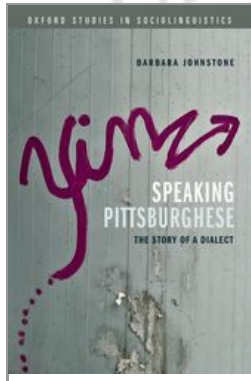University Press Scholarship Online
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Speaking Pittsburghese: The Story of a Dialect

Barbara Johnstone

The History of Yinz and the Outlook for Pittsburghese

Barbara Johnstone

[−] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter traces the semiotic history of *yinz*, starting from when it was an unremarked feature of vernacular Pittsburgh speech and ending in 2012, when *yinz* was also a key feature of Pittsburghese, talked about, performed, and otherwise deployed more than almost any other Pittsburghese word. Using the model of meaning and meaning change elaborated earlier in the book, the chapter explores how *yinz* became enregistered with correctness, class and localness, paying particular attention to the role of talk and material artifacts in this process. This set of social meanings has been taken up into a new semiotic order, such that *yinz* can now index youthful urban hipness. In the process of laying out the multiple orders of meaning in which *yinz* now makes different kinds of sense to different people in Pittsburgh, the chapter recapitulate ssome of the book's major themes.

Keywords: yinz, enregisterment, history, semiotics

The second-person plural pronoun *yinz* has been a semiotic resource in Pittsburgh ever since colonial-era Scotch-Irish immigrants brought it to the area. Its use then is still one of its uses now: in address to two or more people. In the course of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, however, *yinz* has acquired new ways of meaning, such that it is now one of the most often cited examples of Pittsburghese, and one of the most visible icons of localness in Pittsburgh. *Yinz* appears on bumper stickers and T-shirts that say things like "Yinz are in Steeler Country." It is used as a graffiti tag (figure 9.1).

Figure 9.1 Yinz as a Graffiti Tag
(Photograph by Barbara Johnstone)

Yinz has become a productive morpheme. That is to say that *yinz* is now an element of meaning that can be used in new ways, as it is in words like *Yinzer*, *Yinzburgh*, or *yinz play*. *Yinz* shows up when people want to claim they are Pittsburghers and when Pittsburghers address the world as Pittsburghers. It can show that someone is an insider. Some spectators at the 2012 Saint Patrick's Day parade in downtown Pittsburgh wore T-shirts that said "Yinz, I'm Irish" or "Irish, yinz?" These slogans point to the wearer's being a Pittsburgher—knowing the insider term to use with fellow Pittsburghers—as well as being "Irish"—an ethnic designation that is accurate for many Pittsburghers and playfully adopted by many others every April 17. The text on a T-shirt that was for sale for a time at the Andy Warhol Museum made the insider/outsider distinction transparent: "we say yinz/you say you all."

Yinz can also be used by outsiders to address Pittsburghers, as on a sign at a protest during the G-20 summit meeting that was held in Pittsburgh in 2008. The sign read "Yinz' live in a police state." The spelling "yinz'," with a final apostrophe, suggests that the sign writer was not from Pittsburgh, where the word is never spelled that way. Alternately, *yinz* can leave it ambiguous whether the addresser is a Pittsburgher or not. For example, a newspaper report on a set of podcasts about Pittsburgh speech was entitled "Yinz can learn about Pittsburghese online—Podcasts provide origins of the city's most colorful words" (Fleming 2008a). Whether or not the headline writer was a Pittsburgher,

the **(p.229)** use of *yinz* in the headline suggests that the podcasts will be of interest to Pittsburghers.

In the pages that follow, I trace the semiotic history of *yinz*, starting from when it was an unremarked feature of vernacular Pittsburgh speech, with no social resonance, and ending in 2012, when *yinz* could still be heard in Pittsburghers' unselfconscious vernacular speech but was also a key feature of Pittsburghese, talked about, performed, and otherwise deployed more than any other Pittsburghese word. Exploring the more strictly linguistic history of the word, I show how traces of its derivation have been erased as people have reanalyzed its internal structure and changed its spelling. This has meant that the range of grammatical roles this word can play has broadened. Using the model of meaning and meaning change I elaborated earlier in the book, I explore how *yinz* became enregistered with correctness, class, and localness, paying particular attention to the role of talk and material artifacts in this process. I then describe how this set of social meanings has been taken up into a new semiotic order, such that *yinz* can now index youthful urban hipness. In the process of laying out the multiple orders of meaning in which *yinz* now makes different kinds of sense to different people in Pittsburgh, I recapitulate some of the book's major themes.

Many languages have distinct pronouns that mean 'you' in the singular and 'you' in the plural (more than one 'you', in other words): French has **(p.230)** *tu* (singular) and *vous* (plural), German has *du* (singular) and *ihr* (for familiars) or *Sie* (the more formal option) for plural, and so on. When English-speakers use pronouns to point to themselves or to people they are not talking to, we, too, use different forms to distinguish between singular and plural. In the first person, we use the singular *I* and the plural *we*; in the third person we use *he*, *she*, *it* (singular) and *they* (plural) However, due to a set of historical accidents, standard English has only one form, *you*, for referring to the person or people being addressed. *You* does double duty in standard English as both the singular and the plural form. This leaves a gap in the English inventory of pronouns, and, at least in more casual speech, English-speakers often try to fill this gap.

The form that became *yinz* was first brought to America by Scotch-Irish immigrants (Montgomery 2002; 2006). As we saw in chapter 3, these were mainly the descendants of Protestant people from Scotland and northern England who had been settled in northern Ireland beginning in 1610. During the nineteenth century, when many Irish speakers switched to speaking English, they found the gap in the English pronoun system problematic, because the Irish language has both a singular second person pronoun, *tu*, and a plural one, *sibh*. In response, these speakers coined a variety of English-based second-person plural forms, including *you all*, *yous*, *youns*, *yiz*, and *you ones*. Subsequent Irish speakers of English, as well as the Scotch-Irish who lived alongside them in northern Ireland, inherited these forms and brought them along when they emigrated. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, as we have seen, hundreds of thousands of people from northern Ireland migrated to America, and a second wave of emigration, mainly from Ireland's more southern counties, followed the potato blight that caused widespread famine in the 1840s and 1850s. *Y'all*, a contracted form of *you all*, is now used across the

southern United States. Other forms are used in other places where Irish or Scotch-Irish people settled. The word now spelled "yinz" in Pittsburgh is a contracted form of *you ones*. *You ones* (often spelled "you'uns") is used not only in the Pitttsburgh area but also elsewhere in the Appalachian Mountains, where it often actually sounds more like [yuənz] ("you'unz").

A form of *you'uns* has thus been used in the Pittsburgh area since the early eighteenth century, and the word continues to be used elsewhere in Appalachia. However, most Pittsburghers think that *yinz* is unique to the Pittsburgh area. They are not aware that the word they think of as "yinz" is related to *you'uns*. *Yinz* has become disconnected from its linguistic history through three related processes. For one thing, the pronunciation of the form has changed, from [yuənz] ("you'unz") to [jʊnz] ("yunz") to (for some speakers) [jɪnz] ("yinz"). This change is still in progress, and people argue about how the word should sound. Nowadays, however, the argument is mainly between [jʊnz] and [jɪnz], as is suggested in this excerpt from an e-mail:

> **(p.231)** My wife and I lived in Pittsburgh from 1974–1977, and our son has lived there for the last eight years. I remember the word to be "yunz," but he claims that it's more properly "yinz." He cites another word, "yinzer," in defense of this. My argument is that the word was likely "you-uns," contracted to become "yunz." (Devlin Gualteri, e-mail to author, Jan. 21, 2011)

The writer notes (correctly) that the word started out as "you-uns" and remembers it being pronounced in a way that sounded closer to that, while his son thinks the "proper" pronunciation is "yinz." Another e-mail correspondent (Pete Peterson to author, Jan. 6, 2011) complained to me about "the misuse of 'yinz' [rather than 'yunz'] by those who want to talk the working-class lingo."

Gualteri's son's perspective reflects a second development in the linguistic history of *yinz*, namely that people now tend to understand *yinz* as a single unit of meaning rather than two. Jason E., the seventeen-year-old interviewee from whom we heard in chapter 4, said that he "didn't get" yinz, because "it's not a contraction"—in other words, not a shortened form of "any words": "I don't really even get [jɪnz]," said Jason, "'cause it doesn't make any sense, it's not a contraction, because it's not any words, 'yinz' is not a 'you'—." To put it in more technical terms, people like Jason E. have reanalyzed the morphology, or internal structure, of *yinz*, imagining it as monomorphemic (a single, indivisible unit of meaning) rather than bimorphemic (two units of meaning).

Finally, the spelling of the word has changed in ways that reflect these developments and at the same time help push them forward. Because *yinz* is nonstandard, it does not have an official, dictionary-approved spelling, and people have been free to write it various ways. The spelling of *yinz* is an easily sparked topic of discussion in Pittsburgh. Variants include <yunz,> <yins,> <you'uns,> and <youns> or <younz.> People tend to suppose that there is a correct spelling, but they are not sure what it is, and they explain the variability in the word's orthography (which can easily be observed) with reference to variability in its pronunciation; they imagine, in other words, that people must spell the

word differently because they pronounce it differently.

The most frequent spelling is now <yinz.> A Google search conducted in April 2011 (figure 9.2), uncovered far more uses of <yinz> together with the word *Pittsburgh* than of <yunz,> <younz,> or <you'uns.> While earlier spellings, such as <you'uns> preserved traces of the history of the word (treating it as a contraction and spelling *you* the standard way), reading from right to left on the chart in figure 9.3 shows how the spellings have become more and more phonetic: more and more based on how the word sounds, not where it comes from. <Younz> preserves a trace of the fact that part of the word was once *you*, but spells the rest the way it sounds: <unz.> <Yunz> and <yinz> have lost this trace of history and are even more phonetic.

Spellings of *yinz* : Google search April 12, 2011

Figure 9.2 Spellings of *yinz* on the World Wide Web: Google Search April 12, 2011.

(p.232) How has *yinz* come to mean so many things? For one, personal pronouns occur frequently in talking and writing, and they both reflect and reinforce distinctions among categories of people that can easily spark controversy. English personal pronouns have a history of becoming controversial because of social meanings with which they become enregistered. One example is the now unfashionable "generic" use of *he* (as in "Each of the students opened **his** book"). In other contexts, *he* indexes biological maleness or cultural masculinity, and once the distinction between generic *he* and some other option (*he or she*, *s/he*, *they*) was enregistered with gender it came to sound as if it suggested that the typical or default person was male. The distinction between *I* and *we* can carry social meaning, too, as when individuals use *we* to refer to themselves—the "royal *we*" that caused a furor when used by not royal Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher after the birth of her son's first child ("**We** are a grandmother").

More specifically, though, the semiotic history of *yinz* tracks the semiotic history of Pittsburghese in general. In order for *yinz* to be associated with one way of talking as opposed to some other way of talking, Pittsburghers first had to become aware that not everybody uses *yinz*. As we saw in chapter 4, until around the middle of the twentieth century, Pittsburghers rarely noticed that they used a form that was different than anyone else's. We heard from Dottie X., born in the late 1920s, who said that as a child, she "never even heard" *yinz*, despite the fact that she and everyone around her used it in everyday speech.

To model how *yinz*, together with other features of Pittsburghese, moved from being an unremarked, unremarkable feature of Pittsburgh speech to being a meaningful choice that could express social meaning, I introduced the idea of enregisterment (Agha 2003; 2007a): the linking of a linguistic feature (a word, sound, or bit of grammar) with a social meaning (a persona, situation, or identity). The social meanings of linguistic features are enregistered according to **(p.233)** "ideological schemas"—in other words, local ideas about language and society and how the two are related.

For example, a very widespread ideological schema is that there are "better" and "worse" ways of talking. American children learn from caregivers and teachers that some words are "bad," that in some situations (if not all) you need to speak "properly," and that some ways of saying things "sound better" than others. In Pittsburgh, people who noticed that they sometimes heard *yinz* and sometimes *you* as the plural pronoun mapped this difference onto the idea that some ways of talking are better than others: *you* started to be heard as better, *yinz* as worse.

Yinz has also been enregistered with social class. It is thought of as a feature of working-class speech. This has happened partly through people's lived, everyday experience. The people in the next neighborhood, who all worked in the steel mill, might have sounded different from people in your neighborhood. This might have caused you to enregister the way the people in the other neighborhood talked with the fact that they were working class. Material artifacts like the Yappin' Yinzers also help enregister *yinz* with social class. Chipped Ham Sam says *yinz* often and looks like a stereotypical working-class Pittsburgher.

Yinz has also been enregistered with correctness, however, so that even people with working-class roots that they are proud of will deny that they use it. Jen and Donna, the mother and daughter we heard from in chapter 5, talked about *yinz*. The daughter claims that the neighbors say yinz "constantly." Her mother responds with, "We don't use that! … Your dad and I don't use that too often."

In addition to being semiotically linked with class and with incorrectness, *yinz* has also been linked with place, as perhaps the most iconic feature of Pittsburghese. Leaving a Giant Eagle grocery store in September 2007, I passed three employees on break. One of them used *yinz* in an unselfconscious way, in addressing the other two. Rather than responding to what she had actually said, another of the employees responded with, "Yinz. Yes, that's Pittsburgh." Other Pittsburghers agree. A blogger writing about the word claims that "any Steelers fan will tell you that 'yinz' is pure Pittsburghese."[1] A young man I interviewed agreed, telling me, "Probably the number one prime example of Pittsburghese is 'yinz.'" And an entry under Pittsburghese on UrbanDictionary.com, a site where users post definitions of new and nonstandard words, says this: "Emblematic of Pittsburghese is 'yinz' as the plural of 'you', with 'yunz' as a variant."[2]

Yinz has become "emblematic of Pittsburghese" partly because many Pittsburghers now live in places where people use a different form, *y'all*, in the same contexts. Over the course of repeated interactions with southerners, the pattern this creates—a pattern I

referred to in chapter 3 as text metricality—comes to highlight the contrast. The fact that different people use different words in the same contexts, to do the same thing—address multiple hearers—points up the **(p.234)** possible semiotic value of y*inz* beyond its meaning as a pronoun. Several posts in the WTAE discussion forum (chapter 5) allude to this. "Alas, my kids grew up saying 'ya'll' and I still can't get used to it," wrote someone who "moved to the south eighteen years ago." The discussion took place in 2002, which means that this participant left Pittsburgh in 1984, exactly when the massive contraction of the steel industry forced so many young Pittsburghers out, and the fact that this person has grown children suggests that she or he was part of that cohort. Another participant said that he "live[s] in Georgia, the land of ya'll," and suggests that others "try living among the 'y'allers' for a few years. You'll appreciate the 'yunz' a little more."

Yinz has also been further reanalyzed. In addition to being used as a personal pronoun, it can now be used as an adjective, prefix, or suffix, to modify a noun. In these uses, *yinz* means "Pittsburghy," somehow connected to Pittsburgh or typical of Pittsburgh. For example, "Yinz Play" was the name of an exhibit at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum in 2010. This was not meant as an imperative ("Yinz, play!") but rather as a chance to find out more about Pittsburgh by playing. *Yinz* served as an adjective modifying the noun *play*. The exhibit included an area called "Pittsburghese Illustrated Word Play," where, according to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, children could "place Pittsburghese phrases and famous quotes in the mouths of such images as Troy Polamalu [a Pittsburgh Steelers football star] and Mister Rogers [once the host of a popular television show for children.] For example, Andy Warhol might ask to go 'dahntahn', with Mr. Rogers responding 'Nuh, uh!'" (Chapman 2010). (The artist Andy Warhol was from Pittsburgh and is much celebrated there.)

There were other Pittsburghy activities as well. "Other elements of the exhibit," said the *Post-Gazette*, "allow visitors to create their own version of a Primanti Brothers' sandwich, pretend to paddle a kayak, and do much more." Primanti Brothers' overstuffed sandwiches have become an emblem of localness; kayaking is a recent and often advertised possibility on the now cleaner rivers. Also involving *yinz* used as an adjective is the Yinz Teddy Bear, a plush bear, for sale online, dressed as a Pittsburgh Steelers football fan.

"Yinz float" (figure 9.3) is the label of a picture of three people in a boat just big enough for them, a cooler, and some fishing gear. The photo appears in a Flickr stream by an amateur photographer, David Kent, called "simple pleasure" (Kent 2009). The scene is the Monongahela River. Taken from above as the boat passed under a bridge, the picture shows the boaters looking relaxed, the two young women in bikinis sunbathing, the older man, shirtless, at the tiller of the outboard motor, in his other hand a beverage can in a foam "beer koozie." One of the women sits in a folding lawn chair. *Yinz* suggests that they are Pittsburghers, engaged in a typical Pittsburgh activity.

Figure 9.3 "Yinz Float"
(Photograph by David Kent, used with permission)

As a prefix or suffix, *yinz* is used to modify nouns in words like "Yinzburgh" (an exhibit at the Carnegie Science Center consisting of photographs of unidentified **(p.235)** Pittsburghers, together with activities aimed at getting visitors to think about their family's history and the history of industry), as well as YinzPitt and Yinz Sports (websites about Pittsburgh). YinzBlog was a section in the *Pittsburgh City Paper* consisting of excerpts from blogs about the city. A blog on the website iheartpgh.com in 2012 was called Questyinz.[3] Readers were invited to submit "questions about Pittsburgh or life in Pittsburgh."

As noted, a Yinzer is a stereotypical Pittsburgher. *Yinzer* can be used disparagingly or fondly, depending on who uses it to label whom, but it is increasingly used in the latter way, as a claim to localness. In 2003–2004, I asked all my **(p.236)** interviewees whether they were familiar with the term *Yinzer*. Older people tended not to recognize the word, while younger people did. McCool's Pittsburghese dictionary, published in 1982, does not include *Yinzer*, and *Yinzer* does not appear in the corpus of print representations of

Pittsburgh speech I assembled between 1997 and 2000. Over the course of the 2000s, the word *Yinzer* has become more and more visible, and its appearance in the final volume of the *Dictionary of Regional American English* (Joan Houston Hall 2012) has given it an official seal of approval, in some people's eyes.[4]

A July 2012 Google search yielded more than 223,000 hits for *Yinzer*. Photos tagged Yinzer tend to be of male sports fans, sometimes drinking (or drunk). Figure 9.4 shows *Yinzer* used in the name of a shop that sells sports team T-shirts, additional gear for fans, and other Pittsburgh souvenirs. Yinzerparty.com provides "Street Style and Nightlife Photos of Portland and Pittsburgh." The site's name invites readers to imagine that the blogger is from Pittsburgh, not from Portland.

Figure 9.4 Yinzer as Part of a Shop Name.
(Photograph by Barbara Johnstone)
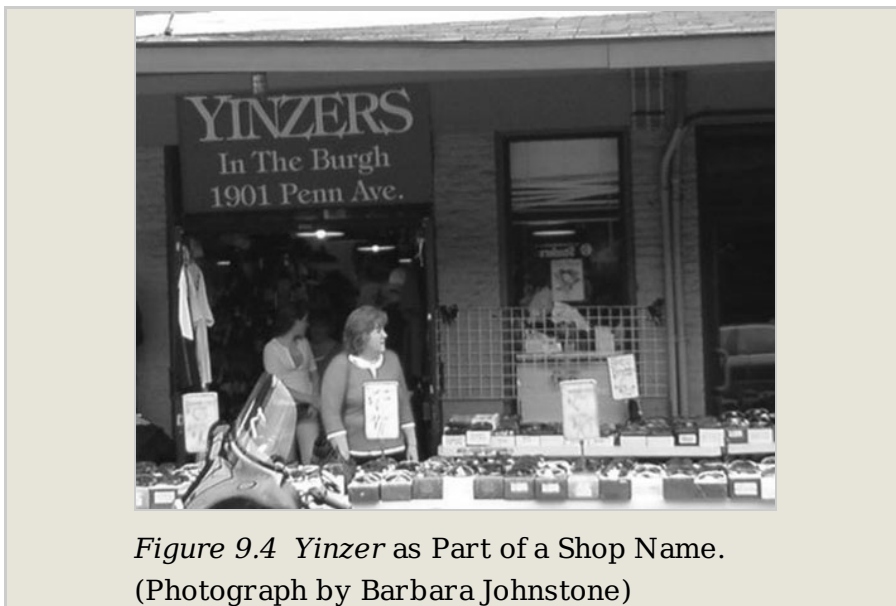
However, the term is also used in many contexts that do not call up sports and parties, contexts in which it appears simply to mean "Pittsburgh." *The New Yinzer* is a literary magazine founded in the early 2000s by a group of people in their twenties. (The name is a take-off on *The New Yorker*, a prominent **(p.237)** US literary magazine.) The website makes an explicit link between the "new Yinzer" and "Pittsburgh's newly emergent identity:"

> Welcome to the fall 2011 issue of Pittsburgh's literary magazine, The New Yinzer.
>
> Our mission is to question, develop, and embody Pittsburgh's newly emergent identity via literary discourse.
>
> We provide regional writers with a working classroom to cultivate writing from fresh idea to finished product on the page and on stage.[5]

A 2011 *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* review of the new album by a Pittsburgh rapper was headlined, "Miller pounds out a show for Pittsburgh's Yinzers." Pittsburgh's Penn Brewery produces an India Pale Ale called "Cheeky Yinzer." *Yinzer* has itself become a

productive morpheme in words like the blend "Yinzercation" (a blog about the Pittsburgh public schools). Yinzermakover.com was the domain name of a website about an online contest, held in 2008, described in a Facebook announcement as "Pittsburgh's Biggest Fashion Disaster: What Yinz Shouldn't Wear."

Figure 9.5 Visually Enregistering *yinz* with Place (Photographs by Barbara Johnstone).

The links between *yinz* and its social meanings have been forged in the kinds of activities I described in the second half of this book: in conversation and storytelling, in the media, on artifacts that are for sale, and in performances both fleeting and carefully designed. The visual artifacts in figure 9.5, for example, invite viewers to enregister *yinz* with local identity in various ways. On the T-shirt in figure 9.5, *yinz* is superimposed on the Pittsburgh skyline and further linked with the city via the colors black and gold and by virtue of the T-shirt's title: Picksburgh. On the motor scooter, a souvenir sticker of the kind that usually indicates a place name (like OBX for the Outer Banks) says "YINZ" where a viewer might expect "PGH." The Subway Sandwich drink dispenser that thanks "yinz" for visiting Pittsburgh was in the airport, where people arriving at the concourse where it was located might encounter *yinz* as one of their first Pittsburgh experiences. **(p.238)** The social practices through which *yinz* has been enregistered as incorrect, as working class, as Pittsburghy, and as an emblem of "rust belt chic" (Doig 2012) have been shaped by the history of the city and its people, which has in turn been shaped by the physical geography of the area.

What does *yinz* mean now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century? *Yinz* is a second-person plural pronoun. *Yinz* is a noun prefix or suffix, or an adjective. *Yinz* is a noun. *Yinz* sounds incorrect. *Yinz* is a working-class word. *Yinz* is a Pittsburgh word. *Yinz* is hip. In short, people use *yinz* in many different activities, each of which draws on and reinforces a different overlapping set of ideological schemas. *Yinz* is enregistered in multiple ways. It is a resource, in different ways, for different publics in Pittsburgh. Its meanings are both layered in time and dispersed in social space, so that, depending on when and where a person is socially located, some meanings are available and others are not.

Older uses of the word can sometimes be seen through newer ones: *yinz* can sound working class partly because it can sound incorrect; it can sound Pittsburghy partly because it can sound working class. *Yinz* is sometimes a window on the past, its newer meanings laminated on its older ones. Sometimes, though, for some people, newer social

meanings have replaced older ones. A college student from out of state uses *yinz* in a bar, as a way of showing that he fits in, unaware of its other social resonances; his Pittsburgher friend cringes, hearing an embarrassing allusion to the uneducated Pittsburghers of the past. A colleague who reads an online forum for video gamers noticed that one contributor called himself "Yinzer Slayer" and asked whether that meant "Yinzer who slays" or "one who slays Yinzers." Yinzer Slayer's reply was scaffolded on an older meaning: "slayer of Yinzers—I hate the stupidity that some willfully ignorant people around Pittsburgh display on a regular basis. Some people take 'Yinzer' as a term of endearment, I don't." People who *do* take Yinzer as a term of endearment might, on the other hand, pay for an item made by jeweler Sharon Massey, who designs, produces, and sells silver pendants, earrings, cuff links, and other wearable products in the shapes of Pittsburghese words or with Pittsburghese words on them. Massey markets her Yinzer pendant to people who are "proud to be a Yinzer" (Massey, n.d.).

Massey's jewelry can link Pittsburghese with a variety of social meanings, depending on who buys it for whom and who wears it. The fact that Massey's pendants, belt buckles, and earrings are experienced on the bodies of people who wear them rather than on the bodies of standardized dolls like Chipped Ham Sam, or in the visual context of the fronts and backs of T-shirts, opens up the possibility that the words they represent may be taken into new orders of indexicality, given meaning according to new cultural schemata. Unlike the Pittsburghese on T-shirts, Pittsburghese as jewelry need not be visually linked with images of the city, local names and activities, or aspects of visual design (like color) that look Pittsburghy. Unlike the Pittsburghese uttered by the **(p.239)** Yappin' Yinzer dolls, Pittsburghese jewelry is not directly linked with the persona of the Yinzer. If, for example, a pendant that says Yinzer were worn by a youthful hipster, it could link Pittsburghese to a different sort of social identity than that of the Yappin' Yinzer dolls, still perhaps evoking the Yinzer identity in a more ironic, detached way, or perhaps not. Like the oral performances we looked at in chapter 8, the jewelry serves as a centrifugal force, pushing *yinz* into new semiotic domains.

From Remembered Locale to Imagined Persona

One of the biggest surprises for me as I have pieced together the history of Pittsburghese has been the huge role played by the baby boomers, the generation of Pittsburghers and ex-Pittsburghers who were born after World War II and who became working-aged in the 1980s. This cohort of Pittsburghers has been the bridge generation, anchored both in Pittsburgh speech and in Pittsburghese. In their lifetimes and with their participation, economic and social history, ideas about language, and the history of western Pennsylvania speech came together with communication technology to put Pittsburghese in place.

Stories about language change are often stories about young people, and part of the Pittsburghese story traces the baby boomers' youth in a still-industrial Pittsburgh where high union wages and the highway building boom of the 1950s and 1960s made it possible for their parents to move from Lawrenceville to the suburbs or from East Pittsburgh to Forest Hills. Their parents had grown up sounding like Pittsburghers, unaware of how

they sounded and what it could mean to sound one way or another, but these Pittsburghers, more aware of other ways of speaking because they were more mobile, linked Pittsburghese with class and knew it could sound uneducated and sloppy. They try not to say "dahntahn" or *yinz*. Still, they know they have Pittsburgh accents, because people have told them so. They grew up reading articles about Pittsburghese in the newspapers and still today get recognized as Pittsburghers by how they talk. As we have seen, they grew up thinking of themselves as Pittsburghers, too, not as immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Huge numbers of baby boomers were forced away from Pittsburgh when the economy contracted in the 1980s. Many of them moved to the "sun belt," a group of southern and southwestern states that were attracting industry in part because of lower labor costs. Coincidentally, personal computers were just becoming widely available, first in workplaces, then in homes. By the early 1990s, many younger adults were comfortable with e-mail, and by the mid-1990s they were exploring the World Wide Web. Still young or in early middle age, the ex-Pittsburghers quickly caught on to personal computing and used it to keep in touch with home and talk about home. As we have seen, this involved talking **(p.240)** about how Pittsburghers talk. They continue to do so, perhaps even more now that their children are grown and they have more time for nostalgia.

The children of this generation grew up with Pittsburghese. Those in the diasporic "Steeler Nation" may have seen Pittsburghese or heard it discussed, mainly on football Sundays, but it is unlikely that they are interested enough in it to carry on in their parents' online footsteps. Those who grew up in Pittsburgh may still speak with their parents' unselfconscious Pittsburgh accents. On the other hand, if their parents moved up socially and economically, they probably speak in a more leveled, regional-sounding way, maintaining some features of the way their parents speak (they pronounce words like *not* with the rounded low back vowel, words like *school* with a vocalized /l/) but not the features that have come to sound Pittsburghy. These people are probably able to talk about Pittsburghese, though, and they may use it playfully to claim a local or insider identity. The in-migration to Pittsburgh by college students and young professionals means that these Pittsburghers are joined by people who learn to talk about Pittburghese, even use bits of it, but who relatively rarely hear anyone speaking with a Pittsburgh accent. If they do, they may not even recognize it.

The people who enregistered a subset of Pittsburgh words, phrases, and sounds as Pittsburghese in the latter half of the twentieth century typically had personal memories of childhoods in Pittsburgh, and the Pittsburghese of the twentieth and early twenty-first century included many forms that evoked activities and artifacts they associated with their youth. Lists of Pittsburghese from those years included local place names and local products as well as distinctive words, and these tended to be embedded in phrases and sentences that evoked the past. The people who generated these lists and argued over their contents knew many people who actually used these words and sounds, people who really sounded like Pittsburghers, and the experience of being recognized by their accents made them sensitive to the sounds of local speech. Thus, lists of Pittsburghese

from the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s tended to represent a variety of local pronunciations, in iconic words like "dahntahn," "Stillers," and "Giant Iggle," but also in less iconic contexts like "still mill" ('steel mill') and "cahch" ('couch').

The Pittsburghese that has been created by and for the baby boomers is shaped by the idea that Pittsburghese is linked to the Pittsburgh of the remembered past. It is an aspect of Pittsburgh's cultural heritage, albeit rarely acknowledged as such in more official kinds of talk about the city. It has become unloosed from the kind of social evaluation that can make it shameful to have an actual Pittsburgh accent or provincial to use Pittsburgh words. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* columnist Brian O'Neill, writing in 2004, gave voice to this idea in an e-mail to me in which he suggested that he had used a local-sounding term in one of his columns because "'rubber bands' has no authority over 'gum bands.'" This is to say that the standard, "correct" form (*rubber bands*) no longer trumps the local **(p.241)** form (*gum bands*). Given that most people in the United States, most of the time, use *rubber bands* instead of *gum bands*, the world in which O'Neill's claim makes sense is a world in which the local is as good as the global. Pittsburghers no longer live in such a world, but many miss it.

As the realm of discourse about Pittsburghese becomes further and further disconnected from the realm of people who speak the way Pittsburghers speak, the repertoire of Pittsburghese items has shrunk and standardized. Older Pittsburghese T-shirt designs, with ten or more words on the front and a longer list on the back, are now sold next to newer designs, which tend to play with a single Pittsburghese word: "I'm surrounded by jagoffs," "YNZ", "Drink up, yinz bitches," "Stillers," "We got [Super Bowl] rings n'at." An apparently self-published 2012 book called *Yinzer Bible* (Anon 2012) includes a "Pittsburghese Dictionary" that is different from earlier ones in some telling ways. Some of the entries appear to be copied from the lists that circulate via the McCool dictionary, T-shirts and other artifacts, and online. Others, however, suggest that the list maker was not very familiar with the way Pittsburghers talk. *Redd up* is spelled "Red-up" and wrongly defined as "to get ready," and *hoagie* is misspelled "hogie." Most of the other entries are eye dialect: "picknick" for *picnic*, "rilly" for *really*, "grahj" for *garage*, and so on. The monophthongal /aw/ sound is spelled <aaw>, <ah>, <awh>, and <ha>, which suggests that the writer of the list may not be sure what it actually sounds like. But the new dictionary includes one item that is missing from earlier lists: "Yinzer," defined as, "The beloved Pittsburgher who speaks Pittsburghese and follows the culture."

Particularly for people who do not remember the Pittsburgh of the 1950s and 1960s, the meaning of Pittsburghese is shifting. Pittsburghese is being enregistered not with the city's identity in general but more specifically with the persona of the Yinzer. As I noted in chapter 7, the Yinzer figure represents a style of communication as well as a lifestyle; Yinzers are forthright, loud, and directive because they are free of the need to control their speech for the new economy. They are also frustrated and petulant. They call people jagoffs, rant ineffectively about the "Stillers," and yell at their kids. When I ask older people to explain what Pittsburghese is, they list words and phrases; when I ask younger people, they break into performances of the Yinzer, often leaning forward, raising their

voices, sounding a bit aggressive. Speaking Pittsburghese, for them, is not so much a matter of knowing local speech forms that evoke the past as a matter of putting on a speech style that evokes a stereotypical working-class character.

It has been argued that economic and cultural developments have diminished the relevance of place in human lives. According to Robert N. Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et al. 1985), contemporary Americans inhabit "lifestyle enclaves" rather than communities centered around common experience of place. The instability of meaning in general and the threat to meaningful places in the **(p.242)** modern world is often said to be the result of rapid change and mobility (Ogilvy 1977). Edward Said (1978, 18), for example, speaks of the "generalized sense of homelessness" experienced by the globally mobile. According to sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991), the dynamism of modern life has the effect of separating place from space, removing social relations from local contexts. Once social life becomes "disembedded" in this way, "place becomes phantasmagoric" (Giddens, 1991, 146), "much less significant than it used to be as an external referent for the lifespan of the individual" (147). The world is no longer just the physical world in which a person moves through.

But it is also claimed that local, place-based community still has a role to play, albeit a changing one. Giddens points out how people attempt to "re-embed the lifespan within a local milieu" (1991, 147), such as through attempts to cultivate community pride. Cultural geographers who continue to focus on traditional cultures and traditional aspects of culture recognize the continued persistence and importance of traditional sources of meaning such as localness (Entrikin 1991, 41). That localness can still be valued can be seen in activities aimed at perpetuating or even creating it. Local contexts of life may still be tied to human identity in more immediate ways, too. As Stuart Hall points out (1991, 33–36), globalization is not, after all, a new phenomenon, and "the return to the local is often a response to globalization … It is a respect for local roots which is brought to bear against the anonymous, impersonal world of the globalized forces which we do not understand." Face-to-face community is knowable in a way more abstract communities are not: one "knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are" (35). In sum, it is increasingly difficult to predict exactly how the local will articulate with an individual's life.

In exploring one of the ways in which Pittsburghers articulate experience with place, I hope I have said something new about the meaning of place in human lives. Due to a particular set of geographical, economic, linguistic, and ideological circumstances, people in Pittsburgh grabbed onto language as a way of defining themselves, and arguments about what Pittsburgh means continue to be framed as arguments about Pittsburghese. (A controversy over whether the *Post-Gazette* should continue to allow its writers to use the word *jagoff* erupted as I was writing this chapter. On the surface it was about the meaning of a word, but the argument actually had as much to do with the meaning of the city's history.) The set of circumstances that produced Pittsburghese has coincided nowhere else. There are similar stories, but none identical. This is the sociolinguistic history of a particular spot on the planet at a particular time. In telling the story of Pittsburghese, I hope to have opened up some new ways of thinking about what regional

dialects are and what they mean at a time when mobility appears to be erasing difference.

Notes:

(1) . http://www.grammarphobia.com/blog/2011/02/yinz.html, accessed July 17, 2012.

(2) . http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=pittsburghese, accessed July 4, 2012.

(3) . http://iheartpgh.com/quest-yinz/, accessed July 3, 2013.

(4) . If *Yinzer* did not start with a letter that is close to the end of the alphabet, it would not have appeared in *DARE*, whose earlier volumes were all published before the word came onto the scene.

(5) . http://www.newyinzer.com/archive/fall2011/tocindex.html, accessed July 3, 2013.