Peer group identification and variation in New York Latino English laterals*

Peter Slomanson and Michael Newman
City University of New York

Following recent work showing that adolescent peer culture affiliation correlates with phonological variation, our research explores the effect of peer identities and national heritages on the English of Latino students in a New York City high school. Data were gathered in sociolinguistic interviews embedded in a two-year ethnography. The peer groups investigated for Spanish-English contact effects include Hip-Hoppers, Skaters, Geeks, and non-participants in high school peer cultures. Our data show that New York Latino English (NYLE) is distinct from both African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and New York European American Vernacular English (NYEAVE). Here we discuss a previously unexamined variable: the lateral (l). Our most robust research finding is the frequent occurrence of apical /l/ in the L1 Latino English onsets of our sample. This Spanish feature is foreign to NYEAVE and AAVE. Its frequency in L1 NYLE is highest among speakers unaffiliated with the high school peer cultures which promote convergence with NYEAVE and AAVE.

1. Introduction

Early work on Puerto Rican English (Wolfram 1974; Poplack 1978) and later work on Mexican American English (Mendoza-Denton 1997; Fought 1999) coincide in showing how social practices relate to convergence with local English vernaculars. Yet the social context in which the contact between Spanish and English takes place varies both over geography and time. In the southwest-

ern United States, Mexican / Chicano heritage is predominant among Spanish-English bilinguals. Immigrants of other origins tend to adopt linguistic features associated with Mexican Spanish (Fought 2003). In the east, Latino immigration has been far more heterogeneous. In New York, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, and Central America have joined Puerto Rico in contributing significant numbers of immigrants to the local Latino community.

The present work forms part of a larger New York Latino English (NYLE) research project, which pursues the goal of describing L1 Latino English in New York City with particular reference to three languages that Latino New Yorkers encounter: Spanish, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and New York European American Vernacular English (NYEAVE). In section two, we briefly review the literature on linguistic variation in NYLE. In section three, we discuss the social categories analyzed in our research project. In section four, we introduce our research on laterals. In section five, we discuss phonetic issues of relevance to work on phonological variation in American English laterals generally, and NYLE laterals in particular. In section six, we discuss our research findings on variation in the phonetic realization of NYLE laterals.

2. Earlier research on target population

New York Latino English emerged with large-scale Puerto Rican immigration after the Second World War. Adult and teenage immigrants from Puerto Rico acquired English as a second language, commonly not achieving full native speaker competence. Younger immigrants and the children of immigrants, by contrast, began acquiring English within the critical period for language acquisition, and are native English speakers.[1] Most acquired English after acquiring Spanish, however, or else acquired both languages simultaneously, remaining bilingual over time. Many of their English-language models were adolescents and adults who had acquired English non-natively. As a result, they learned English in intense contact with Spanish.

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1. We acknowledge the ambiguity of the term "native speaker". In our view, individuals who acquire an L2 naturalistically as children, in a peer group context, several years before the onset of puberty, are native speakers of that language. We use the term "L1 Latino English" in this paper for ease of exposition; however many of the speakers referred to will have acquired Spanish before English.

Early investigations of US Puerto Ricans found a small number of linguistic features traceable to this contact (Wolfram 1974; Poplack 1978), but these were quite subtle. For instance, in Wolfram's study, consonant cluster reduction, potentially traceable either to Spanish or to AAVE, was more frequent among some Puerto Rican speakers than among African Americans. Interestingly, the rates of simplification also were higher for speakers who reported high rates of contact with African Americans than for those reporting few African American friends. This suggests that the two influences converged to yield a higher rate of simplification than either would have produced alone.

The aforementioned evidence of contact is considerably less robust than what has been found in Mexican American English, in which Spanish contact features are prominent (Santa Ana 1991, 1996; Mendoza-Denton 1997; Fought 2003). For instance, Santa Ana shows that the /o/ in *no* often has a pure monophthongal quality, similar to that of Spanish rather than to its counterpart in general US English, which frequently has a diphthongal quality. By contrast, the findings on the Puerto Ricans display continuity with the highly assimilatory tendencies of the children of previous European immigrants in New York, in whom phonological contact features are not persistent. However, unlike their European American predecessors, speakers of New York Puerto Rican English not only converged to some extent with NYEAVE, but also in varying degrees with AAVE. This unusual convergence toward two targets is emblematic of the status of Puerto Ricans and Latinos generally as simultaneously non-white and non-black.

Wolfram (1974) and Poplack (1978) examined a limited number of features, although their findings were quite important. Puerto Ricans presently constitute only a narrow plurality of the Latino population, due to extensive subsequent immigration from other Latin American countries. Our preliminary findings suggest that speakers with other national heritages (e.g. Dominican and Colombian) often display more Spanish contact features than do Puerto Ricans. Realizations of (ow) produced by non-Puerto Rican Latin Americans are often monophthongal, similar to those of Mexican Americans. Still, the breadth of our understanding of NYLE contrasts unfavorably with the breadth of our understanding of other widely spoken United States dialects. There is no account comparable in scope to accounts on NYEAVE (Labov 1966), Mexican American English (Fought 2003), or AAVE (Rickford 1999; Green 2002).

Research on both the east and west coasts of the United States has explored social issues underlying variation in the respective communities. Wol-

fram (1974) showed that the amount of contact with African Americans pre-
dicted the use of AAVE features by Puerto Rican teenagers. Following Eck-
ert's (2000) work on the central role played by adolescent peer cultures, both
Mendoza-Denton (1997) and Fought (2003) looked at gang membership. Both
researchers found that youths associated with Mexican-identified gangs tended
to use fewer California European American features than those unaffiliated
with such gangs.

3.   The New York Latino English research project

Our data are drawn from a large corpus of recordings (about 100), resulting
from an ethnographic and sociolinguistic research project conducted most in-
tensively from spring 2000 until fall 2002, although some fieldwork is ongoing.
The research is centered in a small multi-ethnic New York public high school
with a large number of Latino students. All of the students in the sample were
born in New York City or immigrated before school age, and grew up bilin-
gual, although not all of them are equally fluent in Spanish. Interviews were
conducted alone or with pairs of friends, mostly in school during free periods.
As an alternative school, the institution promotes relatively informal and re-
laxed interaction between students and adults. Teachers are called by their first
names, and individual teachers were sometimes named by students as their
best friends.

As in recent research conducted on the west coast, the social focus was
on the role of youth peer cultures, although in contrast with the groups rep-
resented in those studies, membership in the peer groups with which we
worked apparently did not involve gang membership. Gang members do ex-
ist in the school, but they are a minority, and they do not dominate the so-
cial scene there.[2] Instead, three internationally-significant youth cultures are
examined here:

–   Hip-Hop: associated with rap music, graffiti art, and dj-ing (using two
    turntables with vinyl records to make music), as well as urban styles;
–   Skater / Bicycle Moto-Cross (BMX): associated with performing tricks us-
    ing skateboards and special small bicycles;

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2.   In fact, gang members were typically considered a subset of "thugs". This category is not
examined in this study.

–   Geek: associated with intensive computer gaming, technological sophisti-
    cation, and sometimes hacking.

Naturally, not all youths are participants in youth peer cultures visible at
school, and one group of non-participants, called "Family-Oriented", will also
be considered.

    Group membership was determined primarily through the fact that youths
exhibited constellations of behaviors generally associated by the community

Table 1. Criteria for peer cultural assignment

Hip-Hop	Skater / BMX	Geek	Family-Oriented
Listening to underground (e.g. non-commercial or not yet commercially successful) hip-hop artists	Participation in skateboarding or in Bicycle Moto-Cross	Profound knowledge of computers, software and hardware	Mention of inter-generational friendships
Profound knowledge of hip hop forms	Admiration for famous skaters and BMXers	Heavy playing of computer games and related activities	Dabbling in different musical styles
Attending live performances of rap	Pride in accomplishments in performing tricks	Plans to use computers in future for career	Overt active bilingual-ism
Expression of attitudes consonant with hip-hop ideologies (e.g. valuing authenticity, realism, self-assertion, and individualism; see Newman 2001)	Pride in injuries sustained while performing	Work in computers repair in school	Claims of pride in national heritage and family
Wearing of hip-hop associated clothes or accessories (e.g. "urban" brands, baggy pants, du-rags or bandanas)	Wearing of skating "gear"	Refraining from wearing stylish clothes of any kind	Use of accessories representing national heritage (e.g. beads in Colombian national colors, Dominican flag pendants)
Association with other hip-hoppers	Association with other skaters	Association with other geeks	Mix of friends

with given peer cultures. All respondents assigned to a group fit all the criteria listed for that group in Table 1.

These characteristics were sometimes (although not always) accompanied by self-identifications. During interviews, youths were always asked what they "represented", a term often used in this demographic to establish claims of social identification. In answer to this question, a number volunteered peer cultural affiliations, though typically for a subgroup within the category. For instance one respondent, Mario, said he represented "East Coast Skaters". Another, Humberto said he represented "graffs", a term meaning graffiti.

However in other cases, overt self-identification was not considered to be accurate. Indeed, as ethnographers (particularly those working with adolescents) are aware, self-identifications and identification of others cannot always be taken at face value. Edwin, who was placed in the Family-Oriented group, claimed a strong interest in computers, and in fact he reported later that he had gotten a job in a cyber café belonging to a cousin. However he had no association with other youths in the school who were considered "geeks", and he actually expressed disdain for those who spent "hours and hours and hours" playing computer games. In addition, his clothes appeared to be far more fashionable than those of the other computer-associated students in the school, and despite his interest in computers, he was not associated with this group socially. Finally, he had made a number of other claims about himself that turned out to be inaccurate, and so expressions of his computer prowess had to be treated skeptically. On the other hand, he showed all the characteristics of the Family-Oriented group.

4.   Previous findings of this project

Prior work involving data elicited from some of the same research participants as in the present study (Newman 2003; Newman and Slomanson 2003) also investigated the effects of adolescent peer cultural affiliation on the variable phonologies in the community as a result of language contact. This initial research – following research on the west coast (Mendoza-Denton 1997; Fought 2003) – examined contact-sensitive vowels among Latino teenagers in New York. Variables included:

– indicators of Spanish contact: monophthong realizations of (ey) and (ow) and back (uw) before coronals, e.g. [bet] and [bot] rather than NYEAVE

and AAVE [beɪt] and [boʊt] for *bait* and *boat* and [dud] rather than
NYEAVE [djud] or [dyd] for *dude*;

–   an indicator of AAVE contact: monophthong (ay) before sonorants, e.g.
[tam] for *time*, as well as before voiced obstruents, as in [tad] for *tide*;
–   an indicator of NYEAVE contact: backed variants of (ay) and tensed and
raised (oh), e.g. [tɔɪm] and [kuət] for *time* and *caught.*

The groups examined were two of the three peer cultures (Hip-Hop and Skater)
and the Family-Oriented group. Our findings confirmed that vowel quality
would be associated with ethnic ideologies – i.e. the attitudes toward ethnic
identity in various peer cultures – though not in all of the ways we expected.
First, not surprisingly, peer culture was associated with targets for assimilation.
For instance, Latino members of the Hip-Hop peer culture, which has strong
cultural and demographic associations with the African American commu-
nity, use more monophthong (ay) – as in AAVE – than members of the other
groups. This is true despite the fact that these young Latinos have relatively few
African Americans in their immediate peer group. By contrast, members of Eu-
ropean American-oriented Skater peer culture show the smallest numbers of
these variants. In identifying with or dissociating from a particular non-Latino
group, speakers converge linguistically with their target peer culture by display-
ing relatively high frequency use of features associated with that culture. Both
groups also present some but not all of the features associated with NYEAVE,
i.e. tensed and somewhat raised (oh) but not backed (ay).

The Family-Oriented students, by contrast, did not behave as expected.
These youths were the only ones who were balanced Spanish-English bilin-
guals and maintained stronger links to the national heritage community (e.g.
participating in a Dominican baseball team, wearing beads or actual flags with
their respective national colors). So they might be expected to show more ro-
bust signs of Spanish contact than the other two groups. After all, such a pattern
would parallel Mendoza-Denton's (1997) finding that gang members who were
oriented to Mexico had more Spanish-type vowels than those with a Chicano
orientation. However, we found no significant increase in the Spanish contact-
related monophthong variants (ey) and (ow) and back (uw) before coronal for
the Family-Oriented group. On the other hand, in terms of (ay) usage, this
group fell between the black- and white-oriented peer cultural groups.[3] Judg-
ing only from these variables, peer cultures in this population would appear to

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3.   All used few backed (ay), but curiously (oh) was kept relatively high and tense.

be determining targets for assimilation, but not the amount of assimilation, an improbable result.

5.   Present study

In this paper, we examine the data from the same respondents as in the previous study, with the addition of two others from the Geek peer culture.[4] In addition to varying by peer cultures, the speakers represent a variety of national heritages, listed in Table 2.

As discussed above, and schematized in Table 2, the peer cultures themselves represent radically different constructions of identity, language, and practices. The macro-social orientations are schematized in Table 3.

It is important to note that all the overt peer cultures are in principle ethnically inclusive. Members of all three groups explicitly avow an ideology of inclusiveness, and even sometimes express what might be called a "post-racial" sensibility, with the claim that their generation is less concerned with issues of ethnicity than previous ones. Sometimes this attitude is explicitly related to the peer culture as if ethnic openness were a dogma of membership in that peer culture. Still, the primary cultural orientations are evident in a variety of ways including music styles, major figures named as important in the peer culture, as well as broader national membership tendencies. The emblematic figures of hip-hop are predominantly, though not exclusively, African American. Most well-known skaters who appear on web sites and in videos are European American. Most computer geeks are either European American or Asian American. Despite these larger trends, within the school, the Hip-Hop and Skater groups are largely though not exclusively Latino in membership, whereas the Geek groups are the most ethnically mixed. By contrast, the Family-Oriented group members associate closely only with other Latinos.

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4.   The respondents examined in the present study are all males in order to reduce the confounding effects of gender on a small group.

Table 2. Peer cultures of respondents

Hip-Hop	Skater / BMX	Geek	Family-Oriented
Cesar (Ecuador)	Mariano (Mexico)	Jacobo (Colombia)	Edwin (Colombia)
Claudio (Chile-Ecuador)	Javier (Guatemala)	Jorge (Colombia)	Horacio (Dominican Republic)
Humberto (Puerto Rico)			Wilson (Puerto Rico)

Table 3. Linguistic and macro-social associations of peer cultures

Peer culture	Language use	Macro-social orientations
Hip-Hop	English dominant to exclusive	African American urban culture
Skater / BMX	English exclusive	national / European American
Geek	English dominant to exclusive	international cyber community
Family-Oriented	balanced bilingual	home countries

6.   Research on laterals

The research we present in this paper deals with the variable realization of laterals in the same population of speakers as in our earlier vowel study. In our work on (l), we are examining both syllable onsets and codas. Earlier research on Latino English in the eastern United States did not yield unambiguously Latino features in L1 English attributable to Spanish-English language contact. As discussed above, our own earlier research on vowels was similarly equivocal in finding contact patterns associated with social factors. We nevertheless operated on the assumption that we *would* find such features if we used the right variables.

   Our research was conducted in a multi-ethnic urban high school. In a setting of this kind, our expectation was that individual phonologies would reflect peer group orientation based on the socio-cultural association of the peer group with a specific ethnic identity. For example, the strong associations of Hip-Hop with the African American urban experience have had linguistic consequences even on youths whose origins are foreign to the African American community (Cutler 1999). Parallel results may be expected for Geeks and Skaters with regard to the European American community. All such cases may

be expected to result in decreased frequency of occurrence for Spanish contact features. This does not imply however that Spanish contact features will be categorically absent, but that they may be in variation with vernacular assimilation target features. In order to display a convergence effect most robustly, we selected sociolinguistic variables whose realizations can be associated with one target population per variant. The broad population categories we had in mind were Latino, African American, and European American, given that these categories can often be distinguished linguistically by New York listeners. We have informally observed significant variation in the phonetic realization of (l) across ethnic varieties of New York English. In particular, our impression had been that the frequency of apical or very light realizations of laterals among Latino English appears much greater than for other groups. These observations suggested to us that sociophonetic research might yield significant results for this variable.

It is difficult to find measurable acoustic traits that can be unambiguously associated with the light/dark contrast in lateral segments. As a result, our approach was to have each token judged by two judges evaluating the quality separately. Tokens upon which there was disagreement were discarded.

7.   Phonetic research on English laterals

Sproat and Fujimura (1993) investigated the phonetic reality behind the alternation between light and dark (l) in English. They claim that both perceptually light and perceptually dark realizations of (l) involve both apical and dorsal gestures, which happen to differ in their timing. The gesture timing difference is part of what yields the perceptual difference. The actual acoustic variation, given the coordination of two distinct articulatory gestures with variable timing of the gestures, is graded rather than discrete. Sproat and Fujimura also observe that there are languages such as German (and for our purposes Spanish) which only feature categorically light realizations of (l) in all environments.[5] However in languages such as English and Dutch which display a contrast be-

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5.   Here are Spanish varieties, such as those influenced by Catalan, that do have dark /l/s; however, these are not present in the New York area.

tween light and dark realizations of (l),[6] we only find perceptually light realizations of (l) in onsets, and perceptually dark realizations of (l) in codas, rather than the other way around. The authors take this generalization to reflect the "attraction of the vocalic gesture" to the syllable nucleus, referring to the dorsal retraction that yields a vowel-like acoustic effect, and therefore the perception of darkness. The generalization also reflects the "attraction of the consonantal gesture", involving the apex of the tongue, to onsets which are peripheral in syllable structure. The implication is that perception in an asynchronous two-gesture segment is weighted in favor of the initial gesture.[7]

It is an important fact for our study that although Sproat and Fujimura were correct that the light/dark alternation characterizes some varieties of English, it is not present in the English that we find is spoken by young European American New Yorkers. These show relatively dark onsets and predominantly dark codas with some tokens of (l) realized as vocalizations. We collected data both from members of that population as well as from young African Americans with overwhelmingly African American peer affiliation in whose speech all tokens of (l) were dark in onsets and vocalized in codas. The predominant realizations of (l) in the relevant varieties are listed in Table 4.

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6.   The glottonyms "English" and "Dutch" should be taken here to refer to *some* varieties of English and Dutch, since there are varieties of each, such as the English dialects associated with New York City and the urban dialect of Amsterdam, in which both simple and complex onsets are perceptually dark.

7.   We leave aside the question of whether variable realizations of (l) in varieties of English should be treated as allophones by phonologists. Sproat and Fujimura (1993) argue that they should not, given the relatively graded nature of what we nevertheless *perceive* as a robust opposition between light and dark realizations of (l). They further base their position on the fact that the same articulatory gestures, both apical and dorsal, are present in each realization, however they are asynchronous. The perceptual contrast is determined by the timing of the gestures and by the duration of the syllable rime. Similarly, we do not address such questions as the relative effect achieved when the nucleus following an /l/ onset varies. Sproat and Fujimura limited their investigation of (l) variation to the environment of tense and lax high front vowels. It is to be expected that the higher and the fronter a vowel following a liquid onset, the lighter the liquid, however this is a perceptual effect. The significance of a light/dark contrast *judgment* may be strongest when a following vowel is held constant. However, our investigation is a sociolinguistic study based on recorded natural speech rather than a controlled phonetics experiment, a fact which renders access to sufficient numbers of a specific subtype of token more difficult, although we intend to control for vowel quality in future research.

Table 4. (l) variants in relevant Spanish and English varieties

Variety	Onsets	Codas
non-Caribbean Spanish	lighter	lighter
Caribbean Spanish	lighter	light or front vocalizations
NYEAVE	(relatively) dark	dark or back vocalizations
AAVE	(relatively) dark	back vocalizations

Given these facts, if light (l) surfaces robustly in a population in which a language other than English, such as Spanish, constitutes a potential substrate source, we assume that it is a contact feature.[8] Although light realizations of (l) are not unknown in US English dialects (they are characteristic, for example, of Philadelphia European American vernacular English), they are foreign to NYEAVE and native to Spanish.

It is important to note that contact features are hardly imported wholesale into NYLE. There are features in the L2 English of Spanish speakers, such as velar nasals in /n/ codas, which are entirely absent from L1 NYLE. However, Spanish-like apical /l/s are frequent in the English of a subset of our research participants, although they rarely appear in non-prevocalic contexts. The vast majority of coda tokens are either lateral dark or back vocalized variants. In addition to the fact that vocalic realizations of (l) are characteristic of AAVE, they are also a feature of some Caribbean varieties of Spanish. However, in those cases the vocalization takes the form of a front glide, as in [otel] → [oteɪ] (for the Spanish word *hotel*), which we have not found in the native English of New York Latinos. Dark /l/ is typical of NYEAVE, although there are also frequent back vocalizations as well. The set of prevocalic realizations does not manifest the same three-way split, since it includes light and dark, but no vocalic variant. There is no prevocalic /l/ that is specific to a non-Latino variety in the school we studied.

8. Findings for New York L1 Latino English

Our most robust finding, which confirms the validity of our initial hypothesis, is that light /l/, an apparent Spanish-English contact feature, occurs fre-

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8. Note that we do not take a transfer-oriented approach to NYLE light /l/. It is neither implicit nor necessary to our approach to language contact phenomena that we should take these realizations to be acoustically or articulatorily *identical* to light /l/ in Spanish.

Table 5. Light lateral (l) compared with previously studied variables, by peer culture

	(ey) monop	(ow) monop	back (uw)	light /l/ onsets	light /l/ codas
Hip-Hoppers	22/44	30/43	09/17	28/45	02/45
	50.0%	69.8%	52.9%	62.2%	04.4%
Skaters	14/44	22/48	12/24	23/30	1/30
	31.8%	45.8%	50.5%	76.7%	02.2%
Geeks	N/A	22/30	0/30		

* The lack of data from the Geek group in the vocalic variables cautions against comparing those totals with those for (l).
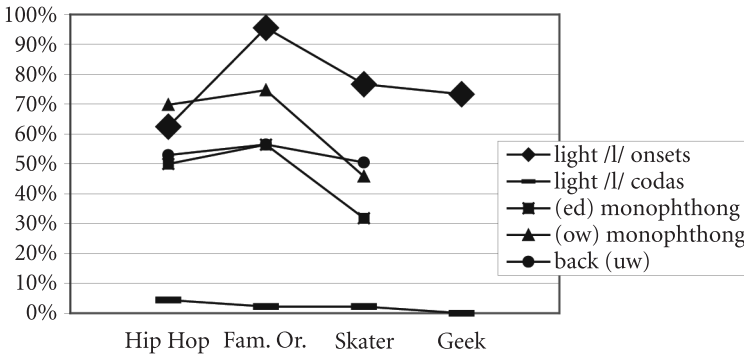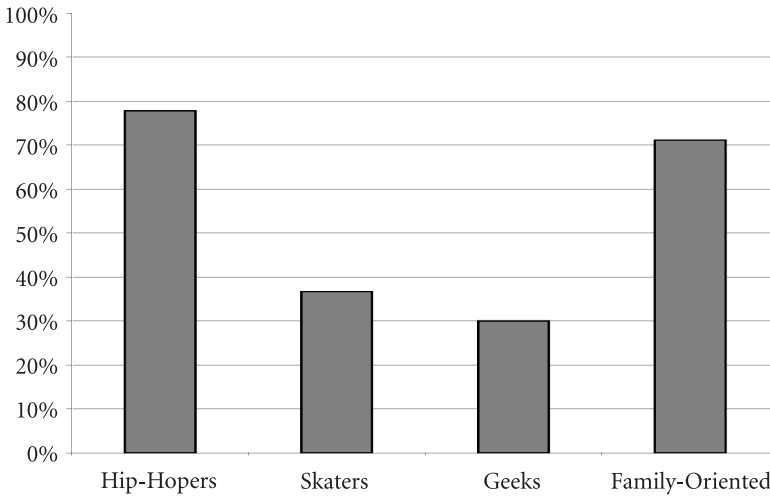

Figure 1. Light lateral /l/ and vocalic contact variables by peer culture

quently in Latino English onsets. In fact, while the small numbers of respondents must make all these data more suggestive than definitive, we find that in contrast to the vowel variables previously examined, the Family-Oriented group – the group that speaks the most Spanish and most strongly maintains heritage cultural emblems – shows more of these variants. When the individual tokens from this group are considered together and compared with those of the three overt peer culture groups, a two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances shows the difference to be significant (t(121) = 4.98; p < 0.05). The frequency of light onsets contrasts with that of light codas, which are rare. These data are shown numerically in Table 5 and schematically in Figure 1.

Note that light /l/s are near categorical for onsets in the Family-Oriented group, and are found in smaller majorities for the other groups. These apical variants are found almost exclusively in onsets, not in codas. There were only a
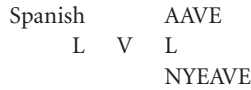
Table 6. Vocalized (l) codas by peer culture

Hip-Hoppers	35/45	77.8%
Skaters	11/30	36.7%
Geeks	9/30	30.0%
Family-Oriented	32/45	71.1%
Total*	87/50	58.0%

Figure 2. % of vocalized (l) realizations over total (l) by peer culture

total of four light codas, two in a single Hip-Hopper (Cesar) and one each for a Family-Oriented (Edwin) and Skater (Javier). By contrast, in codas, we find a less robust, but nevertheless noteworthy tendency to vocalize (l). Syllabic /l/, as in the name *Mitchell*, is pronounced with a final high back round vowel; *Paul* is pronounced with a final back upglide; *Bill* ends with a high backglide. Since all these pronunciations have the same essential target, we consider them all together as vocalizations. Vocalization results can be seen in Table 6 and Figure 2, which show that the Hip-Hop and Family-Oriented peer groups lead. Vocalized variants are less common, though hardly unusual, in the Skater and Geek peer cultures.

T-tests (two-sample, assuming unequal variances) also show highly signif-icant results when the tokens of the Family-Oriented and Hip-Hop groups are combined and opposed to those of the combination of those of Skater and Geek groups (t(122) = 5.01; p < .005).

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            Spanish        AAVE
                L    V     L
                           NYEAVE
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V = vowel
L = phonetic realization of (l)

Figure 3. Schematic view of strongest influence on NYLE (l), in syllable context[9]

Whereas we attribute the frequency of light onset /l/s to contact effects from Spanish, we attribute the vocalized coda /l/s to convergence with African American English and the dark /l/ variants to convergence with NYEAVE, as schematized in Figure 3. The similar behavior of the Family-Oriented and Hip-Hop groups is interesting, and somewhat puzzling, but appears to create an opposition of a unified minority orientation – Latin and black – to a white one. On the other hand, the substantial minority of vocalized codas in some NYEAVE speakers (up to 45%), may indicate an emerging broader pan-ethnic urban New York feature.

In strictly linguistic terms, the contrast that we found between the striking frequency of light onsets and the negligible frequency of light coda realizations is difficult to explain, since none of the source varieties, Spanish, NYEAVE, and AAVE, feature this contrast.

One way to understand this asymmetry is to take the "robust tendency" of Sproat and Fujimura (1993) as a point of departure. It follows from their explanation, based as it is on phonetic principles operative in languages generally, that the light/dark contrast may surface in new contact language varieties, which provide opportunities for the selection of relatively unmarked phonological options.[10] However the fact that the realization of this tendency in contact language phonology has lead to what is only *partial* convergence with individual English target dialects can only be explained by recourse to

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9. The first instance of (l) represents onsets. The second instance of (l) represents non-prevocalic coda contexts.

10. In this line of reasoning, we would say that English syllables manifesting light onsets and dark codas constitute the unmarked option, light onsets with light codas or dark onsets with dark codas a relatively marked option. We take consistently dark onsets with light codas to be highly unlikely, although such an option may well surface in a language in which some perceptually light /l/ and some perceptually dark /l/ are in fact phonologically contrastive. Note that southern Irish English features light /l/ in all environments (although Irish Gaelic does not!), so this configuration is not universally alien to L1 varieties of English.

social factors. Competition between Spanish substrate pressure and accommodation pressure from African American and European American-oriented peer groups is resolved in a phonetic division of labor, given the availability of two structurally discrete positions in the syllable. The set of phonetic realizations of (l) and their distribution within the syllable cannot be attributed to any one target lect. The phonetic division of labor, although favored by Sproat and Fujimura's universal "robust tendency",[11] is socially motivated. It would seem as though the rejection of light coda realizations of (l) is partly a function of just how alien such realizations are in American English phonology generally.

9.   Conclusion

In our previous research on vowel variation in the L1 English of New York Latino high school students, we have found that affiliation with a peer group culture which is closely associated with either European American or African American orientations correlates with a greater frequency of European American or African American realizations of selected phonological variables. However, the data on lateral onsets show us, for the first time, a simple robust feature of East Coast Latino English that is traceable to contact with Spanish. Light onsets were found among all the speakers of Latino English in our study. They were especially prevalent among individuals, members of the Family-Oriented group, who were expected for social reasons to show stronger Spanish contact than members of the other groups.

This variable consequently brings the New York Latino community in line with findings regarding Latino English on the west coast. At the same time, the research broadens the range of peer cultures used in the exploration of Spanish contact in this minority group from Latino gangs to a wide spectrum of popular peer cultures. The contrast between the members of these peer cultures and those who are not affiliated with them has interesting social implications. They confirm Eckert's (2000) insight that adolescent peer cultures function as vehicles by which small groups construct adult macro-social identities, making the global local. However, whereas Eckert was largely concerned with gender and class identities, these data on contact suggest a similar role for the con-

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11.   We acknowledge that, also following Sproat and Fujimura, the duration of NYLE nuclei may be contributing to the perception of darkness in codas which might otherwise be perceived as light. We take this as a matter for future research.

struction of ethnicity. This role is especially concerned with the proximity of Latino English to different co-territorial Englishes. On this view, broadly based peer cultures function as vehicles of integration into larger societies, be they the common minority urban world of hip-hop or the mainstream technical or social worlds of skaters and geeks. Clearly, however, these conclusions can only be tentative at this point because of the small number of respondents and the impressionistic nature of the data. Our future research will examine these data in more detail and will increase the number of respondents, providing a richer sample and testing the validity of the conclusions drawn in the current work.

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Authors' addresses

Peter Slomanson
Ph.D. Program in Linguistics
The Graduate Center
City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10016–4309
USA
e-mail: sloman@panix.com

Michael Newman
Department of Linguistics and
Communication Disorders
Queens College and Graduate Center
City University of New York
65–30 Kissena Boulevard
Flushing, New York 11367–1597,
USA
e-mail: mnewman@qc.edu