

Linguistic Individuation and Conformity among Suburban Chicago Adolescents

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Chambers (1995:169) labels adolescence as "the transition to individuation." This paper offers data that highlight the complexity of the (co-) construction of individual and group identity among a densely knit group of suburban Chicago young adults. Naturally occurring conversations and interviews were collected by one of the group members. Reflected in these young adults' linguistic behavior is a remarkable ethnolinguistic dexterity and awareness of metalanguage. As they index the construction of linguistic and cultural differences, they also utilize their linguistic code as a second order indexical in the constant renegotiation of power and solidarity issues within their peer social group.

The use of innovative forms and performance voices are explored as means by which both social and linguistic behavior of individual members is regulated by the group. Through the conversations, we observe the young adults variably "engage in acts of transgression, subversion, and resistance" (Cameron 1997: 50) at individual levels within the group, and as a group within the larger community. Questions of conformity become interesting as these young adults adamantly strive for individuation while they simultaneously participate in the co-construction of identity.