading or generational change, remain baffling. For instance, towards the very end of her three-hour re-interview in 2008, at precisely the point where most sociolinguists would expect to see the highest vernacular use, Foxy uses the **least** vernacular and the **most** standard. The reason? She concludes with a long discussion of the day care that she now runs, how she deals with parents, how she introduces kids to computers, and so on. In (17), for instance, she is explaining how state budget cuts are affecting her business; note the full and contracted forms of *are*:

- (17) Foxy: Because I felt so bad for these kids I was like, ‘You know, some day cares don’t even do the things that I do.’ And I could see that other day cares that kids are [at] around here that don’t get what my day care kids are getting, and they’re cutting like that.

This is at the other extreme from the fish fries and marijuana blunts that she complained the boys were stuck in (‘it’s so hard to say goodbye to yesterday’), and Foxy uses a language that is more appropriate to her subject and to the persona of responsible preschool proprietor and teacher she is currently trying to project.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Tinky and Foxy, the ‘Girlz II Women’ whose vernacular morpho-syntactic usage over a twenty-year span we have analyzed in this paper, show changes (decreases) at the individual level that are best interpretable, given the model of Table 1, as age-grading. Supplementary trend study evidence from a recent

study (Alim 2004) supports this conclusion, and the evidence of stability in these women's vowel systems, which are less socially diagnostic than morphosyntactic variables, points in the same direction. This interpretation is also supported by Tinky and Foxy's overt articulation of both how and how much their orientation to the world has changed as they have become parents and wage earners and family supporters.

The evidence of Tinky's intermediate 1992 interview, when she was 20 and already had two children, supports the overall inference of age-grading quite strongly, since it suggests that she had already begun to reduce her vernacular usage as she assumed adult roles. In the case of Foxy, the diachronic picture is muddled (or, we think, enriched) by the evidence of her intermediate interviews that she has been able to vary her copula absence usage – to come across as more or less vernacular sounding – ever since her teenage years. On the one hand, she does appear to be more of a stylistic chameleon than Tinky. But an age-grading interpretation is still valid, based on the less ambiguous evidence of change over time in her use of invariant habitual *be*₂ and third singular –s absence.

The importance of stylistic variation in this case (Foxy's especially) and others (e.g. Blondeau 2001) raises questions about the validity of earlier sociolinguistic studies of stability and change that have not taken this variable into account, and suggests that longitudinal studies of linguistic change might benefit from, if not require, at least **three**, not just **two** time points (cf. Blondeau 2001; Sankoff 2005a). Perhaps attending to style has not been as central in studies of change in real and apparent time because so many of our change in progress studies have involved phonetic variables, where stylistic variability is often (though by no means always) less marked than it is with morpho-syntactic variables. It is certainly interesting that some of the change studies that **have** attended to stylistic variation (e.g. Blondeau 2001) involve grammatical variables. Be that as it may, it should come as no surprise to sociolinguists that stylistic variation is to be expected, and that we need more than two time points to control for the intermediary variable of style. Indeed, change may be favored in or restricted to certain styles, as it may with respect to linguistic environments or social groups. Multiple time samplings and greater attention to style will increase our ability to solve the constraints, embedding, evaluation, transition and actuation problems of linguistic change identified by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) nearly half a century ago.

The importance of stylistic variability in the particular case of age-grading studied in this paper also reaffirms the value of what Eckert (2005, 2012) calls 'third wave' sociolinguistics, in which the study of style and social meaning are central, as is the study of how individual variants (like copula absence or invariant *be*) are combined to create special ways of speaking, and to construct individual personae and social types. It is in this mix of stylistic variation and social meaning-making that language variation and change are embedded.

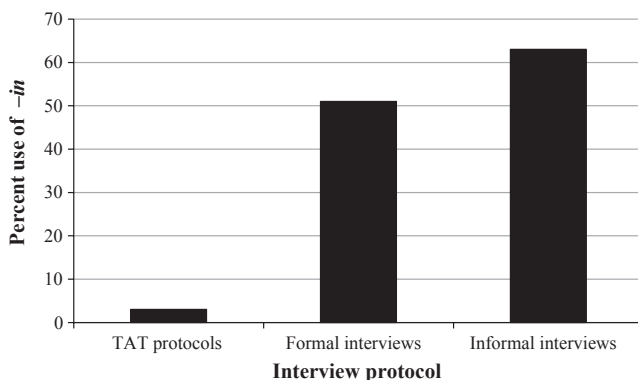


Figure 13: Variation in *-in* use among New England children by style/interview context (Fischer 1958)

One aspect of stylistic variation that has not received much attention in sociolinguistics is the shifts speakers often make when using *quotations* to represent the speech of themselves, their family members, friends and other characters. We have introduced the term ‘Embodied Quotation’ to refer to these instances, using it in Table 8 and in our discussion thereof.

It is helpful, in closing, to return to the pioneering study of Fischer (1958) with which we began. One of the constraints on *-in/-ing* variation that Fischer studied was **style**, as represented by children’s widely varying use of *-in* in the thematic apperception test (TAT) protocols, formally administered, and in informal and formal interviews, shown in Figure 13. In a sense, this was a third wave sociolinguistic study even before the first wave was well established, much as Labov’s (1963) study of Martha’s Vineyard was. And nowhere is this better typified, we believe, than in the fact that Fischer suggested calling *-in* and *-ing*, not free variants, but ‘socially conditioned variants’ or ‘socio-symbolic variants’ on the grounds that they serve to symbolize things about the relative status of the conversants and their attitudes toward each other. ‘Socio-symbolic’ variants as a concept seems capable of accounting for some of the variation that Foxy and Tinky have exhibited in our study. And the concept also provides a good foundation on which sociolinguistics and historical linguistics can begin to take stylistic variation into account (both by topic and addressee) more frequently and forcefully, in studies of stability and change in real and apparent time.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to the editors and anonymous referees of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. We also wish to thank: Faye McNair-Knox and RaShida Knox for their animated recordings with Foxy and Tinky over more than 20 years, and Bonnie McElhinny for her invaluable 1992 interview with Foxy; Marianna Di Paolo

and Rob Sykes for their help with the vowel plots. Thanks also to the many people who provided helpful feedback after John Rickford's plenary presentation at the 2009 LSA meeting in San Francisco, or on other versions or presentations of this paper, including: Suchiao Chen, Patricia Cukor-Avila, Penny Eckert, Lauren Hall-Lew, Tyler Kendall, William Labov, Rob Podesva, Angela E. Rickford, Erik Thomas, Ewart Thomas, Tom Wasow, Walt Wolfram, Malcah Yaeger-Dror, and graduate students in the Stanford Sociolinguistics group. We are also grateful to these and other Stanford undergraduates for help with transcription or analysis of the recordings: C.C. Chiu, Naima Green, Devon Holman, Cameron Jeffers, and Candace Jones. Also, these Georgetown University graduate students for help with the Spanish abstract: Colleen Moorman and Alicia Martinez. Responsibility for any errors, however, remains our own.

2. The point is that Fischer (1958) – and Labov (1963, 1966) – did not intend their conceptual and methodological innovations to apply only to the study of language change, but also to the analysis of synchronic variation, which would be enriched by attention to non-linguistic constraints and quantitative regularities. One sees great evidence of the use of probabilistic regularities in the work of *some* 'synchronic' description in syntax and phonology (see for instance Bresnan 2007; Tily et al. 2009; Shih et al. to appear; and other papers listed and available at <http://www.stanford.edu/~bresnan/publications/index.html>), but this excellent research does not usually consider social and stylistic constraints, nor does it cite Fischer or Labov and represent itself as an intellectual descendant of their work.
3. In the analysis of AAVE copula absence, 'don't count' cases are especially numerous and complex, and there is some variation among researchers (cf. Blake 1997). For comparability with our analyses of Foxy and Tinky's earlier recordings (e.g. in Rickford 1992; Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), in analyzing later recordings we discounted the same cases listed for Rickford et al. (1991) in Blake (1997: 60, Table 1): past tense, clause final, emphatic, finite and habitual *be*, *is* preceded by existential *there*, *is* preceded or followed by *s*, *are* followed by *r*, first person singular *am*, and *what's*, *it's*, or *that's*. In each of these cases, it was either difficult to accurately assess which variant had occurred (e.g. *he 's smart* vs. *he Ø smart* in the case of a following -s) or one or two of the variants rarely if ever occurred (e.g. clause final, where only the full form is allowed: e.g. *that's what he is/*s/*Ø*).
4. Another respect in which Foxy is distinctive is that she uses *be2* in copula and auxiliary contexts primarily with first singular subjects, while Tinky, like most of Labov et al.'s (1968: 234) Harlem peer groups, and the Texas urban adolescents in Bailey and Maynor (1989: 14), uses it primarily with plural and second person subjects, as shown in Table 2a, below. The only other peer group similar to Foxy in this regard is Labov et al.'s oldest peer group, the Oscar Brothers, but Foxy's 80 percent use with first singular subjects dwarfs the Oscar Brother's 24 percent use, much as Tinky's 81 percent use with plural and second person subjects dwarfs the comparable figures for the Harlem and Texas groups (28–37%).
5. Richardson (now Carmen Fought), a former (undergraduate) student of John Rickford's, used data from Foxy and Tinky and other individuals in our East Palo Alto sample for her analysis. As Table 2b shows, her analysis revealed that Foxy and Tinky (in EPA 7, 8 and 12/13) used Verb or Verb+s more than half of the time to mark habituality, followed by *be2*, with *be1* coming in third (a distant third for Foxy, less so for Tinky). These data cover first, second and third person subjects, both singular and plural.

Table 2a: Use of invariant habitual *be2* as a percentage of all present tense copula and auxiliary forms (*be2* + *be1* in full, contracted and deleted variants) by person-number category in Foxy and Tinky's first recordings, compared with other groups and studies

Variable	Foxy (EPA 7, 8, 1986)	Tinky (EPA 11, 12, 1987)	Jets, Harlem*	T-birds, Harlem*	Cobras, Harlem*	Oscar Bros., Harlem*	Urban kids, 11–13 yrs, Texas**
1st sg (am)	80	10	13	14	16	24	16
3rd sg (is)	28	10	6	7	15	0	4
Plu & 2nd (are)	48	81	29	37	32	16	28

*Labov et al. (1968: 234).

**Bailey and Maynor (1989: 14).

Table 2b: Foxy and Tinky's different ways of expressing the habitual in present tense contexts in their first (1986, 1987) interviews; based on Richardson (1991: 294, Table 1)

Present tense context	Foxy (% use)	Tinky (% use)
Verb(s) (e.g. <i>he walk(s)</i>)	58	68
<i>Be1</i> (e.g. <i>he is/'s/ Ø walking</i>)	5	11
<i>Be2</i> (e.g. <i>he be walking</i>)	34	17
<i>Will V</i> (e.g. <i>he'll walk</i>)	3	4
TOTAL	100% (n = 379)	100% (n = 299)

- The match is clearest in the case of *is/are* absence. Foxy and Tinky's combined copula absence rate in their 1986/87 recordings is 84 percent (346/410), and there is no statistical difference between this and the 80 percent (190/235) rate reported by Alim (2004: 154) for his four 17-year-old Sunnyside teenagers in interaction with familiar black peers (Chi-square = 1.092, $p = 0.296$, two-tailed; Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.2751$, two-tailed).
- Young adulthood may be interpreted as stretching from about 19 to 34 years of age, since Chambers characterizes 'middle age' on p. 165 as stretching from 35–55 years. Note, too, that Foxy's and Tinky's occupations as day-care proprietor and real-estate agent respectively both qualify as 'language sensitive' in the sense that Chambers uses it in this quotation.
- Direct quotation often plays a significant role in narratives, as others have noted. Among other things, it adds to the dramatic effect (Macaulay 1987), and can serve as an evaluative device, helping to justify the actions of central characters and demonstrate why the narrative is worth telling (Labov 2004). However, as far as we know, the relation between direct quotation (what we refer to as 'Embodied Quotation') and the use of vernacular in narrative has not been noted or treated as theoretically significant before.

9. Gregerson, Jørgensen and Spindler Møller's (to appear) LANCHART study of variation in Danish is similar to ours in a number of respects, including the fact that the time span between their initial interviews and subsequent re-interviews is 20 years, and that the years in which those interviews were done overlap with ours (1987 and 2006). More significantly, note their remarks (to appear: 8) after comparing the (æ) raising variable as used by KLT across three interviews (interview 1, recorded at work in 1987, showing 5% raising, interview 2, recorded at home in 1987, showing 36% raising, and the 2005 re-interview, showing 8% raising):
- if we compare [the 2005 interview] with interview 1, nothing at all has happened in KLT's life-span, whereas if we compare with interview 2, there is a drastic change. This shows that intra-individual variation may be greater than real time life span variation. Or put another way: we might seriously have underestimated the amount of raising in this informant's repertoire if we had looked only at interview 1.
- These remarks parallel what we said above about the copula absence evidence across Foxy's five interviews.
10. The assessment of a native speaker's language use and persona by another native speaker is not customary evidence within (socio-) linguistics. An obvious difficulty is that it is not itself hard empirical data, although it can be considered in the light of usage data, as is done in this paper. In this respect, it is like much of ethnography. But like ethnography, it draws on insider knowledge. And given that RaShida grew up in the same community as Tinky and Foxy and has been acquainted with them for more than thirty years – far longer than most sociolinguists or ethnographers know the individuals or communities about which they write – her perspective must be given some credence.
11. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DangerousMinds>. And note that the book's author, Lou Anne Johnson, began teaching at Carlmont in 1989, so Foxy, a sophomore there in 1988–89, would definitely have overlapped with her, and she may have known some of the characters depicted in Johnson's book and movie, or been one of them herself.

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Address correspondence to:

John Rickford
Stanford University – Linguistics
Department of Linguistics Bldg 460, rm 107
Stanford
California 94305-2150
U.S.A.
rickford@stanford.edu