Dialect and constructions of belonging in ‘the ghetto’

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Sociolinguistic work on adolescents’ speech in superdiverse urban spaces in Europe is typically concerned with emergent speech styles (sometimes called ethnolects or multiethnolects, e.g. Bodén 2010, Quist 2008 Wiese 2009). Only few studies of multiethnic speech practices focus on the use and acquisition of local dialect among second and third generation migrants. However, a few studies indicate that young speakers combine features associated with multiethnic speech and more traditional dialect (Christensen 2009, 2012, Cornips 2002). Christensen (2012) shows that multilingual youth even use more dialect than youth from mono-ethnic neighborhoods. So far, these combinations of ‘local’ and ‘global’ features are scarcely researched with regard to symbolic expressions of place identity and belonging. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a multiethnic housing estate in Denmark, this paper discusses how and to what extent linguistic features usually associated with regional dialect and multiethnolect are used in combination as indexes of locality and belonging. The housing estate in this study is spatially and socially marginalized. Using definitional criteria suggested by e.g. Wacquant (2008) it can be defined as a ghetto. The term ghetto is also used by the young people there themselves to discursively claim ownership to their local neighborhood. Linguistically, their speech differs from standard Danish in terms of pronunciation, some grammatical features and lexical loans (mostly from Turkish and Arabic). Most features resemble what has been described as multiethnolect in Copenhagen (e.g. Quist 2008, Hansen & Pharao, 2010), while other features may be associated with the local dialect. Based on participant observations, sociolinguistic interviews and group recordings, this paper discusses how these speech styles may be linked to the structural marginality of the housing estate and to the speakers’ own perceived positions and constructions of belonging.