

Variation, stylization and heteroglossic linguistic practices among multiethnic Hip-hop youth in Oslo

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Abstract

Increasing resentment towards multiculturalism, fueled by sentiments of fear and anger, has intensified the struggle for belonging and identity among the mixed and diverse populations of Europe. This paper considers Hip Hop performances by Oslo youth of immigrant backgrounds in the context of this struggle.

Recent work on language and identity among urban youth in Norway suggests that Hip Hop plays a decisive role in the creation and formation of multiethnolectal urban speech styles (Brunstad, Røyneland & Opsahl 2010; Knudsen 2010). A similar phenomenon has been documented among Eastern European immigrants and Latino youth in New York City (Cutler 2008; Slomanson & Newman 2004).

Drawing on these studies I argue that immigrants as well as native-born youth are drawn to Hip Hop's oppositional symbolism and use language in ways that challenge hegemonic language ideologies. I show that variation, stylization and heteroglossic language practices function as a means for hip-hop-affiliated youth *to differentiate themselves from others, to signal social and discursive stances*, and as a way to *resist and transform traditional social and ethnic categories*.

In addition I argue that certain kinds of linguistic practices cannot be fruitfully analyzed within a traditional sociolinguistic variationistic framework. As shown by Eckert (2000; 2008) and others, counting variants and providing statistical analyses may hide rather than reveal highly context sensitive social meanings and plastic patterns of use.

References

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