

# Emerging multiethnolects in Europe

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## Abstract

We discuss the results of research carried out in the last ten years or so in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK, on new forms and styles of language that have emerged in multilingual areas of European cities. We discuss the problematic nature of the term *multiethnolect*, and argue that multiethnolects are a new typological language variety. We survey the innovative linguistic forms that have emerged in the different European languages, and draw brief and preliminary conclusions about the cognitive and communicative processes that drive their emergence. We then consider general social awareness of multiethnolects and attitudes about their speakers, drawing mainly on the example of the Netherlands. Finally, we review the small amount of existing evidence that helps predict the future of new linguistic forms and styles.

**Keywords** multiethnolect; language contact; language change; styles

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## 1 Introduction

The large cities of Europe have always been a destination for immigrants, but the amount and diversity of immigration has increased massively in the last fifty years or so, with huge impacts on the extent of multilingualism in our cities. In Oslo, for example, 125 different languages are now spoken (Svendsen and Røynealand 2008). London has the largest number of community languages of all European cities, with more than 300 reported as spoken in its schools<sup>1</sup>. Language contact on this scale is having a significant effect on the dominant ‘host’ languages of the different European countries, with many new forms of language and new ways of speaking emerging. We refer to these linguistic forms and styles of speaking here as *multiethnolects* (but see below). They are born in the informal spontaneous talk of multiethnic peer groups; a defining characteristic is that they are used by (usually monolingual) young people from non-immigrant backgrounds as well as by their bilingual peers.

The language changes resulting from language contact on such a large scale allow researchers to address some important and intriguing questions. The very recent and rapid emergence of new forms in multilingual urban neighbourhoods provides data that we can use to explore the cognitive and language-internal processes determining the emergence of a linguistic innovation from its very earliest occurrence. We can also analyse the social, cultural and communicative processes at work in the creation of new forms and new uses of multiple languages, providing insights into the origins of contact varieties. As Dorleijn and Nortier (20013: 36) say, multilingual areas of European cities are a locus where “language contact can be...caught red-handed”.

Of course, it is not only Europe that has seen immigration on a large scale, with resulting new forms and uses of language. Similar language developments have been attested in Nairobi (*Sheng*; Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997), Jakarta (*Gaul*; Smith-Hefner 2007) and elsewhere (see further Dorleijn and Nortier 2013, Dorleijn et al 2015). In this paper, however, we confine our discussion to the results of research carried out in the last ten years or so in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany, France and the UK. We begin, in section 2, by setting out the different approaches and broad findings of different researchers, and argue that *multiethnolects* are a new typological language variety. We also briefly discuss the problematic nature of the term. In section 3 we compare the innovative linguistic forms that have emerged in the different languages of these countries, and attempt to draw brief and preliminary conclusions about the cognitive and communicative processes that drive their emergence. In section 4 we consider general social awareness of multiethnolects and attitudes about their speakers, drawing mainly on the example of the Netherlands. Finally, we review the small amount of existing evidence that helps predict the future of new linguistic forms and styles: will some persist, to become part of the dominant language variety or repertoire? Are some being acquired by a new generation of speakers? Will speakers continue to use the linguistic innovations and new styles of speaking in later life? Or will the innovations disappear as speakers grow older and their lives and social circumstances change?

## 2 Multiethnolect

We use the term *multiethnolects* here to encompass a broad range of language forms and practices documented by researchers in European cities. First, it refers to the way that in mixed multicultural neighbourhoods, young people may combine elements from different heritage languages with the dominant mainstream language. Dorleijn and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/londonfacts/default.htm?category=2>, accessed January 26, 2015.

Nortier (2013:1) give the following example, in which Turkish (in bold) and Moroccan Arabic (in italics) occurs together with Dutch (in regular type):

- (1) wreed **olmazmi** *ab* *sabbî?*  
 great wouldn't. be VOC my.friend  
 wouldn't that be great my friend?

Dorleijn and Nortier point out that it is not necessary to be fluent in Turkish and Moroccan Arabic in order to speak in this way. Example (1), they say, could have been uttered by a young person of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi or any other origin, including, of course, Turkish or Moroccan. Importantly, it could equally well have been uttered by a young Dutch-speaking monolingual person from a non-immigrant background. The term *multiethnolect*, then, has been coined to capture the fact that this way of speaking is not ethnically marked.

In addition, the term *multiethnolect* has been used to describe an ethnically neutral variable repertoire containing a core of innovative phonetic, grammatical, and discourse-pragmatic features (see, for example, Cheshire et al 2011). In London, for example, many of the diphthongs characteristic of the local variety of English have become near-monophthongs (in the FACE and PRICE lexical set for example). There is a new pronoun, *man*, a new quotative expression *this is* +speaker, and many other innovations (Cheshire et al 2011, Cheshire 2013). Wiese (2009, 2013), similarly, refers to *Kiezdeutsch* in Berlin as a multiethnolect: a way of speaking for young people in multicultural neighbourhoods of Berlin that contains new forms of German. In both uses of the term, it is assumed that there is a 'base language', the dominant language of the local society, and that the multiethnolect is highly variable and dynamic.

For many working class speakers in London, the multiethnolect is a 'vernacular' in Labov's sense, in that it is their 'basic', unmarked, unreflecting, unmonitored variety (Kerswill 2014). Wiese, somewhat similarly, argues that *Kiezdeutsch* in Berlin should be thought of as an urban dialect, comparable to other German dialects (Wiese 2013). In this sense, multiethnolects are a new kind of dialect, meeting the conventional definition of a dialect as "the particular combination of [English] words, pronunciations and grammatical forms that you share with other people from your area and your social background" (Trudgill 2004a: 2). However, unlike the situations described for London and German *Kiezdeutsch*, the use of a multiethnolect elsewhere is sometimes reported to be deliberate and marked. Multiethnolects cannot be equated with vernaculars everywhere. Either way, multiethnolects also meet the definition of a contact variety: "a language that arose by some historical process other than normal transmission [from caregiver to child]... comprised of grammatical and lexical systems that cannot all be traced back to a single parent language" (1997: 74-5)". This is the view taken by Dorleijn and Nortier (op.cit.), on the basis of a comparison of the typical characteristics of contact varieties such as pidgins, creoles, mixed languages and interlanguages, and by Wiese (2009: 803), who despite seeing *Kiezdeutsch* as an urban dialect also comments "in multiethnolects like *Kiezdeutsch* we see the rise of a new kind of contact language originating in European youth cultures". Multiethnolects can be considered, therefore, a new typological variety (albeit sometimes considered a style), with characteristics of both a dialect and a contact variety.

A somewhat different phenomenon that has also emerged in multiethnic speech communities is described by Rampton (2015). Rampton presents an interactional analysis of the 'hybrid style' (2015:32) of a British Asian speaker who combines elements of his heritage language, Punjabi, with traditional working class London English and

elements of Jamaican Creole. He argues that this speech style is a socially embedded and relatively stable resource in the speaker's everyday interactional practice (2015: 25).

Other researchers see multiethnolects as a stylistic resource, in the sense that speakers use the characteristic linguistic features in certain situations, with certain speakers, to negotiate and construct identities and allegiances interactionally (as, too, does the speaker analysed by Rampton; see also Rampton 2013): see, for example, Quist (2008) on the *Københavnsk multiethnolect*, and Haglund (2010) on adolescent discourse in Durby, Sweden. Confusingly, there is anecdotal evidence that in London, too, there are some young people who treat the multiethnolect as a style that they can opt into and out of. Perhaps this dual status is the same for all multiethnolects, with decisions about whether they should be seen as individual styles or as new varieties of language merely reflecting the research design, the speakers studied and the analytic method adopted, with some researchers taking a 'stylistic practice' approach to the phenomenon and others a 'structural variety' approach (Svendsen and Quist 2010). Many studies to date, in fact, with the exception of research on Multicultural London English and, more recently, Multicultural Paris French (Gardner-Chloros et al 2010-2014), tend to take a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach.

In all cases, the forms and practices emerge in multilingual communities where speakers have a high tolerance and high use of variation and where linguistic norms are flexible. This type of environment seems particularly conducive to linguistic innovation. The new ways of speaking tend to receive a great deal of attention from the media and the general public, usually in terms of negative comments (see for example Kerswill 2014b, Wiese in press). In some cases, however, the attention could, with some fantasy, be considered positive, as illustrated by the examples from the Netherlands in section 4. Labels used to refer to them often reflect their perceived origins in minority ethnic groups: thus in the UK the press refer to *Jafaican*, reflecting a popular belief that the London multiethnolect originates in the speech of immigrants of Jamaican and African descent, and in Germany the term *Kanak Sprak* has been used, with an insulting meaning that Wiese (2013: 213) literally translates as 'wog speak' (Wiese 2013: 213). Linguists have attempted to introduce more neutral terms such as, for London, *Multicultural London English* or, for Berlin, *Kiezdeutsch*, 'neighbourhood German', with varying degrees of success.

It is important to note that a range of different terms have been used to refer to the phenomena we describe here, all of which have been contested. The term *multiethnolect* was coined in opposition to *ethnolect* which, as Eckert (2008) notes (referring to Clyne 2000) "is generally reserved for varieties of a majority language that have been modified through a period of bilingualism in an immigrant community". The term *ethnolect* focuses on one specific linguistic (heritage) community and reflects a static view rather than a fluid and dynamic perspective. The varieties we consider here are not restricted to one specific ethnic group, neither in form nor in agentivity, and therefore the term *multiethnolect* seems more appropriate. However, reference to ethnicity remains traceable in the term multiethnolect, and it has been rightly criticized for implying a focus on one dimension of social variation, ethnicity, at the expense of other relevant dimensions. Furthermore it does not capture the fluidity and dynamism of these ways of speaking. Dorleijn et al (2015) use the term *urban youth speech styles*, in order to stress that ethnicity plays a subordinate role and that stylization is basic to the phenomenon described. A problem with this term, though, is that it implies that the linguistic forms involved will not be used by adult speakers. This is not necessarily the case, though, as we briefly discuss in section 5.

Rampton (2015) prefers the term *contemporary urban vernaculars*, which makes no reference to age and which incorporates the fact that the linguistic features involved are

no longer specific to ethnically mixed groups, and not necessarily restricted to young people. The term is an attempt to encompass Silverstein's (1985) concept of the total linguistic fact, and to "find a formulation that remains open to the shifting social meaning potentials that emerge in the dialectic of linguistic, interactional and ideological processes at play" (Rampton 2015: 43). This, too, though, has been criticized for giving a false impression of linguistic homogeneity (amongst other things; see Cornips et al (2015) for discussion).

At present, then, there is no term accepted by all researchers in the field to refer to the phenomena we describe in this paper. Indeed, whether or not one term suffices to cover the different ways of using language that we discuss here is a topic of debate which we have addressed only briefly. For now, we have decided to retain the term *multiethnolect*. We use the term with caution, recognizing that ethnicity may no longer be a relevant social factor and without wishing to reify a way of speaking that is dynamic and far from focused. It is worth repeating that although the phenomena described by researchers across Europe are diverse, they have a shared origin in communities where many different heritage languages are spoken and where young people, whatever their individual language background, share the language of the host community. We stress that in almost all cases the forms and styles are used not only by young people of recent immigrant background but also by their peers from the (monolingual) majority background of the host community. We describe some of these ways of speaking in what follows, and attempt to draw out general processes, both linguistic and sociolinguistic, that underlie them.

### 3 Linguistic forms and processes leading to their emergence

In this section we focus on some of the distinctive linguistic forms that researchers have identified as typical of different multiethnolects. As we will see, these forms are found in all components of language.

#### 3.1 Lexis

Vocabulary is of course the most obvious indication of language contact, and it is not surprising therefore that it is the characteristic of multiethnolects most often remarked on by commentators (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 68). As would be expected, the words taken from other languages reflect the wide variety of heritage languages in the communities where multiethnolects have emerged. It is important to note that speakers use elements from many of the languages in their repertoire irrespective of how fluent they are in those languages: sometimes they may know no more than a few words or chunks of the languages. Jørgensen and many other researchers refer to this phenomenon as *polylinguaging* (see, for example, Jørgensen and Møller 2008).

In some cases, there is a preponderance of words from a language spoken by the first wave of immigrants to a neighbourhood. This appears, then, to support the Founder Principle, a term borrowed by Mufwene (2001) from population genetics: the speech forms of the linguistic founding population of an area continue to survive and affect the language of the area despite later arrivals. For example, Italian mineworkers and their families were the first immigrant group to arrive after World War II in the town of Genk, in Belgium; from the 1960s on they were joined by immigrants from many other countries, so that what were once Italian neighbourhoods now represent a 'real melting pot of different languages and cultures' (Aarsæther et al 2015: 251). The multiethnolect (referred to as *Citétaal*) now spoken by young people in these neighbourhoods still contains a large number of Italian words, both adapted and non-

adapted (e.g. *parlaren*, ‘talk’). In London, similarly, the first immigrant groups to arrive in what are now very diverse multicultural neighbourhoods were from Jamaica, and Multicultural London English contains many words of Jamaican origin. They include *blood* and *bredren*, ‘friend’, *cuss*, ‘defame’, *ends* ‘estate’ or ‘neighbourhood’, *tief*, ‘steal’ and *wha gwan*, ‘what’s up?’ (see further Kerswill 2014b).

However, as Mufwene remarks (2001: 76), the Founder Principle works unless it doesn’t! (See also Trudgill 2004b: 164). Elsewhere, the ‘borrowed’ words come from a very wide variety of languages. The Copenhagen multiethnolect, for example, has words from Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish and Serbian (Quist 2008): examples are *pička*, ‘cunt’ or ‘prostitute’ in Serbian, used as an insult; *jalla*, ‘come on’, from Arabic; and *para*, ‘money’, from Turkish. Often, the borrowed words reflect what is important in the (frequently mainly male) peer group culture: thus *giz*, from Turkish *kız*, ‘girl’, is used in Stockholm and Copenhagen, and Berber *koebe*, ‘prostitute’ for ‘girl’ in Oslo (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 65, 71). *Toes*, ‘rubbish’, from Arabic and *sjpa*, ‘good’, are also frequent in Berber Svendsen and Røyneland’s Oslo corpus, as are hybrid compounds consisting of both a non-Norwegian word and a Norwegian word: for example, *drijtspa*, ‘very good’, from the Norwegian emphasizer *drit*, literally ‘dirt’ and Berber *sjpa*. Words from Urdu and Punjabi also occur, such as *baja*, ‘friend’ and *toert* ‘good, pretty, cool’ (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 70). In Paris, *brat*, ‘many’, *kerari*, ‘like’ and other Arabic words are used, as well as Romani words including *bicraver*, ‘to sell or steal’, *maraver*, ‘to hit’, and *narvalo*, ‘crazy’.

*Wallah* ‘swear by Allah’, from Arabic, is widely attested: it is reported as frequent not only in Oslo, Norway, but also in Utrecht and elsewhere in the Netherlands (Nortier 2001), Malmö, Sweden (Bodén 2007), Copenhagen (Quist 2000) and Helsinki (Lehtonen 2011:302). It also occurs in French in Paris (Gardner-Chloros et al 2010-2014), as does the Arabic *starfoullah*, ‘I swear’. In Oslo *wallah* has multiple functions, occurring as an intensifier and ‘emphasizer’ in conversation, and as a symbolic way of describing the multiethnolect (*Wallahspråk*) and adolescents who speak it, or who try to (‘*wallah-wannabees*’); Svendsen and Røyneland (2008:71). In Oslo and Copenhagen *wallah* also occurs in fixed phrases such as *wallah jeg svoerger*, ‘wallah I swear’; and as a follow up to a previous utterance, meaning ‘is it true?’ or ‘yes it is true’ as in example (2) from Quist 2008: 47. Quist notes that many of the same words occur in Rinkeby Swedish.

- (2) Ahmed: Jeg så Sabrina i dag  
‘I saw Sabrina today’  
Mehmet: Wallah?  
Ahmed: Ude foran bussen  
‘next to the bus’  
Mehmet: Wallah?  
Ahmed: Wallah

As these few examples make clear, many of the words taken from other languages are evaluative adjectives, intensifiers or fixed phrases with interpersonal, ritual functions in discourse; some are taboo or slang words. Since multiethnolects have their origins in young people’s informal spontaneous discourse, it is not surprising that the words are of this kind (for example, adolescents are known to use a higher proportion of intensifiers than other age groups; see Ito and Tagliamonte 2003) and that they are thought to have an iconic status as markers of multiethnolectal speech (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008). No doubt their iconic status contributes to their use in styling and in a range of young people’s social practices (see for example Özcan et al 2015 on teasing).

### 3.2 Phonetics

It is less easy to identify direct effects of language contact for the phonetic characteristics of multiethnolects. In some cases there is mention of possible transfer of features from one of the background languages, but use of the features is rarely straightforward and it is usually mediated by sociolinguistic factors. Nortier and Dorleijn (2008), for example, describe the complex situation in several Dutch cities where young people of all ethnicities and language backgrounds, including the majority indigenous Dutch, use an exaggerated form of Moroccan-accented Dutch. Impressionistic observations indicate an overgeneralisation of certain features, such as word-initial [s] which is realised as [ʃ] when a Moroccan accent is imitated, though in Moroccan Arabic and Berber both [s] and [ʃ] can be used word-initially. For some speakers of Moroccan origin the accent seems to be a ‘natural’ way of speaking’, with its roots, presumably, in transfer from Moroccan Arabic or Berber to Dutch; but for other speakers of Moroccan descent it is a stylistic resource, just as it is for other language groups, used only in informal peer group interactions in specific styles of speaking. In Hamburg, similarly, an emerging German multiethnolect has phonological characteristics based on Turkish (Dirim and Auer 2004). Nortier and Dorleijn suggest several sociocultural reasons why it is the Moroccan accent that has this role in the Netherlands, rather than, say, Turkish-accented Dutch. Both communities in the Netherlands are about the same size and have the same cultural background; one important difference, though, lies in the relative prestige of Moroccan Arabic and Turkish in the two communities. A further difference is that the Moroccan community is more open to outsiders, so that their way of speaking Dutch is more often heard and more easily recognized by other ethnic groups. On the other hand, in Germany Turkish has played a more important role in the formation of Kanakspråk, to the extent that the multiethnolect is also known as Türkendeutsch (Deppermann 2007)

Nortier and Dorleijn point out, importantly, that the Moroccan-influenced Dutch accent in the Netherlands is highly dynamic and that, therefore, an exact, precise description cannot be given – indeed, it is not per se the primary goal of their research (2008:140). It would be possible to describe this Dutch example as the direct effect of language contact, then, but this would miss the important point that speakers make use of language transfer creatively, to mark group membership. In all cases, though, it is clear that the social structure and sociolinguistic developments in the communities have affected the form of the multiethnolect.

A similarly complex example comes from research conducted in three Swedish cities (Bodén 2010). Bodén claims that the multiethnolect is a ‘foreign-sounding variety’ (2010: 77). For example, in Malmö, the pronunciation of the first sound in a words such as *checkar*, ‘check’, as an affricate, [tʃ], is perceived as a marker of the Swedish multiethnolect by adolescents taking part in a listening test. Many of the words pronounced with word initial affricates in the test material were English borrowings. Despite generally speaking English well, monolingual Swedish speakers are apparently reluctant to produce an English-sounding affricate in these words (Lindström 2004); bilingual Swedes with an immigrant background, on the other hand, readily transfer the pronunciation from their heritage languages (Bodén points out that affricates are relatively common in the languages of the world). This gives the affricate pronunciation “great force” as a marker of the multiethnolect (Bodén 2010: 72), to the extent that it is used by young people who speak heritage languages where affricates do not occur. Again, then, language transfer can be seen to be relevant, but again the process is far from straightforward, and it is mediated by the social meaning that the phonetic feature has acquired.

In London, on the other hand, Cheshire et al (2011) argue against the effect of language transfer. Pronunciations such as near monophthongal variants of the FACE and GOAT vowels correspond strikingly to the vowels of Jamaican patois, but they also correspond to vowels of the Englishes spoken in West Africa and the Indian subcontinent, and to typical learner pronunciations generally (Kerswill et al 2013: 270). Cheshire et al (2011: 190) argue that an exceptionally high proportion of speakers of language varieties other than the local London English, sustained over time by continuing immigration, has led to the near-monophthongal variants dominating in a ‘feature pool’, and that it is frequency of the variants rather than language transfer that accounts for their use in Multicultural London English.

Elsewhere, although pronunciation of a multiethnolect seems to be distinctive for users and non-users alike, the relevant phonetic features are not yet clear. Thus Quist (2008: 48) notes that for the Copenhagen multiethnolect “it has so far not been possible to provide a thorough description of what it is that actually makes it sound different from standard Danish”. Kotsinas makes a similar point for Rinkeby Swedish (1988, 1990).

In some cases there is evidence of simplification in the phonological system. In Copenhagen, there is variable omission of the Danish *stod* (a word accent realised as a glottal constriction); thus speakers of the multiethnolect tend to omit *stod* in the word *tusind*, ‘thousand’, where standard Danish speakers would have *stod* on the *u* vowel, and in *sammen*, ‘together’ and *grim*, ‘ugly’, where the standard has *stod* on *m* (Quist 2008:48). In London, strategies for hiatus resolution in English are simplified, seen at their clearest in the resulting levelling of allomorphy in the indefinite and definite articles. The indefinite and definite forms before words beginning with a consonant and also words beginning with a vowel are variably realised as [ə] and [ðə], so that the distinction between *a* and *an* (seen, for example, in *a banana* and *an apple*) and [ðə] and [ði:] is no longer made. Thus speakers now say *a apple* and *the [ðə] apple*. In this case, then, phonetic simplification may be bolstered by a drive to reduce redundancy in the article system.

In the Danish and English examples above, it is possible that simplification of the phonological system is the result, in the first instance, of strategies of second language learning. However, in these cases as well as the others mentioned in this section, monolingual speakers for whom the mainstream language is unquestionably a first language also use the relevant features. Clearly, then, the features have acquired a social meaning.

In some cities, speakers of the multiethnolect use new forms resulting from ongoing language change more frequently than other speakers. In Oslo, for example, young people are using lexical tone in new ways, reducing the tone distinction in some minimal pairs while creating new minimal pairs for other words. Speakers of the multiethnolect not only participate in the variation resulting from this change, but they also seem to be accelerating the change by producing new mergers (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 73). Svendsen and Røyneland suggest that this may be due to language contact in multi-ethnic areas of Oslo, arguing that the tone distinction has now been lost in some Scandinavian dialects where there has been language contact in the past. In Oslo the tendency may be reinforced by the fact that, with the exception of Vietnamese, the major contact languages in the multilingual environment are not tone languages.

### 3.3 Prosody

A common feature shared by many emerging multiethnolects is the development of a syllable-timed rhythm, often described as ‘choppy’ or ‘staccato’ (see, for example,

Kotsinas (1990) with reference to Rinkeby Swedish, Quist (2008) with reference to the Copenhagen multiethnolect, Svensen and Røyneland (2008) with reference to Oslo, and Lehtonen 2011 for Helsinki).

Kotsinas (1990) notes that in the Swedish multiethnolect there is less frequent use of assimilations and reductions across word boundaries than in other varieties of Swedish and that this might lead to an impression of syllables having a similar length. A further relevant factor seems to be changes in vowel duration. In Copenhagen, there is levelling of the contrast between the duration of long and short vowels preceding a stressed syllable (except for words containing a schwa in the second syllable): short vowels are becoming longer and long vowels shorter. It is argued that this contributes to an overall more syllable-timed rhythm (Hansen and Phrao 2010). In London, the changes in the realisation of diphthongs, mentioned above, lead to their having a shorter duration, and this, together with a lengthening of the duration of the schwa vowel, is a contributing factor to the emergence of the new rhythmic pattern (Torgersen and Szackay 2012). In both Copenhagen and London these changes are led by speakers from the heritage language groups, but they also occur in the speech of the monolingual dominant indigenous group; this seems to be the case in the other European cities too.

Torgersen and Szackay suggest that changes in vowel duration are a general characteristic of contact varieties, resulting in their tending to be more syllable-timed irrespective of the typological background of the contact languages. This idea is supported by Fagyal's (2010) research in Paris. Fagyal found that monolingual French-speaking young people with no immigrant background and young people from immigrant families speaking an African stress-timed language all had syllable-timed prosody, and that the ethnically French speakers had greater variation in vowel duration (Fagyal 2010).

### 3.4 Syntax

A number of similar developments in morphosyntax and syntax have been noted in the multiethnolects of a range of languages.

#### 3.4.1 *Inflections*

There is widespread reduction of morphosyntactic marking. In Dutch, Swedish and Danish multiethnolects the marking of grammatical gender is changing, with an extension of common gender in place of neuter gender (Wiese 2009:780). Wiese (2009:788) notes a more general loss of inflectional markers of case, gender and number in German, especially of the more marked feminine and plural suffixes. She points out, however, that to some extent this is typical of spoken German more generally, where a form such as *meinen*, 'my<sub>ACC</sub>', is frequently reduced to *mein* as a result of schwa deletion in fast speech. This tendency is also observed in Dutch.

A reduction of inflections is of course a frequent result of language contact, well attested in research on creolisation and second language acquisition. The important point here though is that, as with the phonological changes mentioned in the previous section, monolingual speakers from the dominant host communities speak in the same way as their multilingual peers. Cornips (2008) discusses whether the simplification of grammatical gender in Dutch is the result of bilingual language acquisition or an act of identity. In the same vein, Opsahl and Nistov (2010: 63) conclude from their analysis of both gender marking and the loss of the V2 constraint (see below) in Norwegian that the patterns cannot be explained solely as the result of bilingual or second language

acquisition. It seems, then, that as with the phonetic changes mentioned above it is the social meaning of the changes in gender marking that provide the impetus for their use.

Other examples of morphosyntactic simplification come from the French spoken in multi-ethnic peer groups in Paris, where irregular plurals such as the adjective forms *normaux* or *spéciaux* are regularised to become *normals* and *specials*. Note that our use of the word final *-s* here is arbitrary: the *-s* is a written form, not pronounced in any variety of spoken French, where it is the pronunciation of the vowel that carries the meaning of plurality.

In Multicultural London English there is variation in the use of plural marking on nouns, resulting in variation such as *ten boy* and *ten boys*, and extension of the *-s* plural in words such as *childs* (rather than the standard *children*). The process has had far-reaching consequences in the case of the word *man*, for which four different plural forms occur: *mans*, *man*, *men* and *mens*. One of these plural forms, *man*, has become specialised in meaning to refer to a group of people, usually male, whose makeup is defined by the context, either situational, as in (3) where the members of the group are present, or linguistic, as in (4) where the following discourse makes it clear that the group consists of people riding past on their bikes.

- (3) you man are all sick though
- (4) some of my boys they were kicking man in the canal like from their bikes .  
people just driving past on their bikes . they're like out at ten o'clock kicking man  
in the canal and that

It has been a short step from using *man* to refer to a contextually defined group to using *man* as a pronoun. In the London data speakers frequently use *man* as a first person singular pronoun to position themselves as a member of a group. For example in (5) the speaker tells his friend and the fieldworker what he said to his girlfriend when she annoyed him by bringing along her friends on a date with him.

- (5) “didn’t I tell you man wanna come see you I don't date your friends I date you  
not your friends”

In this case, then, variation in plural marking has led to the relatively unusual development of an innovative pronoun form (see Cheshire 2013 for further details).

A further example of simplification in Multicultural London English is the use of a levelled *was/wasn't* pattern for past forms of BE, so that speakers of the London multithnolect use *was* with all persons of the verb, in both negative and positive polarity contexts (in other words, they say *I was out* and *we was out*, and *I wasn't out* and *we wasn't out*). This pattern differs from what is widely attested elsewhere in London (and the south of England more generally), where young people tend to use leveled *was* in positive polarity contexts and leveled *weren't* in negative polarity contexts (for example, *I was out*, *weren't I*, and *we was out*, *weren't we*); see Cheshire and Fox 2009 for details. It is possible that language contact is a factor in the emergence of the *was/wasn't* pattern, since this occurs in Jamaican Creole English and also as an interlanguage form in second language acquisition. However there are other relevant factors. The pattern was latent in the local variety of London English: elderly speakers of indigenous ‘Cockney’ also used the *was/wasn't* pattern, albeit to a limited extent. Frequency of the form may also be relevant: in London non-standard *were* does not occur at all in positive contexts: the form used with first and third person singular past forms of BE, then, is always *was*, and the most frequent grammatical subjects in speech are first and third singular subjects. In

negative contexts, frequencies of non-standard *weren't* (i.e. with first and third singular subjects) are relatively low in the data analysed by Cheshire and Fox. All this makes *was* the dominant form heard in the locality, in both negative and positive contexts (Cheshire and Fox 2009). There is enormous pressure, then, for young speakers to select *was*.

### 3.4.2 Bare NPs

A development shared by both English and German is the use of bare NPs in 'local' expressions where a lexical preposition would be expected, for example *ich bin schule*, *I'm going school*. In English the bare NPs mainly occur after GO and COME, and it is the preposition *to* that is absent. The development seems more extensive in German, with *zu*, *auf* and other lexical prepositions absent, not only in complements of GEHEN, 'go', but also in complements of 'to be' and adverbials (Wiese 2013:223). In both English and German the spatial interpretation is retrievable from the semantics of the verb or the linguistic context; it typically involves either place/location or direction, with an orientation towards the bare NP referent as the target.

Wiese argues that bare NPs of this kind are latent in spoken informal German generally, where they occur in a few restricted contexts. Prepositions do not occur, for example, with proper nouns referring to public transport stops, as in (6), taken from an official notice posted by Potsdam's public transport company in May 2010 (Wiese 2013: 225).

- (6) Bei allen Fahrten, die Bhf Charlottenhof enden.....  
 for all journeys which station Charlottenhof end.....  
 for all journeys ending at Charlottenhof station.....

A similar point can be made for English, where most speakers use bare NPs in a few restricted expressions, such as *I'm going home*. Bare NPs after GO are heard in young people's informal English, whether or not they are speakers of the multiethnolect, but they are far more frequent in the multiethnolect. In both English and German, then, the development continues a pattern that can be thought of as latent in the languages.

There is a similar development in Swedish, shown in example (7).

- (7) min farbror gick military  
 my uncle went military  
 my uncle joined the military/became a soldier (Kotsinas 1998: 136; cited in Wiese 2009: 793.)

In German, the syntactic consequences are more complex than they might at first appear. Bare NPs of this kind frequently occur in the context of a semantically bleached light verb, as in (8).

- (8) machst du rote ampel  
 make 2<sub>SING</sub> you<sub>NOM</sub> red traffic light  
 you are crossing at the red light

Wiese points out that in these contexts there is a change in argument structure. In the case of *machen* in (9), for example, *machen* and *Kesser* together select the accusative object *dich*, assigning it the role of patient.

- (9) ich mach<sup>2</sup> dich Kesser  
 I make<sub>1 SING</sub> you<sub>ACC</sub> knife  
 I'll knife you

This is a substantial change from conventional uses of *machen*, where the verb subcategorises a dative and accusative object and therefore assigns two theta-roles, recipient and result, as in (10).

- (10) ich mach dir einen Schal  
 I make you<sub>DAT</sub> a scarf<sub>ACC</sub>  
 I'll make you a scarf

### 3.4.3 *Word order changes*

A striking development in several of the Germanic languages studied is the loss of the so-called Verb Second (V2) rule (Freywald et al 2015). In declarative main clauses in Dutch, German and the Scandinavian languages only one constituent can precede the finite verb (subordinate clauses in Dutch and German have a different word order). Usually this constituent is the subject. This means that if the sentence begins with an element other than the Subject, the subject must follow the verb, as in the Dutch example in (11).

- (11) Gisteren kocht ik een boek  
 Yesterday bought I a book

In German, Swedish, Norwegian (and Danish; see Quist 2008) new word order patterns have developed, with additional elements before an otherwise ‘normal’ V2 clause. Freywald et al note that in German, Swedish and Norwegian the most frequent additional element is an adverbial, occurring as PP, DP or even CP, but more often with the form of a simple adverb. In all three languages the adverb usually has a temporal meaning (though conditional adverbs are also fairly frequent) and in all three languages the subject in this type of sentence is a pronoun. Full NPs subjects are rare.

Freywald et al argue that this new pattern can be explained in terms of information structure preferences. The initial temporal adverb provides an interpretational frame for the following proposition in terms of time, place or condition; alternatively, it links the clause to a preceding clause, presenting successive clauses in a linear order that is easy to process (as in narratives, where the order of the clauses in the complicating action section represents narrated events in the order in which the events occurred; see Labov and Waletzky 1967). In the first case, the adverb functions as a frame setter, limiting the following proposition to a specified temporal (or other) domain. The pronoun subject in these sentences is a familiar, or given, topic (hence the use of a pronoun); and a favoured position across all languages for frame setters and given information is to the left of the finite verb. In the second case, elements functioning to link a clause to a preceding clause typically occur at the beginning of the clause.

An intriguing question that has not yet been explained is why the V2 rule has not been similarly relaxed in Dutch. Between them, three separate corpora, from Nijmegen, Utrecht and Rotterdam, yield only 4 tokens from a total of 714 potential contexts (see Freywald et al 2015:788 for discussion of possible reasons).

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<sup>2</sup> There is no –e inflection with this 1<sup>st</sup> singular verb, as is common in informal spoken German generally; Wiese 2009: 793; note 17]

Other word order changes have been noted in some studies. For example, Wiese notes that Kiezdeutsch is more liberal generally with respect to the forefield of the finite verb: for example, the finite verb sometimes occurs in first position, as in (12).

- (12) brauchst du VIER alter  
 need you four old one  
 you need four of those, man! [=parts for building virtual cars in a computer game]

In Norwegian, the negative marker *ikke*, ‘not’, is usually post verbal, yet in embedded clauses the Oslo multiethnolect *ikke* occurs both before and after the finite verb. In French, embedded questions with the *wh* word in situ occur frequently in the speech of multi-ethnic peer groups in Paris (38 per cent of the time in Gardner-Chloros et al’s 2010-2014 corpus; see Gardner-Chloros et al 2014). An example is given in (13)

- (13) Je sais pas il est où  
 I know not he is where  
 I don’t know where he is

In all these examples, discourse-pragmatic pressures may be relevant, with the new positions allowing different elements of the clause to be highlighted. In French, for example, the indirect embedded question now has the same form as a direct question in informal spoken French; in both direct and indirect questions, then, the *wh*- word is highlighted by occurring in clause-final position.

#### 3.4.4 Syntax/pragmatics interface

The marking of information structure, of course, is at the interface of syntax and pragmatics, where processes associated both directly and indirectly with language contact are well-attested (Hulk and Muller 2000, Matras 2009). Not surprisingly, then, information structuring preferences seem to drive several other types of innovation in multiethnolects.

One such innovation is the use of the English relativiser *who* to mark antecedent nouns that are candidates for topics. Young people in London generally use both *that* and *who* as subject relativisers, but it is only speakers of the multiethnolect who have attributed a topicaliser function to *who*. Thus in (14), the bolded *who* in the relative clause *who moved to Antigua* refers to ‘my medium brother’. The speaker then refers to this brother (shown by the pronouns in bold type) in 5 of the 10 following clauses, before sidestepping in the next four clauses to the topic of his house.

- (14) I've done three things cos of my mum and one thing for my little brother.  
 my medium brother **who** moved to antigua  
 cos **he**'s got a spinal disorder  
 so **he** grows kinda slow [S: mhm]  
 so **he** is kinda short.  
 people were swinging **him** about in my area. I thought "what?" .  
 now I lived near **him** then in north one.  
 I still had my house in east london  
 cos that's where I've lived born and raised like I had a house in east London  
 where my nan lives

Speakers tend to use *that* as the relativiser when the antecedent subject is not a potential topic of the following discourse. Cheshire, Adger and Fox 2013 explain the emergence of *who* as a topicaliser by first noting that unlike *that*, in the London data *who* occurs only with animate subject antecedents. Topic is closely related cross-linguistically to both subjects and animacy, so it is a straightforward development for speakers to use *who* to mark topic as well as animacy and subjecthood. There is nothing unusual about the development, then, but it is the multilingual setting in which the multiethnolect has emerged that allows it to happen. Cheshire, Adger and Fox further argue that the kind of variation and change seen in the London multiethnolect provides evidence for how grammatical theories should be configured so as to capture the patterns, highlighting the importance of multiethnolects not just for understanding the sociolinguistic aspects of language change, but also as crucial sources of phenomena that inform theoretical linguistics.

New uses of *innit* (arguably *isn't it* originally) in London also mark information structure overtly. In Multicultural London English *innit* has the same discourse functions as elsewhere in southern England: speakers use it both as a question tag and as a follow up, as in (15) and (16). However they also use the form with an additional function, to mark a topic or to foreground new information, as in (17); (see Pichler and Torgersen 2009).

(15) *they was getting jealous though innit*

(16) Hadiya: *it weren't like it was an accident*  
Bisa: *innit*

(17) *yeah I know . I'm a lot smaller than all of them man and who were like "whoa" . I mean the sister **innit** she's about five times bigger than you innit Mark?*

A striking example of an innovation motivated by information structuring comes from the parallel development of Swedish *sån*, Norwegian *sånn* and German *so*, 'such (a)'. Ekberg et al (2015) show that these forms have a common semantic basis with a primary lexical meaning that is comparative, along with a 'more or less salient' deictic or demonstrative meaning. A Swedish example is given in (18), where the comparand (B) identifies the comparee (A); see Ekberg et al 2015: xx)

(18) Jag vill ha [en **sån** klänning]<sub>A</sub> [som den i fönstret]<sub>B</sub>  
I want to have a such dress as the one in window the  
I want to have a dress such as the one in the window

In all three languages, these forms have undergone semantic bleaching, reducing their deictic meaning in favour of a pragmatic function that targets the level of information structure. They are now used with a determiner-like function, to mark nominal elements introducing a new referent identifiable to the interlocutor through an implicit or imagined comparand that is shared knowledge. Thus the comparative meaning remains, but it is backgrounded. This can be seen in example (19) below, from Ekberg et al 2015, where Gordana points to an imagined comparand needed to identify the comparee (the bed). The characteristics of the referent are then elaborated in the continuation of the discourse, in Gordana's second turn. *Du vet*, 'you know', emphasises the frame of reference shared by the two speakers.

(19) Gordana: du vet jag har sån ee sang

- you know I have sån eh bed  
I have sån bed you know
- Sabaah: mm
- Gordana: du vet sån ee (.) med sån fjarrkontroll (.)  
you know sån eh with sån remote-control

All three forms are also used for hedging, which the authors argue is a crucial transitional phase from the lexical element to the focus marker. This is because hedging allows for ambiguous contexts where the forms may be reinterpreted as focus markers. The forms also occur as quotative expressions, presumably developed from their use as a focus marker (cf English *like*). For German, at least, the hedging and quotative functions occur in the informal spoken language more generally, as does the focus marker use; but it is more widespread and perhaps also more systematic in the multilingual speech communities.

In London, discourse-pragmatic functions appear to drive the use of a new *why...for* question frame, occurring variably with clause initial *why* in interrogative clauses. *Why...for* occurs mainly in confrontational or argumentative contexts, perhaps because the framing reinforces the pragmatic force of the question. As an example, consider the rhetorical question in (20), which was followed by an aggressive argument between the speaker and his interlocutor (*diss* means ‘say something bad about someone’).

- (20) why are you gonna go diss someone like that for?

Another development in London concerns *this is* followed by a Noun Phrase, which has developed into a new quotative expression as a result of frequent use of the sequence by 8 year old speakers with the discourse-pragmatic function of describing an action or a state of a protagonist in their narratives, as in (21) and (22). These young speakers use the same forms to report speech, as in (23), with roughly equal frequency as to introduce an action or state. *This is* + NP highlights what follows and, together with other forms characteristic of this age group, helps make the narrative lively (see Kerswill et al 2014 for further discussion).

- (21) this is me <does an action which makes the interviewer laugh>  
(22) he’s sitting on a chair **this is him** like he’s drunk or something  
(23) this is her “ that was my sister”

For bilingual 8 year olds who are not yet fully proficient in English the semi-fixed construction is a useful way to keep the floor and maintain the fast pace of speech typical of interactions in their peer groups. Kerswill et al argue that the dramatic force of the expression leads to it being taken up by their monolingual friends. By the time speakers reach the age of 16, however, the form has become specialised and used only as a quotative expression to introduce reported speech.

### 3.6 Summary

This brief and necessarily selective overview shows that linguistic innovations occur in all components of language, and that there are many common developments shared by multiethnolects based on different languages. The factors involved in their emergence can be tentatively grouped into four main types (see also Ekberg et al 2015), though we stress that a single cause for any one feature is unlikely.

First, some innovations are directly related to the effect of language contact, most notably in lexis but also in phonetics. However, what may have begun as a contact-induced feature has acquired a social meaning, marking group identity, and it is presumably this that is responsible for the take-up by speakers in the peer groups with no background in the relevant heritage languages.

Second, some innovations may stem from second language learning strategies or an overgeneralization of (second language) learner variety features, such as simplification of various subsystems of the grammar, such as the grammatical gender system. Here again, sociolinguistic factors that are all-important in explaining the emergence and take-up of the innovations.

Third, lexical material or grammatical patterns offered by the majority languages may be extended or elaborated, continuing 'latent' patterns in the languages involved. Wiese's work on *Kiezdeutsch* has documented this pattern very clearly (for example, Wiese 2009, 2013), and we have seen that it is also evident in some of the English examples. A related phenomenon is the more frequent use by speakers of the multiethnolect of nonstandard features typical of the local community; this is the case in London, for example, for multiple negation and the use of *them* as a determiner (for example, *them children* as a variant of standard *those children*). We can also consider in this category the more frequent use of features already undergoing change in the wider community, which means that speakers of multiethnolects may therefore accelerate the ongoing change. Changes in vowel mergers in Oslo represent one example of this phenomenon.

Finally, many innovations represent fundamental processes that drive communication generally, such as a preference for marking information structure.

The multiethnolects we have surveyed here are dynamic and, perhaps, unstable, and by grouping the innovations into four general types we may have oversimplified the diversity attested in the research we have surveyed. Our aim, though, has been to stress that the innovative forms that crystallise in situations such as these are not idiosyncratic events; instead the emergence of the forms that characterize multiethnolects in Europe follows well known trajectories of language development and reflects fundamental principles driving language change generally, in all varieties of language (see also Schneider 2007: 110, Mufwene 2001).

#### 4 Social awareness and attitudes towards multiethnolects

In a short Dutch video on YouTube, several young people in the city of Rotterdam are interviewed about their knowledge and use of *straattaal*, literally 'steet language'.<sup>3</sup> Their answers show that there is no consensus as to who uses – or who is not supposed to use – *straattaal*. A young Surinamese woman, when asked whether *kakkers* (mainstream 'posh' or 'stuck-up' Dutch people) can use *straattaal*, is amused and shocked and obviously finds the idea ridiculous:

- (24) Dat kan nooit nooit nooit, hahahaha  
That can never never never hahaha

And another young migrant (whose ethnic background is unknown) says:

- (25) Als je Nederlander bent moet je gewoon Nederlands praten en niets forceren.  
When you are Dutch you just have to speak Dutch, don't force things

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTzkerYFxml>, accessed February 24, 2015

Yet another young (Moroccan) man says:

- (26) Da's toch leuk, dan zijn we een beetje op dezelfde level, als we met elkaar praten zijn we op dezelfde level.  
That's fun, then we are on the same level, when we talk we are on the same level

The people interviewed are of both Dutch and migrant backgrounds but often their background is unclear and doesn't seem to be relevant. There are also people who don't know what the interviewer is talking about or who react in an irritated way. These people are both young and old, and usually mainstream Dutch. However, the people who say they know and use *straattaal* are always young and although the majority seem to have a migrant background, there are also Dutch interviewees who report familiarity with and use of *straattaal*.

The observation that the use of *straattaal* is restricted to teenagers and adolescents is strengthened by another short video, an advertisement for coffee. Here two elderly ladies are drinking coffee together and have the following conversation in which *straattaal* lexicon is used, marked in boldface<sup>4</sup>:

- (27) Dus **check**, ik zit in mn **waggie**, 50 cent komt uit m'n speaker, **je weet toch**, gewoon **chill**.  
So **check** (look), I sit in my **waggie** (car), 50 cent comes from my speaker, **you know**, just **chill**

Dus ik **boek** die **bak vet** hard toch? Komt die **skoutoe** met z'n **neppe pata's**.  
So I **book** (drive) that **bak** (car) **vet** hard (real fast) right? Comes that **skoutoe** (police) with his **neppe pata's** (fake shoes)

Nooooo!

Zegt die XXX tegen me dat ik hier niet zo hard mag **booke**, en dat ik 'm **doekoe** moet **passen**!

Says that XXX to me that I shouldn't **book** (drive) so fast here, and that I have to **pass** him **doekoe** (pay him money)!

Ik zeg hee, **te moeilijk**, ik ben je **bitch** niet! **Gruwelijk**!

I Say hey, **too hard**, I'm not your **bitch**! **Gruwelijk**! (gruesome)

People who see this video are amused since it shows a complete contradiction that everybody seems to agree about: old women are not supposed to speak like that. *Straattaal* is typically restricted to young people.

Both the interviews in the first video and the caricature in the second highlight the idea that people can choose to speak in a certain way. The use of *straattaal* is marked; it is not a language to be used in all circumstances and by all people.

In several countries people who don't use urban youth vernaculars consider them a threat to the good functioning of society. This fear is based on the assumption that speakers have no choice: they are unable to use other forms of the national language. In France, *Verlan* is associated with the stereotype of the tough 'ghetto' delinquent (Doran

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgDuEJ2erSM>, accessed February 24, 2015

2007: 504). In 2012 the Rotterdam municipality openly worried about the use of *straattaal*. It was feared that people using it were deprived from finding jobs<sup>5</sup>. In London the use of words associated with urban youth dialects was forbidden at the Harris Academy in Upper Norwood<sup>6</sup>, in order to prepare the pupils for their future on the labour market and in mainstream British society. Another example comes from Germany where the same worries about young people's chances on the labour market exist as long as they continue using 'Kiezdeutsch'.<sup>7</sup>

We will not elaborate on how right or wrong such worries and measures are but they illustrate that the status of these youth varieties is extremely low. Their strong covert prestige may make them especially attractive.

What these two Dutch videos illustrate is that not just anybody can use *straattaal*, the Dutch version of the urban dialects that we discuss in this article. The examples above are from the Netherlands, but the background and function of *straattaal* are not different from what has been described in many other major European cities.

#### 4.1 Non-speakers

The video about the grandmothers shows more than the restrictions about who can use *straattaal*. It is directed towards a large audience, most of whom do not use *straattaal*, but everybody is supposed to understand what it is. Although the use of the variety is restricted, knowledge about its existence is widespread, even among those who never will use it.

Dorleijn and Nortier (2013: 24-25) wrote:

In the Netherlands, *Straattaal* has gained the status of 'interesting curiosity' for some non-users. People who are aware of the existence of *Straattaal* have the image of knowing what is going on in the big world. This attitude has led to a stream of word lists, TV programs, quizzes, etc. about *Straattaal*. (...) . Every year Dutch television has a writing contest, the so-called Nationaal Dictee ('national dictation') and a few years ago there was an alternative version in *Straattaal*. Recently, a list with signs in Dutch Sign Language for *Straattaal* words has been published on the Internet.

In 2011, even a part of the bible was translated into 'Dutch slang', as it was called<sup>8</sup>. Most reactions were positive. However some reactions were negative because they considered it a form of blasphemy. Another point of criticism might be that this translation, just like the aforementioned national dictation, the quizzes, etc. suggest that there is a standard *Straattaal*, which doesn't seem to be the case.

#### 5 Language change or transitory youth language?

Most of the research on emerging multiethnolects has been based on the speech of adolescent speakers and, as we saw in section 4, in many cities multiethnolectal speech is

<sup>5</sup><http://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/01-10-2012/gemeente-start-campagne-tegen-straattaal>, accessed February 24, 2015

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-24522809>, accessed February 24, 2015

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DL4XS4FOw\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DL4XS4FOw_s), accessed February 24, 2015

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.rnw.org/archive/bible-translated-dutch-slang>, accessed February 24, 2015

seen as the preserve of young speakers. We have argued in this paper that the creativity and innovation of new urban ways of speaking derives from the flexibility of language norms and the high tolerance of linguistic variation in multilingual peer group settings. However, flexible norms and variation on a large scale can also lead to unfocussed, unstable forms of language. The few quantitative analyses that have been conducted on innovative multiethnolectal forms show that many occur with low frequencies, sometimes only in the speech of a small number of individuals. Some forms, therefore, are likely to be transitory and unlikely to survive. Hybrid speech styles incorporating elements from several languages may also be transitory phenomena that speakers stop using as they become adults. On the other hand, we know from the case of Sheng, in Kenya, that multiethnolects can persist: Sheng began as a typical urban youth variety and is now reported to be acquired as a first language (Dorleijn et al 2015). In this final section, we assess the extent to which multiethnolects may have a more lasting effect on language in the urban cities of Europe.

One potentially relevant point is that there is evidence of successive generations of speakers continuing to use forms associated with the multiethnolect. Milani and Jonsson (2012), for example, show that forms and linguistic practices associated with Rinkeby Swedish, first documented in the 1980s, are still used by young people in Sweden in recordings made in 2003-4 and 2007-8. This certainly indicates that the forms persist over time, but the fact that the data come from adolescents for both time periods could indicate that we are witnessing age grading, where successive generations use the same forms, but only at a certain age. In order to conclude that language change is occurring it would be better, therefore, to look for evidence of multiethnolectal forms being used by young children or by adults.

This kind of evidence does exist for London. The vowel pronunciations typical of the multiethnolect are acquired by children as young as 5 (Cheshire et al 2011). Cheshire et al report little or no similarity between the pronunciations of 5 year old children and their caregivers, and assume that this is because children in multilingual communities in London attend to the speech of their peers at a younger age than in monolingual communities (as documented, for example, by Kerswill and Williams (2005) in Milton Keynes, and by Smith, Durham and Fortune (2007) in Buckie, Scotland). Cheshire et al suggest that young children from immigrant families are influenced by their peer group because English tends not to be spoken at home or, if it is, is used mainly between siblings and so contains many multiethnolectal features. In the London project 8 year old children, Anglo and non-Anglo alike, also had a mainly Multicultural London English vowel system. Furthermore, non-Anglo young adults also used the MLE vowels. This age pattern suggests, then, that the new vowel pronunciations may be here to stay. A similar, if somewhat more complex, pattern exists in London for the reduction of allophony in the definite and indefinite article system, and for the *was/wasn't* system for past BE (again, see Cheshire et al 2011).

There is also evidence from London of the use of a hybrid multilingual style surviving beyond adolescence. Rampton's (2015) analysis of the interactional use of elements of Punjabi, London English and Jamaican Creole was mentioned in section 2. The speaker in this case study was aged 40; he was a British-born business man of Pakistani descent, with lasting friendships from his schooldays with young people from AfroCaribbean, Indian and Pakistani families as well as White British families. Rampton argues that this way of speaking is a relatively stable resource in the man's repertoire, noting that whereas many interactional analyses or urban youth styles are interested in the "artfully creative" dimensions of stylization, for this speaker the style has adjusted to the demands of adult language use and now "seems sedimented in the repertoire of an individual who has moved beyond youth into middle age" (2015: 25).

Further evidence of ongoing language change both in London and elsewhere in the UK comes from research investigating the diffusion of multiethnolectal forms between different groups of speakers. The new monophthongal GOAT vowel and front onset narrow PRICE and FACE diphthongs are more frequently used by speakers of heritage languages, indicating that they emerged first in their English and were then taken up by young speakers from the dominant language group. Fox, Khan and Torgersen (2011) document the diffusion of the innovative variants through multiethnic friendship groups to White British speakers in two separate London communities and also in a multilingual community in Birmingham. In other words, the innovative forms are spreading through the local communities through the usual well known channels of diffusion, via social networks. Fox et al stress that their analyses are based on vernacular speech in sustained discourse with a fieldworker present, so it is unlikely that the White British speakers were adopting an out-group way of speaking for the purposes of stylization. Fox (2007) presents similar evidence for the diffusion of the simplified English definite and indefinite article system, documenting how Bangladeshi male adolescents appeared to be influencing the English of their white Anglo male peers with respect to these features. Again, multiethnic friendship networks played a key role in their diffusion. Guzzo et al (2008) analysed the same forms used by third generation immigrants of Italian descent in a different city, Bedford. Here, once more, multiethnic peer group networks appear to provide the means of transmission between users.

One indication that aspects of a multiethnolect have survived is when forms or styles are no longer associated with immigrant groups. An example of a location where this seems to have occurred is Denmark, where forms originally associated with the multiethnolect have been sociolinguistically reallocated. Madsen (2011) points out that social class is usually considered irrelevant when analyzing variation in present day Danish, but that her interviews with young people from multiethnic friendship groups revealed the continuing relevance for them of a 'high' versus 'low' social stratification. Linguistic forms that used to be perceived as related to migration, positioning ethnic minorities on an insider/outsider dimension of comparison, are now being actively mapped onto social stratification and status.

Rampton (2011) discusses a similar reworking of forms associated with ethnicity and migration, in the UK context. Rampton argues, more generally, that nation-states are giving more recognition to minority bilingualism and that as "standard language multilingualism becomes the new cosmopolitan posh, polylingual hybridity is positioned as a core characteristic of the multi-ethnic urban working classes" (2011:1237). In fact, much research that takes a social practice approach to multiethnolects shows how speakers use multiethnolectal forms and styles in interaction to position themselves and others in different social spaces and to create different kinds of identities, such as 'tough' or 'streetwise'.

In most European cities, though, the multiethnolects still seem to be associated with young people, as discussed in section 4. The question then arises whether London is simply ahead of other cities: if we wait long enough, will the forms and styles associated with young people become more widely used? Or is there something different about London that promotes both a wide range of innovative linguistic forms and their transmission to other age groups?

It is possible that the number of different heritage languages present in some London communities, together with the time depth and scale of immigration in London has resulted in a sociolinguistic setting that is particularly conducive to the emergence and the persistence of linguistic innovations. Cheshire et al (2011: 153) note that in many London communities, majority language speakers are in the minority, so children acquire the majority language from other second language speakers, through unguided informal

language acquisition in friendship groups. The situation is an example of ‘group second language acquisition’ (Winford (2003:235) or ‘shift-induced interference’ (Thomason and Kaufman 1998: 75). Thomason and Kaufman argue that if the minority group speakers are well integrated into the host community, the forms they use through imperfect learning of the target language may initiate language changes, and that these changes may then be taken up by the majority group. In a sense, this is what has happened in the emergence of multiethnolects. However, although minority group speakers may spearhead some linguistic changes, this is not necessarily the result of imperfect learning. As much of the research surveyed in this paper has argued, forms that may emerge during language acquisition processes take on social meanings of group identity, and it is this that assures their use and their take up by young people in multiethnic peer groups.

However, it is not clear whether the concept of group second language acquisition and the question of which linguistic forms will survive are equally applicable to other European contexts. In the Netherlands, the first observations of multiethnolects are from the late 1990s. Now, 15-20 years later, new generations are using multiethnolects. The mechanisms by which the relevant linguistic forms are generated may be the same, perhaps worldwide, but the actual linguistic forms are changing continuously, with not only words but also other elements becoming outdated years – or sometimes only months – later. What is important in these cases, therefore, is to attempt to understand the mechanisms that are involved rather than document the specific forms that are used.

Whichever approach is taken, it is clear that in multilingual urban contexts such as those we have discussed here, variation of form in constructing semantic, pragmatic and interactional meaning, is likely to be far greater than in more familiar situations of language acquisition. Acquirers of multiethnolects need to use their linguistic capacities to organise rapidly shifting patterns of form and meaning into usable linguistic systems. From the evidence presented here, it is clear that the resources provided by ambient multiethnolect speech are structured in different ways by speakers, leading to new systems of form-meaning patternings, and whether these are maintained and stabilised in the multiethnolect will depend on complex social factors. The processes that form, maintain or discard such subsystems of form-meaning patterns need to be understood not just from a sociolinguistic perspective, but also from the viewpoint of the internal cognitive processes that enable speakers to create the systems in the first place. Multiethnolects therefore provide a hugely important source of evidence for the fundamental social and cognitive forces that shape not only use of language but also its very nature.

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