

LIMINALITY AS LINGUISTIC PROCESS. IMMIGRANT YOUTH AND EXPERIENCES OF LANGUAGE IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

If it is an adult they think that younger people don't really know how to translate. They just look down on them and by showing them that a kid translates it kind of raises up my spirits a bit. It kind of gets back at them. [...] He will look down on him and he will be like, ha, ha, ha, and he will start laughing at the little kid. And if the little kid does show him he can translate it kind of raises up the kid's spirits. It gives [him] more encouragement for the next time (Sammy).

12-year old Sammy, the son of immigrants from Mexico to Chicago, is one of millions of children of immigrants in the United States and Europe who, in the process of growing up, use language to negotiate multiple relations and forge new identities. These youths sometimes utilize their knowledge of two languages to mediate between their parents and speakers of the "majority" language. At the same time, like all people, they deploy language to negotiate their *own* identities with these adults, and with each other, as well as to *contest* identities that are wrested upon them. Each of these linguistic processes – mediation and contestation – is shaped by the youths' positions of liminality along the lines of immigration status, language, and age.

In this paper¹ we will build from anthropological theories of liminality, providing a critical evaluation of this concept as a useful heuristic for understanding the linguistic practices of immigrant children. Entailed in this is a brief discussion of how the concept of liminality has hitherto been used to explain the experiences of immigrants, particularly immigrant youth, in anthropological and socio-linguistic research. Centrally, this paper will explore the power-laden ways in which the limen becomes situated linguistically, and how new identities are constructed from this locus, by looking at the language practices of Turkish adolescents in Berlin (Germany) and Mexican-origin children in Chicago (United States).

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Using these two cases as points of leverage, we develop a comparative analysis of immigrant youths' experiences in two different national and cultural contexts, focusing on linguistic processes of mediation and contestation. We center our analysis of mediation in the study of Mexican-origin children who serve as language and culture brokers for their families in the Midwestern United States. Our analysis of contestation is based on the ways in which the Turkish youths clustered in a Berlin youth gang use language to contest and recode stereotypes put on them by dominant society. We draw from multiple, mutually illuminating sources of data, including field notes based on participant observation, open and semi-structured interviews, inferred personality characteristics tests, survey data, transcripts of focus groups, children's journal entries and transcripts of youth engaged in a range of talk.

We begin our discussion with a brief elaboration of the construct of liminality, from its inception to its portrayal in current anthropological, sociological and sociolinguistic inquiry. We then go on to identify three key theoretical concerns about the construct of liminality: first, issues of power; second, the conceptualization of change; and third, the multiplicity of identity processes. We consider how these three issues play out in the experiences of immigrant youths and their language practices, and through grounded theorizing aim to contribute to an elaboration of theories of liminality, partly by joining Turner's concept of liminality with more recently-forged hybridity theories.

The concept of liminality

The concept of liminality was originally formulated by Turner (1969), who took up van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) model of "rites of passage." Elaborating on Durkheim's (1912), and later Eliade's (1959) dichotomization of human experience in sacred and profane, Turner used this concept to describe a phase through which an individual passes during processes of social transition. Liminality is a condition in which individuals are stripped off their ordinary identities, roles, and positions. During a liminal period the characteristics of the "ritual subject," as Turner calls it, are "ambiguous;" he or she is "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969: 94).

Rites of passage are periods of ambiguity that accompany every change of place, state, social position and age of an individual. A rite of passage is a three-part process that includes first the separation of the individual from one of his previous social statuses, second, the *limen* (lat.) or threshold phase, and third, the aggregation of the individual into a new status. During the first phase, the individual symbolically detaches from an earlier status in the social structure and/or a set of cultural conditions. "Liminality," the second stage, is a state experienced by the individual during a rite of passage. It is a condition

of not having full membership in a status.² In the third phase the ritual cycle is completed and the ritual subject is again a member of a “relatively” stable state, with the binding norms and values connected to it.

Turner had a closely defined understanding of liminality. In his conceptualization “liminal personae” do not fit the categories that are available for societal classification. It is exactly for their “betwixt and between”-ness (Turner 1969: 94), their lack of membership in established categories, that liminal persons are assigned and represented by numerous symbols in societies that ritualize these transitions. On the symbolic plane liminal transitions are often represented as death, darkness, invisibility, and being in the womb (95). The behavior expected of liminal persons is passivity, humility and obedience. Classic examples are initiates in traditional societies and soldiers in modern day armies. They are in a state of absence of personal rights, and they cannot challenge unjust treatment. Their former self is ritually deconstructed and a new self that will lead them through the new life stage is constructed from its ruins. During the transition stage, liminal personae develop “an intense comradeship and egalitarianism” (95) and rank and status distinctions disappear. For Turner the experience of liminality is part of the normal developmental process of every individual: “social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality” (97). Importantly, each society is made up of “multiple personae, groups, and categories,” each of these with a separate developmental cycle, so that at any given moment an individual might be both in liminal and structured states.

When a group of people goes through a liminal phase together, *communitas* is created. A brief elaboration of the notion of *communitas* is of interest here, because in this article we are specifically addressing social processes and practices. *Communitas* is not “community” in its prevalent connotation, but essentially the complementary opposite of societal norms and classifications: “[C]ommunitas emerges where social structure is not” (126). The opposition between structure and *communitas* hence does not describe the difference between the inner sphere of family or neighborhood life (“community”) and the outer sphere of official institutions and the public sphere. *Communitas* means that there are no institutionalized rules or norms. *Communitas* is outside of the defined statuses of “structure,” it is “spontaneous, immediate, concrete” as opposed to “norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract” (127). Crucially, as we can see, *communitas* can only become evident “through its juxtaposition to, or hybridization with, aspects of social structure” (127).

Turner is then situated in a structuralist functionalist approach in which the liminal phase culminates in the reestablishment of structure and social order. However, this process is dialectic, and for Turner the notion of hybridity is entailed in this dialectic. The opposite is part of that which it opposes. Commu-

2 Turner defines a state as “any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized.” It opposes the “transitions” between these states.

nitas (and hybridity) for Turner are not simply resistant forces, but *communitas* is what makes structure possible.

Theoretical work related to the notion of liminality includes Mary Douglas' (1966) work on purity and dirt and the danger inherent in their conflation and Max Gluckman's (1997) work on rituals of rebellion and the inversion of power structures during seasonal rituals. These early anthropological writings, according to Werbner (1997), showed how hybrid symbolic acts challenge cultural orders from a position within society. Other work in this line include Barth's (1969) analysis of the creation of identity via processes of opposition and boundary construction; Bakhtin's (1968 [1940]) analysis of popular mass culture and carnival as subversive and challenging inversions of popular discourse; and Park's (1950) concept of the marginal man. Each of these theories can provide insights into the experiences of people who do not experience themselves as full members of particular social groups, even as each differs in their central focus in the way they address the experiences of individuals versus social groups; the movement of people between spheres versus their experiences on the margins, and power and change.

In the context of immigrant and minority cultural and language practices, the notion of liminality was first framed in essentialist models of identity that were instrumental in creating discourses about the "deficiency" of immigrant children. The notion of cultural and cognitive deficiency proposed that minority and immigrant children come into mainstream society with a lack of skills in one or more domains (linguistic, cognitive, developmental, social).³ This deficit model, which previously dominated work across disciplines on the linguistic and cultural practices of minority and immigrant children, has since met a devastating critique from the fields of education, psychology and cultural studies. In a postmodernist reaction to the dominating Eurocentric view on minority children's cultural and linguistic practices (and in its implications of their cognitive potential), the notion of *new ethnicities* and with it the concept of *hybridity* was introduced.⁴ The term hybridity describes the idea that immigrants and ethnic minorities are not merely caught in a deadlock between cultures; rather this state of "in-betweenness" is a positive, socially productive historical process in which new cultural practices are forged in their own right. Werbner (1997) stresses the unbounded, impure characteristics of hybridity as opposed to essentializing notions of monolithic identities implied in normative theories surrounding immigration and immigrant identities. Hybridity theory emphasizes the creativity of the cultural practices of the "new ethnicities." The central idea involves looking at what these formerly stigmatized social groups have to offer in and of themselves, and not at how they compare to the dominant group.

In post-colonial theory it is Bhabha (1994) who has reconceptualized the notion of cultural hybridity. Bhabha introduces the concept of mimicry to

3 For a critique see Cazden 1970, 2001.

4 Hall 1996 [1989], 1994; Hall & du Gay 1996.

conceptualize the subjectivity of the liminal experience, the “social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective” (2). He argues that cultural identities are not pre-formulated, a-historical cultural traits that are mapped onto conceptions of distinct ethnicities. Rather, for Bhabha cultural identities are continually negotiated through the interface and exchange of cultural performances that produce recognizable representations of cultural difference. For Bhabha a third space is created at the heart of first world cultures and Third World postcolonial states. This is a liminal, hybrid space for the production of cultural meaning. The concept of mimicry subverts Fanon’s (1952) dichotomic theory of oppressor and oppressed, while still speaking to a hegemonic context that demands assimilation, in which there is no room for difference. Liminality – as subversion – here takes the form of (subtle) mimicry, “as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. This is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 1994: 85).

Mimicry is neither unidirectional, nor static. Rather, it presents a practice of political agency appropriating forms of cultural representation. In sociolinguistic theory, Rampton (1999) shares this focus on slippage and describes social and linguistic interactions as constant flows of structured practices that can be breached and interrupted, and because of this, day to day life presents dozens and dozens “of small-scale opportunities for minor adventures into liminality – opportunities, indeed, for the reworking of oppressive relations which liminality is seen to permit” (Rampton 1997: 6). In his study on the use of Stylized Asian English among multiethnic urban youth in Great Britain, Rampton (1995: 158f.), draws on theories of liminality to interpret the use of stylized language as a form of ritual interaction. According to Rampton, stylized talk as a youth cultural language practice centers on issues of social order. He introduces three different kinds of interaction rituals that use stylized language – rituals of disorder, differentiation and consensus. These three functions – the anti-structural, the differentiating and the consensual – are taken from a number of discussions of ritual.⁵ Rampton (1995) points out that collective ritual, here in the form of language practices, function as attempts to resolve deep social anomalies and contradictions. These processes surrounding structure and anti-structure – as theorized by Turner – become meaningful in the context of youths’ use of formalized speech as well.

Recent work employing the concept of liminality then uses Turner’s concept as well as hybridity theory to theoretically grasp processes of adolescence, ethnicity and identity. This work includes considerations of adolescence as “liminal,”⁶ “liminal ethnicities,”⁷ and studies on liminal cultural,⁸ and

5 See Goffman 1967.

6 Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995; Bucholtz 2002; Skelton 1998.

7 Back 1996; Hewitt 1992.

8 Gilroy 1987; Puzar & Markovic 2001.

multilingual language practices⁹ These recent conceptualizations are important developments in our understanding of immigrant positionalities, because they address the tensions of immigrant subjectivities and practices without reifying and fixating immigrants in stable identity categories, or normative host-newcomer dualisms. However, both the original and these recent conceptualizations fail to consider how, at the local level, liminal practices may play out in very different, possibly contradictory ways, and how they might include practices of both accommodation and defiance at the same time. Liminal practices may then be both hybrid practices that merge different cultural forms into a “bricolage” (Hebdige 1979: 102ff.), and practices of contestation that newly forge apparently “authentic” ethnic traditions (Williams 1990). In this paper we will look at language practices that appear to be dichotomous in this way; we, however, consider both to be linguistic practices that arise from being “betwixt and between.”

Practices of mediation and contestation

Examining liminality as linguistic practices means looking at how liminal positionings in society are responded to culturally. We have described prior sociolinguistic research on positionalities of in-betweenness and marginality. As we turn to our cases, we want briefly to introduce the social and historical contexts in which these particular youths grow up, and note some similarities and differences. Similarities in the social and historical contexts of Berlin and Chicago include challenges for immigrant communities to establish access to institutional networks and resources of the dominant society, and ethnicization and racialization of both immigrant populations in the dominant discourse.¹⁰ In the United States and Germany immigrants can be found at all levels of society; nevertheless the Latino and Turkish immigrant families in our case studies are positioned in the lower socioeconomic levels in society, as indeed are the majority of their counterparts. Resulting from this is low symbolic, cultural and educational capital of immigrants, and low linguistic prestige accorded to their language.¹¹

Important differences between these immigration contexts include the fact that the sites vary in the relative progression of historical stages of immigration in that the Turkish youths generally were second and third generation immigrants, while the Latino children were the 1.5 generation,¹² i.e. some of them had been born in the United States, while some of them had only recently arrived with their parents. The complexities of the local sites also include the fact that the Chicago data is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two different communities in the Chicago area.

9 Androutsopoulos 2002; Eksner, to appear; Rampton 1995, 1999.

10 Çağlar 1995; Urciuoli 1998.

11 Bourdieu 1977.

12 Portes & Rumbaut 2001.

Differences in the research foci in each site also have importance for the kinds of phenomena we observed: the Mexican children were observed mainly at home and in school, while the Turkish youths were observed in a youth centre and on the neighborhood streets. Accordingly, the youth were involved in different kinds of activity settings, where different language practices would flourish: in activities with families or in classrooms (in the case of the Mexican youth) versus hanging out in the street (in the case of the Turkish immigrant study). This has implications for the presence or absence of adults in the activity settings described as well as for other differences in practice. For example, while hanging out in the street different participants are involved in the activity, different situational identities are constructed, and different actions are pursued than when translating back and forth for a mentor while negotiating over a public aid form with a government agent.

Lastly, in addition to differences in social and historical contexts, it is important to consider differences between the groups that we studied. The Turkish youth were somewhat older (ages 16–18) and in mid to late adolescence, while the Mexican youths were 10- to 12-years old, just entering the liminal phase of adolescence. Further, the Turkish youths in Berlin were self-proscribed members of a local youth gang (the “36”). In contrast, the Mexican youths were identified on the basis of a school survey in which they self-identified as translators for their families.

It is this range of activities and variations in immigration histories and contexts that gives empirical power to our grounded discussion of the concept of liminality. By comparing two immigration contexts, and contemplating the liminal experiences and practices connected to them, we are able to illuminate the dimensions of liminality in ways that would be impossible with a single case. All of these remarks also add up to explain why we use the Berlin case to describe processes of contestation, because on an overall continuum these adolescent Turkish youths’ practices are situated more at the end of contesting practices. In contrast, the practices we observed with the Latino children are overall more closely linked to mediating activities. This does not mean that each group does not engage in the other activity, or that each practice cannot be used in the service of the other (as indeed the opening quote by Sammy suggests; Sammy uses his skills as a mediator to *contest* his positioning by others). Further, we do not mean to imply that these differences in the expressions of liminality are culturally pre-determined or that they map deterministically or easily onto either cultural group or context (Germany or USA; Mexican or Turkish). Rather, it is the unique combination of developmental stage (which includes identity formation and autonomy from the family) as well as socio-cultural and class context that shapes the forms of cultural practices around language that are produced.

Research sites

Our first research site is located in a Turkish ethnic enclave in Berlin, Germany, a neighborhood also known as “Little Istanbul.” During the late 1990s, socio-linguists, politicians, and the media in Germany have busily discussed a new language code as being the second and third generation immigrant youths’ Creole variety of German. Discourse depicted and continues to depict the majority of the speakers to be of Turkish origin and the new code is characterized by the “toughness” and “aggressiveness” of the streets. Some writers declared this apparent new code to be a phenomenon related to pidginization; some labeled it mere semi-lingualism. Both the media and official institutions described the speech of German Turks as bad, uneducated and unintelligible. At the same time pop-cultural discourse celebrated a new stereotype of a tough, empowered, yet semi-literate, inarticulate jargon – “‘lan-talk”¹³ or “Kanak Sprak”¹⁴ (Zaimoglu 1995, 1997, 1999) – supposedly spoken by immigrant Turks of the second and third generation. The data presented here is pulled from a larger body of research on how German Turkish youths’ linguistic and social practices are related to their notions of collective identity that are created in engagement with and contestation of discourses about their liminal positioning in German society (Eksner, to appear).

The youths in the study were predominantly male teenagers aged 14–18 years and involved in a neighborhood youth gang. In contrast to other neighborhoods in Berlin, where Turkish youths grow up with closer contact to peers of other nationalities, and often are completely bilingual, most of the youths in the Berlin-Kreuzberg field site were dominant in the language used at home, Turkish, and usually also interacted in Turkish among themselves (Eksner, to appear). Most of the children are successive bilingual speakers, with Turkish learned first and German acquired later. However, the youths have several codes and registers at their availability, and the “new pidgin” is only one situational code reserved mainly for conflict interactions with members of the out-group, particularly German and Arab youths. As in other cultural settings, the youths’ code and register use is connected to specific linguistic realms: they used several linguistic strategies, i.e. different registers and codes, according to the demands of the respective situation. There were three different spheres of relations that demanded different linguistic strategies: First, the inner sphere of class-equal familiar and familial relations, secondly, the outer sphere of authority and class/race imbalance, and thirdly an outer sphere of reversed authority and dominance by the Turkish youth. We will discuss in more detail how the code used in this outer sphere of reversed authority has

13 “‘Lan” from “oglan” means “boy” in formal Turkish, it is often being used to mean “gay” in slang language. Both “‘lan” and “oglan” (my son) are slang terms that Turkish male youth in Berlin frequently use to address each other. “To speak ‘lan” is how this code is frequently called among German youth.

14 A derogative term used for immigrants, from the Melanesian ethnonym “Kanak.”

performative power attached to it that transforms language into a tool of contestation.

In the second case study we are building on a line of research carried out by sociolinguistic, psychological and educational researchers interested in the experiences of immigrant children in the United States who translate for their families. Since the 1990s there has been an increased interest in what researchers have called “family interpreters,”¹⁵ language and culture “brokers”¹⁶ or “para-phrasers.”¹⁷ Researchers have considered the social and linguistic processes involved as well as the psychological and educational consequences of this practice.



*Illustration 1: Claiming territory and power,
wall with graffiti by the “36 Juniors”*

Para-phrasing, like other forms of social interaction, takes many different shapes as it occurs in different contexts, relationships, and activity settings. Most often, youth translate for their parents (usually their mothers) or other close family relations; but they may negotiate for that parent in interactions with a wide range of others, including teachers, social workers, lawyers, government officials, store personnel, doctors, dentists, and strangers on the street. The texts children translate include official letters, medical and insur-

15 Valdés 2002; Valdés, Chávez & Angelilli 1999.

16 Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez & Moran 1998; Cooper, Denner & López 1999; Tse 1995; 1996; Weisskirch & Alva 2002.

17 Orellana 2001; Orellana, Dorner & Pulido 2003; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza 2003.

ance documents, letters from school, application forms for store credit and legal materials. These exchanges may take place in public spaces, before audiences, or in the privacy of families' homes. Children may deploy mostly English as a mediational tool (e.g. when translating written or oral texts, or when going out in the world to do things for their parents simply because they can speak English), or both English and their home language (e.g. when they negotiate conversation), in different configurations. Power relations in these situations are differently configured, which shapes the nature of the mediational demands on youth, as they must negotiate their own relationship with each speaker as well as the communication between different adults. There are different kinds of mediational demands on children when they translate, for example, between a parent and a lawyer, a teacher and a student, or an aunt and a neighbor. But in all cases children have to listen as well as speak in order to represent each perspective and accomplish the task at hand.

As this initial introduction of our two research sites demonstrates, structurally comparable experiences of immigrant childhoods in the US and Germany can lead to different practices situated in subjective feelings of marginality.

Theoretical concerns

While the concept of liminality seems immediately heuristically useful in characterizing these experiences, as we detail our cases we will use grounded theorizing to further elaborate the topic. With this discussion we want to indicate ways to conceptualize liminality in a more differentiated way than has hitherto been the case, and better unite it with other theories of hybridity. We will consider three major theoretical concerns, which fall into the following broadened categories: (1) issues of power, (2) the conceptualization of change, and (3) the multiplicity of identity processes.

Power

While for Turner the liminal phase is a phase of loss of status, powerlessness, and obedience, "new" liminality theories, speaking to hybridity and defiance, operate with complementary categories: appropriation, power (of the streets), and disobedience. There is a mismatch then between these two conceptual frames. As our, and other, case studies reveal, adolescent social practices clearly show the impact of power relations, or structure and in-betweenness often comes hand in hand with powerlessness. Immigrant child translators in Chicago are mediators between their parents and English speakers because of socioeconomic and structural conditions that have kept their parents largely monolingual. Turkish teenagers in Berlin are stereotyped and experience prejudice that is similarly connected to their socioeconomic standing and segregated lives in Germany. They create a situational code that appropriates and at

the same time defies these stereotypes. This, however, neither implies that they are unconscious of power relations (or that they don't adhere to the demands of power inequality), nor that their cultural responses are truly agentic political responses to these relations.

Stylized Turkish German as contestation

We introduced three different spheres that demanded different linguistic strategies of Turkish youths in an ethnic enclave in Berlin: the inner sphere of class-equal familiar and familial relations, the outer sphere of authority and class/race imbalance, and lastly an outer sphere of reversed authority and dominance by the Turkish youth. Particularly during situations of conflict with members of the out-group, the boys would intentionally use a third register, apart from Turkish and German, which I have called Stylized Turkish German¹⁸ (STG) and which is the object of ongoing debate about "pidginization" in Germany. STG, which is used in the outer sphere of reversed authority and dominance by the Turkish youth (outer sphere 2), will be the focus of the following discussion.

The language ideologies of the youths reflect the dominant discourse that strongly prefers standard German pronunciation and describes (ethnic) accents as negative. Accents are complex signs of difference in which several semiotic principles converge: they are perceived as outlining contrasting cultural positions and create a frame of reference and interpretation in which a person's looks, language and actions are judged.¹⁹ To say that a person sounds typically Turkish means the person is likely to mean or do just what one would expect from a Turk. In contemporary Germany a Turkish accent is strongly associated with exclusion. People who speak with such an accent can be ridiculed, treated as if they are stupid, and put down by standard speakers. Accent as a marker of ethnic identity also indexes social capital. The youths showed keen awareness of these different ways that accents crucially influence their social positioning.²⁰ While accounts of accommodation to standard, or as they called it, "good" German were frequent among the youths, in the sphere of reversed power relations, accent was redefined as a sign of power and strength in the face of the interlocutor.

It is the peculiarity of outer sphere 2 interactions that the rules and power inequalities of outer-sphere 1 are suspended or superseded by reversed norms.²¹ Here the Turkish youth feel themselves to be in a (real or imagined) position of dominance. The relations in outer sphere 2 are not connected to institutions or authorities as those of outer-sphere 1 are. Instead they take place in uncontrolled territory that cannot be claimed by German mainstream society, as for instance the territory of the neighborhood Kreuzberg 36 or the youth center. Typical interactions take place on the street, in parks, in public

18 This term is modeled after Rampton's (1995) "Stylized Asian English."

19 Urciouli 1998.

20 Eksner, to appear.

21 Bakhtin 1968 [1940].

places, with people who have no institutional or network control over them. These interactions include other youths, especially youths that are not part of the same networks, thus Germans and other foreign youth.

There are two main characteristics of conflict situations with non-peers. First, conflict situations are carried out in ritualized speech that reflects exactly their notions about others as they are mirrored and indexed in language. Second, they employ linguistic strategies of insult and counter-insult to compete over masculinity.²² Not only could code switching be observed, in their interviews most boys also stated that they spoke “hard” or “tough” in situations of conflict. The following is an excerpt from an interview with 18-year old Murat (M).²³

JE:²⁴ Are there any situations, in which you talk harder than you talk now with me?

M: Naturally there are, yes. For example, if I see a guy here, who, let’s say, is getting on my nerves or something, or who wants to confront me, or something like that, then I’ll talk a little bit harder... While now... now I’m giving an interview, let’s say, I’m still talking more friendly. Now I’m still talking friendly, you know... Then, let’s say, another one comes, like this:

[Murat’s voice rises to higher pitch, and gets louder. Facial expression and body language more tense] Hey! ... What’s up! Whyya staring at me ...

[lowered voice and pitch again] naturally I’ll talk hard with him, that’s automatic. Not... yes... uh... uh... [and back to original pattern] I won’t talk like that, because then he thinks softballs. ... What’s up.

STG then is a code created to represent “toughness” in language; a “foreignized” German with Turkish paralinguistic features. Its properties are closely modeled on the discourses surrounding indexes of Turkishness and the Turkish language. The interpretation of STG as a situational register is supported by the fact that the youths have achieved different levels of linguistic competence in German, while they all “hypocorrect” their linguistic production in the performance of STG. The concept of hypocorrection, as introduced by Baugh (1999), originally referred to African American Standard English speakers who, in an attempt to perform an inner-city African American identity, will shift style towards African American Vernacular English, resulting in the creation of hypocorrect – as opposed to *hypercorrect* – utterances and linguistic overcompensation beyond the target linguistic form. In a similar way, STG is used to mark a certain, “non-German” identity in the face of speakers who are not Turkish. The situational identity that is created through this register use is a form of meta-identity.

STG closely resembles ethnolectal varieties, where basic structures are acquired, while phonetic features (“accent”) and lexical items alone provide the “ethnic overlay” (Fennell 1997; Labov 1972). However, STG stands inde-

22 Dundes 1972; Tertilt 1997.

23 Interview in Standard German.

24 JE = Julia Eksner.

pendently from the parents' immigrant language, and it is therefore not a Creole that developed of their parents' speech. It can also not be seen as a kind of substratum effect. The function of language has shifted from a learner or interlanguage to its function as an identity marker via the emergence of a situational "xenolect." A xenolect, which Holm (1988) defines as "slightly foreignized varieties spoken natively." It does not rely on radical restructuring of language, but on a small – "but symbolically significant" (Fennel 1997) – amount of influence from immigrant languages to render it different from the standard.

STG is employed in interactions of situational dichotomization as a register that carries xenolectic characteristics. With this it primarily serves as a social semiotic.²⁵ Several short examples of naturally occurring conflict situations will serve to illustrate ritualized speech as social semiotic. The first situation, which we will discuss, takes place with members of the out-group.

One evening, five of the older boys were standing in the entrance of the neighborhood center. They were talking to each other in Turkish, while code switching to and borrowing from German all along. Because they knew each other, they presupposed each other's accents and code switching, which are both indexes of their shared location and background. For the boys the neighborhood center is "theirs;" it is the former "headquarters" of the local gang, the "36" and the boys know all the regulars, have keys to some of the rooms, and regard the Germans, mainly adults, who use some of the space for their dance or music practice, as outsiders. While the youths were standing in front of the building, a German man and a German woman, in their mid-thirties, appeared in the window above them. To the Turkish boys they were presumably identifiable as typically "German" because of their light skin and hair, their choice of clothes, the way they moved, and the simple fact that they were not known to them as regulars. The man in the window waved to the boys, which was probably prompted by the boys holding and filming with a video camera. The boys acted on the looks of the German man as a creative index, thereby establishing an inside-outside line across the following interaction (Standard German/Berlin dialect: normal letters, STG: bold, Turkish: small caps):

- C: *[sweet, tempting voice]* Fall... fall...
[German man is waving from a window in the building to the camera.]
 T: *[performative, Berlin dialect, loud for the camera]* What kind of asparagus²⁶ is this, I'm fucking your mother. Fuck, fuck...
[The man can't hear what the boys are saying. He closes the window. One of the boys whistles to get his attention. The man opens the window again.]
I'm fucking your mother, yes, I'm fucking your mother. I'm fucking your mother. OK, HONEY, BYE BYE).
[The man is waving again. The boys laugh.]
 Some people like it when you fuck their mothers.

²⁵ Fennel 1997.

²⁶ Derogative for skinny, "weak," German.

[The German woman appears in the same window and waves like crazy. We can only guess her motives for this action...]

Haha... THEY ARE GIVING IT TO YOUR FATHER A LOT²⁷.

Somebody's touching you down there, right... ha. *[laughs]*

While this example might seem crude, it is both exemplary of the youths' language practices, and, if looked at in more detail, shows linguistic richness. The boys started out their comments with a rhetorical question in the local Berlin dialect, thereby both demonstrating proficiency this register, and sharing their assumption that the two adults in the window are Germans from Berlin. They then addressed the Germans in a deliberately aggressive way, shouting to them in a very curt and offensive form of German that appears simplified. The Germans could probably overhear some of the louder comments. In two instances, when they used particularly crude insults, which they may not have felt appropriate to say to the face of their interlocutors (or to the camera), they switched back to Turkish (see underlined). When the Germans left the window, the boys continued their usual pattern of interaction. While the German adults might have interpreted the whole situation in terms of code (i.e. "deficient language skills"), the underlying dynamics were generation, ethnicity and class. The boys here employed strategic or "metaphorical" switching (Blom 1972) between different codes.

In the following interactions, conflict interaction took place in a less mediated way, here however among youths in the in-group themselves. Because STG is not the code used for in-group conflict, we catch only short glimpses before the boys switch back to Turkish to continue the conflict or before they resolve it. In the first example, Çem (Ç) and several of his friends are playing computer games at the neighborhood center. A register switch from jokingly commenting on his friends to a half-serious conflict occurs. Çem is teasing Halil as "gay," because he does not act up for the camera. Halil gets up and without much ado, and no words, boxes Çem in the stomach. Çem's register switch ensues during this action (Standard German/Berlin dialect in normal letters, STG in bold, Turkish small caps):

- Ç: Yo, we're inside, man, what's up? Everybody's shooting already, yeah, come on... yeah. You're all lazy, man...
[Çem zooms in on Halil]
[voice starts to get into higher pitch] What's up with you, hey you faggot.
[laughs] Hey, it's you I'm talking to. Yeah. Exactly you. GET LOST, I SAID.
[Halil gets up].
'Lan!! *[suddenly very high pitch, loud]* **Fuck off, I said, 'Lan!!**
[voice suddenly drops, calmer] ...STOP.

This interaction points into the direction of how "tough talk" is used among the boys. The performance of STG can be glimpsed in the first phrase uttered by Çem, immediately after Halil attacks him. He however immediately switches into Turkish (italics), since STG is not the conflict code used with in-

27 Allusion to anal penetration.

group members. It might also have been perceived as too aggressive for the context of originally playful in-group-conflict.

In a last example, we find STG to be used as a ritual of consensus, which again points to its role as social semiotic. In the interaction below we find a formulaic – ritualistic – exchange of phrases. STG is used in joking provocation between two friends and acquaintances of the same social status. While the youths were all participating in a representation of them to the outside world (by making a video), one of the boys, Tarkan, was holding back and not really playing along. In this interaction Rahman (R) challenges Tarkan (T) in a friendly and consensual manner, thus inviting him to properly participate in the ongoing activity. STG was used as a regulative and consensual register, reminding Tarkan of where he was, with whom he was hanging out and simultaneously symbolically referring to and enacting the emblems of being “ghetto.”

In this excerpt the older boys are spending their Friday night by roaming through the streets of the neighborhood, documenting their paths with a video camera. Rahman (R) is filming the others and then focuses in on Tarkan (T). Tarkan makes a sign of refusal with his hands, but Rahman continues to film Tarkan. He then initiates interaction by teasingly addressing Tarkan in STG (while before they had been speaking Turkish). Tarkan picks up the genre and responds with a strong accent himself (and exactly despite the fact that he is one of the youths who is almost completely bilingual):

- R: [loud] “What’s going ooonn [= stretched sound] here, what’s going ooonn, heey...
[higher pitch] heey... what’s goin ooonn here, what’s going ooonn... You a [higher pitch] victim or were you victimized?”
T: [loud] ‘Maaan! You a victim you.’
R: [loud, high pitch] “Or did you, or did you victimize?”²⁸

Rahman makes these switching practices explicit and points to the performative efficacy of using stylized speech. We want to cite this excerpt in length, because several of the social relations and issues addressed in this paper are also addressed in his statement:

- JE: Be tough? Yes, I become angry too, but I don’t know if I do the same things as you do, or you. How do you do it? Show me. What would you say then?
R: [dismissive] I don’t know what I’d say.
JE: Well I would talk like this: Hey, are you stupid or what? Don’t mess with me! That’s what I would say.
R: Nuuh, I would say: HASIKTIR ‘LAN!’
JE: What?
R: HASIKTIR ‘LAN!’
JE: What does that mean?

28 The trope of “victim” is a very strong one in this ingroup. Rahman tries a word-play by turning the passive “victim” into an active verb “victimize,” which in German obtains the meaning of “sacrifice.” The intended meaning is “Did you victimize somebody?”

- R: Fuck off.
JE: But would you say that to a German?
R: To a German I would do, yes, I wouldn't say anything, I would just hit him in his face, that's it. Immediately.
JE: If you wouldn't hit him, though, but you would talk.
R: I would then use such... such a strange accent and say: 'LAN SIKTIR...
JE: What strange accent?
R: Like Turkish-German, somehow. All different. How should I... how should I explain this. I don't know how I can explain this, but I would say, 'LAN SIK-TIR [*high pitch, curt*] GIT...
JE: And why would you stress it that way?
R: Because he's supposed to take me serious.
JE: And he will take you serious, if you stress it that way?
R: Yes, yes. Exactly.
JE: Why is that?
R: Because he's afraid then. [...]
JE: And then I also wanted to know why you think this is this way. Why is it especially intimidating?
R: Because you come across hard somehow. With that I want to show, that I'm serious, and then it happens, d'you understand?

In this interview excerpt we can observe how Rahman, just as Murat earlier, stresses the efficacy of language as performative/performance. Speech acts in STG can thus be understood as performative in the sense described by Austin (Austin 1975). The youths understand utterances in STG as acts in an interactive continuum. To sum up, discourse about liminality, in conjunction with everyday life and labor experience, is self-reflexively appropriated and mapped onto language to index collective group identity and express (linguistic) difference from Germans and what they represent. In using different speech styles in different contexts, “we” and “they”-codes are enacted; they reflect culturally constructed oppositions between categories of speakers. Different codes are employed to index situational shifting identities: in using standard German, migrant children stress their equality and rights to occupation or political rights. In using their non-native languages, the familial background, or the cultural heritage and connection to it, is stressed. In using stylized German, the authority of all images and discourses connected to it, is invoked and a youth identity of deviance and “otherness” is presented. At the same time, this novel form of speech is not only symbolic of a newly forming social entity, but also instrumental in creating it,²⁹ i.e. while STG arises from a position of liminality in German society, it is also instrumental in symbolically and materially reproducing this liminality.

Mediational processes in para-phrasing

Where the Turkish youth described above self-stereotyped as talking “hard,” in acts of contestation, the mediational work of the Mexican immigrant youth with whom we worked might be characterized metaphorically as ways of talking “soft.” On the surface, these practices may appear diametri-

29 Gal 1987.

cally opposed. But we want to argue that these divergent practices arise from similar relationships between participants and structures of power; they only represent different ways of engaging with those structurations of power.

In some (though by no means all) mediational encounters children are expected to speak on behalf of their families to people who have the power to offer or withhold a range of resources, goods, information, or other services. The children that we worked with had translated for their parents in schools, government and public aid agencies, doctor's offices, as well as stores and restaurants. (They also engaged in many private translation acts at home with their family; these were different kinds of mediational events that we have analyzed elsewhere; they do not involve the same kind of "soft talk" that we see in public encounters.) In their efforts to secure resources for their families, children in these encounters sometimes exaggerate politeness norms and soften their parents' words. As Luz, a 19-year-old who had translated for her family for many years put it in an interview: "I became a huge 'May I help you' kind of person." Luz talked of softening her father's "vulgar" language when she translated for him:

Once we got into the office an English speaking person would ask my dad questions and even though he understands lots of English he made me answer the questions. And that wasn't too easy because I had to interpret what my dad wanted me to say without sounding rude or ignorant. My dad doesn't speak proper Spanish either so I had to watch what I was going to say to this person carefully. I couldn't use the derogatory comments my dad had so I had to sort of fix what he wanted me to say to the person. So I just had to be like, 'Oh my father is very upset because he paid this much and bla, bla, bla.

This "soft talk" involves a careful balancing of seemingly contradictory goals. Luz is attempting to protect the image of her father, express her own viewpoint, advocate for her father's rights, but avoid the kind of confrontation that could keep the family from securing the resources they need. She describes another time when she filed a complaint on behalf of her mother when applying for social service benefits:

And it's like what do you say? I can't say the lady was a meany you know. I can't say things like that. I have to like, watch what I say and things like that. So then I put that my mother was feeling uncomfortable with the lady there. I remember that day and I remember the tension I felt as I listened to my mom angrily complain about the lady, and the pressure I felt to translate properly. I didn't know what to say. I wanted the complaint to sound like it came from a grown-up, my mother, but I also wanted to stress how rude she was. But then again, I didn't want to be rude myself. I ended up writing that she was very impatient with our situation and that my mom felt very uncomfortable with her and that it was hard for her to express herself and to understand the lady. I made it sound grown-up-like, but I stressed the main point.

While this mitigated language may be most commonly applied when soliciting aid from government agencies, the youth we observed also softened and edited their parents' words when they translated for them in seemingly more be-

nign public encounters, such as in stores.³⁰ Beatriz described going with her mother to shop for gloves:

And my mother would say, you know, ask the lady for the certain type of gloves, and I would say, ‘It doesn’t exist.’ You know, making it up. Because my mother ... would ask somebody to assist her, but she’d know exactly what was the material that she wanted, and I of course had no idea, no clue, so I would tell the lady, ‘My mother is looking for these type of gloves,’ and she would look at me like I was nuts. And of course I was saying it the way my mom was saying it, and it wasn’t correct. It wasn’t being pronounced correctly. So then, I would look her straight at my mom, and the lady, everybody was frustrated. And my mother would just point, having the lady take out all these different gloves, and my mother would say tell her that these are a bit too small and I need them a size bigger.

Beatriz told of changing her mother’s words in order to minimize the annoyance that she saw her mother causing for the store clerk. Her modifications also seem designed to improve her mother’s image vis-à-vis the clerk: “I thought she was being a nuisance and I thought, ‘I don’t want this lady to think that way about my mom. I saw it as protecting her image.’” She gave an example of how she would modify her mother’s words: “I mean she would say, ‘Oh, this leather feels too rough.’ And I would have to tell the lady that, and I would, I would change it a little bit and I would say that, ‘Oh, she says these don’t fit.’”



Illustration 2: Journal entry by a 10-year-old “para-phraser”³¹

30 The 10- to 12-year-old children that we worked with seemed less able to engage in such metalinguistic and metacultural reflections.

We see this kind of mediation in interaction in an audio-taped situation recorded by 11-year-old Estela. In this encounter Estela is in a music store with her father, who wants to rent a musical instrument to play in a band with other men from his hometown. Estela translates while the store clerk points to a number of instruments, indicating their prices, but providing little other information. An analysis of the first part of this encounter is developed in Reynolds and Orellana (under review); we argue there that the clerk's emphasis on the cost of the instrument seems shaped by his assumptions about this family's ability to pay. In another segment of the transcript, we see a further emphasis on the cost of the instruments, even as the salesperson picks up on what he assumes the father "owes" to others:

- Dad: I know! But I owe, I...
 Salesperson: You owe Victor?
 Dad: Yeah, I (have) money in the bank but I wanted credit.

This emphasis on the family's ability to pay frames the initial encounter and continues to mark the entire event. Following the description of instruments, Estela helps her father to fill out a lengthy application for store credit. This involves deciphering the meanings of things like "monthly and gross earnings," "source of income," "applicant's employer; if military show branch and pay grade." During the long process of filling out the form, Estela turns the tape recorder off and on several times. Later she explained to the research team that this was because her father was getting upset and saying bad words. She wanted to edit the bad words from the tape. This suggests that Estela was aware of her power to mediate her father's image vis-à-vis the research team as well as vis-à-vis the store personnel.

The store clerk, who provides no assistance with the application, takes the completed form and shortly returns to announce that credit has been denied. We take up at this point in the transcript to show how Estela – who may well be exhausted from the translation and emotion work (Hochschild 1983) that she has done – continues to serve as mediator between her father and the clerk. In this next section of the transcript, Estela and her father try to negotiate another form of payment. Here Estela seems not only to mediating her father's words to the salesperson, she seems to work as well to soften the salesperson's words to her father.

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- 31 Text in the picture: April 30, 2001 – Today I translated to my mom about a letter that they send her in my brothers school. The letter said that my brother should bring gym shoes with rubber buttons, only. It said that we cannot send with sandals, flip flops, jelly shoes, or open toe shoes. How I tell about translating is because every time I translate I feel like I am talking to somebody. Text in the bubbles (left to right): 1. I wonder why they can't bring sandals, flip flops, jelly shoes, or open toe shoes? 2. You shouldn't let Chavito bring sandals, flip flops, jelly shoes, or pen toe shoes. 3. Ok.

- Salesperson: This is a thousand.
 Estela: *Dice que eso es, es mil.* [He says that this is, this is a thousand.]
 Salesperson: With tax.
 Estela: *Con las taxes.*
 Salesperson: You got enough on there?
 Estela: *Dice que si tienes um, um, dinero que puedas.* [He says that if you have, um, um, money that you can.]
 Dad: Yeah! I, I...

The salesperson has asked a challenging question: "You got enough money on there (a credit card)?" Estela frames the question more optimistically to her father, by saying: "If you have money *you can*." She is cut off by her father, however, who has tracked the English conversation, and who seems to react indignantly to the salesperson's implied suggestion that he might be buying something he cannot afford.

Estela goes on to negotiate for her father about how he might pay for this instrument. The salesperson suggests putting it on a store credit card, but Estela's father sees this as essentially the same as paying cash, and says so: "*Entonces es como, es como pagarlo en cash*" ("Then it's like, it's like paying in cash."). Estela softens the potentially challenging nature of this statement when she renders it in English to the sales clerk by converting it to an ambiguous statement that could be read as something her father intends to or wants to do: "He's like, he's paying in cash."

But Estela's father speaks in English to clarify that he wanted *credit*; Estela, still taking up the role of mediator, repeats his statement in English to the clerk. The clerk merely says he is sorry. Estela's father does not press the point further, and both Estela and her dad thank the man as they leave the store without credit and without the instrument that they came to rent. Estela ends this stretch of soft talk on a cheery note as she renders an upwardly inflected "Bye!"

- Dad: I, I wanted credit.
 Estela: He wants credit.
 Salesperson: Yeah, I'm sorry.
 Dad: OK! That's okay.
 Salesperson: But, uh, well, you know where we're at. So...
 Dad: Yeah, ok, thank you.
 Salesperson: Thank you.
 Estela: Uhuh, bye!
 Salesperson: Bye.

The two cases we have presented reveal that even though youth counter and redefine hegemonic interpellations, they are not empowered to change the present structure. Nor for the most part do they seem aware of its existence or of the processes that they are involved in. The effects of structuration are strongly discernable in the use and pragmatics of STG. Similarly, they are evident in the ways that child translators sometimes take up voices of authority and represent those to their parents. We may therefore see the youths as (more or less) unconscious *historical actors* that are responding to and influ-

ential of their historical context without being aware of the implications of their actions. However, as our discussion of the youths' recoding of dominant discourse and their social practices has shown, in trying to understand the creation of new vernaculars, and specifically STG, we cannot completely stress the impact of structure either. Rather, we would agree with Woolard, who states that "linguistic practices stem from someplace in between both these poles" (Woolard 1985: 745f.).

Building on this, we understand immigrant youths' cultural practices to be *both* powerless and empowered, i.e. youths are constrained by structure while they may create spaces in which to defy it as well. Neither force is absolute, nor totally absent. For example, when children translate for their parents, a practice that is shaped by structural conditions of inequality, they at the same time may experience power over language and over participants in the translating event. In contrast, readings that understand liminality in terms of "defiance" and oppositional youth cultures only, particularly in the U.S. tradition (Bucholtz 2002), tend to not consider the constrained nature, i.e. the at least partial powerlessness, of these practices.³²

Further, such readings play down the fact that these practices are a reaction to structures created by dominant adult practices in their lives, in our cases stereotypes about Turks in Germany or global immigration flows that propel Latino laborers and their families in the United States. In these readings the role of agency is over-emphasized at the expense of real-life power relations and constraints posed by these. For example, current thinking about youth practices carefully avoids a developmental teleology and asserts that these adolescent practices are focused on themselves and are not simply a developmental stage on the way to adulthood.³³ These current understandings of adolescent liminality emphasize the "here-and-now of young people's experience, the social and cultural practices through which they shape their world" (Bucholtz 2002: 532), and the research attention is shifted to "inside the borderlands, inside liminality" (Rampton 1999: 8). However, such theoretical approaches tend to neglect the fact that to be liminal is always to be liminal *to something*; liminality is inherently a position of relatedness. In other words, to see youth practices as self-contained disregards what makes the practice happen: the power of adults over those acting on the "inside" (i.e. the juxtaposition of *communitas* to structure). Individuals are part of the societal "market-place" in which power and status is accorded according to possession of various forms of capital (Bourdieu 1977). The power that comes with ownership of different forms of "dominant capital," here adult group membership that is linked to certain practices, cannot simply be ignored or seen as disconnected from the practices on the "inside" of youth culture/*communitas*.

32 Defiant hybrid practices as described earlier by Hall and more recently by Rampton and others (such as immigrant youths' language practices) are not liminal practices, they are rather liminoid (Rampton 1999; Turner 1974).

33 Haavind 2001; Rogoff 2003.

Further, to play down the idea that adolescent practices are in some ways directed towards adult practices (under the impact of transformation and change), and even defined by their exclusion from the adult sphere, is to equally deny the power relations inherent in adult-adolescent relations. Youth practices are often not aimed to be the adult “real thing,” but they are still created within and parallel to a hegemonic social sphere that is perceived as “adult” and that serves as reference point. They are exactly characterized by their difference in ideology and practice to the “official” adult world (in both minority and dominant culture). Similarly, studies of youth cultures in different contexts have found that divisions between youth and elder and “conflictual and consensual” are often not clearly differentiated, but permeable and flexible.³⁴

Theories that reduce adolescent practices to distinctive practices and identities which are not oriented to adults at all, assume adolescents to exist in an enclave, influenced and unconcerned with their membership in larger society, and neglect to see that identities are crucially made in opposition.³⁵ This does not necessarily imply that youth cultures and practices should be reduced to the notion of “oppositional youth cultures” or on the other hand to mere imitations of adult culture. Rather the point here is that there is mutual influence of both, adult and adolescent practices, on each other. Adolescent culture is created in reaction to adults’ norms and behaviors, and adult culture is a result of adolescent practices. But it is power that defines the structure within which youths create these practices.

Change and multiplicity

Turner’s theory of liminality is fundamentally about processes surrounding the change of status of individuals in society; hence it is a theory about change. While Turner discussed the structural conditions that make possible individual change, via the creation of *communitas* and anti-structure, he was primarily concerned with the individual’s trajectory in this process. However, as discussed above, the concept of liminality has been considered particularly with attention to socio-historical processes of change, as for example connected to global immigration flows.

In its application to immigrant experiences and conditions of culture contact, there therefore has been a change in unit of analysis: while for Turner each *individual* experiences structure and *communitas*, the concept is now applied not only to the individual developmental cycle, but to *groups* of individuals and their access to group membership. The effect of this is that, because the phenomena described are different in kind, the temporal aspect (“phase”) – which is a crucial aspect of Turner’s concept of liminal phase and its cyclic character, is pushed to the background or lost.

34 Bucholtz 2002.

35 Barth 1969; Elwert 1989, 1995; Irvine & Gal 1999.

We therefore face another paradox: the concept of liminality was originally conceived as a way to describe one phase in a teleological and unidirectional process, yet now it is being applied to situations that are neither teleological nor unidirectional. The liminal cycle in its developmental usage is usually completed and does not stop in the liminal phase, i.e. adolescents who are members of the group biologically and socially mature at a certain point in time. On the level of collective membership this teleology cannot hold true. Many authors legitimately claim that there are cases in which collective membership is not established and groups of people permanently remain marginal to dominant society. In fact, this is exactly the case to which the concept of liminality is most often applied. The question is then if this marginality can be conceptualized as (permanent) liminality, as it so often is, or if this might make it in some ways the wrong concept for the analyses for which it is used.

One problem with this conceptualization is that this analytical lens takes entities such as cultural groups, and cultural group memberships in these entities, as a given, *and* ignores that “group” is basically a term for people engaged in a shared set of cultural practices (with diffuse and changing boundaries). Another concern we have is that the idea of a permanent liminality implies the notion of permanently *non-liminal entities or states*, a notion that contradicts history and historical change. It fundamentally neglects the fact that cultures are not historically stable units and that in fact all new cultural groups of practice have been produced by deviance from established, official, or institutionalized forms of practice.

Further, the cyclic notion of change inherent in Turner’s conceptualization is lost when the notion of (implicitly) permanent liminality is used to describe the “failed” integration of immigrant and minority individuals and groups. When immigrants try to gain access to group membership claimed by dominant society, society often excludes them. We do not find a cyclic integration into and release from structure as described in Turner’s model. What this fissure shows is that an individual can become part of structure, *if, and only if* s/he has been part of this structure before. This is implicitly assumed in Turner, but it is not made explicit.

The negotiation of power and access to resources in immigrant communities may hence lead to a superficially permanent liminal state. However, this analysis is stopped in its tracks because it does not consider larger historical changes that are the result of these liminal practices. Practices, which are not part of the categories and classifications available within structure, are initially labeled as liminal. However, with time and historical change, new categories are created. Permanently liminal practices become categorized, and to some extent legitimate, non-liminal states. This is exactly what happens with many of the “hybrid” practices that are described as liminal.

Liminality refers to temporary exclusion, but these are permanent, new social practices. They are new cultural forms. It is exactly in this way that culture is created and change has happened throughout history. The underlying semiotic process in this has been called fractal recursion (Irvine & Gal 1999).

There is a fissure – either forced or voluntary – from the structure. The liminal person will be part of an alternative, new structure; a new locus for identity is created. It is because of this that immigrant youths with newly consolidated identities are not truly liminal – i.e. homogeneous, powerless, obedient, and without social status. The youth find a voice and construct new identities, i.e. they have defined and created new *structures* from which to speak and act.

Although the application of the concept of liminality to phenomena on a social level seems intuitively clear, we still regard it to be conceptually difficult and possibly misleading. But also on the individual level, Turner's conceptualization might structure ways of thinking about individual change that lead to the erasure of the important processes surrounding development across the life span. Turner, in his original conception of liminality, focused on the transitions between stages and the movement of individuals from one societal stage to another, such as from childhood to adolescence. This is in accordance with (cognitive) developmental stage theories such as Piaget's (1975). Turner suggests a relatively unproblematic progression across stages, with the first step involving a separation from the starting identity (e.g. "child") and placement into the limen. From there, cultural rituals assist the movement through the "flat" or "ambiguous" stage before official recognition in the new category (e.g. "adult"). Similarly, for Piaget it is a "crisis," a kind of liminal phase, through which the child has to pass in order to arrive at the next stage. However, developmental stage theories have been exposed to substantive critique on the basis of assumptions of teleology and the normative structure proposed by the chronological order of these stages.

As with the "kanak sprak" of Turkish youth in Germany, the phenomenon of child language brokering has not only garnered the attention of sociolinguists; it has also been a topic of discussion in the U.S. media, and has received some consideration in political debates as well. In popular discussions (and as well in much research), the focus has been on the burdens that this mediational work imposes on youth, insofar as it takes children into the realm of adult responsibilities, knowledge and information. In popular and academic work alike, there is discussion of the "adulthoodification" of children and of "role reversals" between parent and child. The perspective is premised on particular Western, middle-class cultural notions of adult-child relations, in which children are viewed as relatively helpless objects requiring adults' protection and socialization (Zelizer 1985). From a "mainstream" cultural perspective, children speaking for adults in "adult" domains of knowledge can present itself as a violation of established orders. Efforts to regulate against such disorder include recent legislation that has been proposed in the state of California denying state funding to any medical clinic that allows children of clients to act as translators. Our point here is not to judge such legislation or the cultural viewpoints that frame it; rather it is to point out the anxiety that may be provoked for some people when immigrant youths speak from the positions that they have found themselves placed in.

Turner's model further invites closer consideration of the ways in which liminal persons are considered to pass in and out pre-defined stages. While Turner's model may appropriately characterize the transition to adulthood in cultures that have preserved relative homogeneity or cultural "consensus," it is less useful for understanding the liminal experiences of youth in places where there is a juxtaposition of different beliefs about the nature of particular stages, and of divergent practices to identify or transform them, such as is often the case in immigrant communities. In immigrant communities, individuals' and families' beliefs and practices about childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and the transitions between them, may diverge from each other as well as from those of the dominant culture, and rites of passage that ensure smooth transitions across stages may be absent or contradictory.

We have discussed earlier how Bucholtz (2002) identifies a shift in anthropological theory away from transitory processes and toward an interest in adolescent youth culture in its own regard. Increasingly, researchers attend to age-based cultural practices. However, this conceptualization does not eliminate the inherent problem of "stage theories;" it only fixes attention on the practices that take place within a given stage, however defined.

Research on hybridity, as detailed above, represents a similar critique within cultural studies. Here, the focus is on the nature of hybrid practices, on the ways in which new cultural forms are produced, and on the mixing of cultures; gone are the assumptions of smooth progression from one cultural orientation to another, of neat processes of assimilation or acculturation. But even here, there remains some tendency in the field to consider hybridity as a resolution of stages in itself. For example immigrant youth may pass through a stage of "bicultural ambivalence" before resolving their cultural identities. The ambivalence stage would constitute the limen, biculturalism the resolution.

Despite the shifts toward an interest in practices and recognition of ambiguities, complexities, and hybridities, we would argue that stage-based models of development, such as Turner's model, still permeate research on adolescence across the disciplines. The very concept of adolescence is based on a stage theory of human development, and it provides inadequate recognition of variance across cultures, contexts, time, and situations in the marking of this category, or its meaning.

The youth we studied – ranging in age from 10 to 18 – are in a contested zone between childhood and adulthood. How they are seen – as children, adolescents, youth, or young adults – is shaped by context and setting (the larger context of racialized immigration in each country as well as more specific settings such as those of home, school, street, or language brokering encounters). It is shaped as well by the linguistic and social practices these youth engage in, even as these in turn are influenced by the youth's readings of their social contexts. For example, the Turkish youth's "hard" talk can be seen as both a response to and a reinforcement of a particular view of these youth as "over-mature" or "street-wise" – as not children but not young adults either. The

youth's words and actions are not oriented toward assimilating unproblematically into the (mainstream) adult world, and they are not read as such by outsiders.

The work that immigrant youth do as language brokers, on the other hand, represents a different kind of threat to the established order; these youth are readily positioned as "children" who have been thrust prematurely into adult worlds. Their innocence is highlighted, and they may be seen as immature instead of over-mature. (Note: neither conception of their maturity may match how the youth view themselves, nor how their families view them.) Part of what these children must negotiate in their mediational work is how to speak appropriately *as children* to adults, even as they speak *for those adults* to each other.

Whether openly contesting, or attempting to mediate, it is the voices of liminal subjects, arising from their betwixt- and betweenness, that is disquieting to the public.

But in neither case do we see clean separations from the stage of "childhood" into the limen, or neat transitions into adulthood. And yet diverse contemporary literatures – in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education, as well as Turner's conceptualization via the concept of liminality as under discussion here – still treat adolescence as a stage, and assimilation as a process, that is teleological in nature and that presumes the resolution of liminal tensions.

Lastly, we would like to address the issue of multiplicity. For Turner individuals are simultaneously members of many different groups, while *each* individual experiences structure and *communitas* at multiple times in his/her life. Turner therefore recognizes that liminal positionalities do not include all aspects of a person's identity and that they hence do not translate into liminality in all spheres of the individual's life. Nevertheless, Turner's work does not pursue this multiplicity and there is a lack of descriptive and theoretical attention to how each individual, and each social group, experiences liminality to different extents, in different combinations, and at different points in time.

Possibly as a result of this original conceptualization, the way in which the concept of liminality is often mapped onto immigrant youths' experiences does little to help us understand how these liminal positionalities differ. As our case studies show, multiple liminalities as adolescent, gendered, bilingual, ethnicized immigrants are based on a complex system of memberships, exclusions and transitional phases. It is a qualitatively different experience to be a fluently bilingual male Latino adolescent in the U.S. or a Turkish dominant girl in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Similarly, there is a qualitative difference between being a monolingual German speaking Turkish boy living in an ethnic enclave in Berlin (a rare case, but existent) and a bilingual Latino boy forced to interact in a predominantly English-speaking environment on his families' behalf.

The environments and contexts in which children and adolescents live give meaning to the practices that they are involved in and this makes for the subjective experience of liminality. These qualitative differences of power and

powerlessness are conflated in the concept of liminality as it is commonly used.

To sum up, we want to alert the reader to the pitfalls, which are inherent in the use of the concept of liminality, both in regard to the implicit conceptualization of change and multiplicity. In applying the concept and its assumptions to our case studies, we show that it is not able to account for the experiences of these youths and that it simultaneously continues to structure our thinking about them. Even more than in our consideration of issues of power in the conceptualization of liminality, it is in the domains of change and multiplicity that this concept seems to side-track current conceptualizations.

Conclusion

The analysis of linguistic practices is ultimately the study of how cultural groups are positioned in society and how they respond to this positioning. While the practices described in this chapter emerge from different contexts and are created by different participating groups, they both speak strongly to the impact of power relations on immigrant youths' everyday lives. The effects of power inequality, in the form of low socio-economic standing, and lack of symbolic, social and educational capital, have emerged at multiple points in our discussion of these youths' practices. We have shown how Turner's concept of liminality is in many ways on target when applied to immigration contexts, particularly because it considers the lack of status of the liminal personae. Nevertheless, the difficulty with resting the analysis of contemporary immigrant experiences on this concept is that it inadequately addresses other aspects of those experiences, such as change and multiplicity. On the other hand, contemporary research in the fields of sociolinguistics and anthropology that further develops Turner's concept by considering these dimensions, has often under-theorized the central aspect of power inequality in the everyday experiences of immigrant youths.

What the field should be working towards then, we propose, is a theory that addresses immigrant youths' experiences particularly as they relate to power. Such a theory is well-advised to consider and make use of both Turner's theory and contemporary deconstructivist theories, but it needs to push further in the conceptualization of these experiences. As we have shown, the concept of liminality is in many ways not the right one for the phenomena we are trying to understand. We discussed some of the elements that such a theory *would* need to address, including the role of change, and the multiplicity of liminal experiences. Further, this theory needs to conceptualize power inequality as non-transitory experience (even as it is continually contested). Turner's concept of liminality has a temporally bound character and does not get at this permanence. The strong importance we accord to considering power inequality lies in the fact that almost all cultural and linguistic practices that research in immigration contexts tries to understand, are fundamentally

influenced by this experience of power inequality. Some practices, such as the ones discussed in this chapter, are even centrally shaped by such experiences.

We therefore believe that in order to understand immigrant youths' language practices, it is not enough to understand adolescence, cultural practices and the construction of ethnic identities as separate constructs. Rather, because immigration contexts are (post)-colonial spaces, in which different groups mutually engage in contestations over the status quo of power distribution, it is important to understand how power weaves through the different aspects of immigrant youths' lives and personae and how it shapes their ultimate structuring.

A theory of immigrant youths' experiences should consider multiple intersecting historical trajectories of subjects who are differently positioned in relation to structures of power, and their dimensions in everyday interactions³⁶. It should enable us to understand both power contestation in immigration contexts, and its relational aspects, while avoiding the conceptual traps we have outlined above. With this we would be then analyzing activity settings, in which actors in particular contexts engage in shared practices, or activities, that are subject to continuous change on the social and individual level.³⁷ An analysis of the activity settings in which immigrant youths engage in a range of linguistic and cultural practices would then allow us to avoid being sidetrapped by essentializing ideas about identity or development, or blindness towards the shaping effects of power on these practices.

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³⁶ Pratt 1991.

³⁷ Cole 1996; Engestroem 1999; Wertsch 1991.

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