

# Characterizing Urban Youth Speech Styles in Utrecht and on the Internet

*Jacomine Nortier*

Utrecht University

*j.m.nortier@uu.nl*

## Abstract

In the past decade there is a growing interest in Urban Youth Speech Styles (UYSS). In this article Dutch UYSS is the focus of attention. The basic question to be addressed is whether the identifying characteristics and functions of spoken UYSS can be used and recognized in written form on the Internet as well.

There is no standardized form of UYSS and the use of it is restricted to members of specific subcultures, not necessarily linked to specific ethnic groups. First, linguistic and functional characteristics of UYSS as they are used in the Netherlands will be described. Linguistically, a distinction is made between lexical, grammatical and phonetic/prosodic aspects. Furthermore, a closer look will be taken at the use of UYSS on the Internet (mostly through rap) and examples of the use of UYSS in written comments on the rap videos will be presented and compared to the spoken varieties. It will be shown how written clues are used for identification purposes that are usually non-linguistic in oral encounters (i.e. classification of speech partners on the basis of what they look like, how they sound, etc.). Most of the analysis is based on a rap video by Relschoppers, a group of young Utrecht based Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch rappers, and the comments on their video. In a separate section some attention is paid to Flemish participants in the Internet-discussions. They seem to use UYSS in a way that differs from their Dutch peers.

Finally a short conclusion and outlook is given, showing that the question asked in the beginning can be answered affirmative: identifying characteristics and functions of UYSS can be used and recognized in written form on the Internet as well.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on joint work by Margreet Dorleijn and the author.

## Keywords

youth styles – Internet – linguistic practices – identity – rap

### 1 Introduction

Urban Youth Speech Styles (UYSS) are typically urban phenomena that emerge in particular among adolescents in a context of change and migration. Although much research has been done in Europe, UYSS occur not only in the larger cities in Western Europe (Quist and Svendsen 2010, among many others), but also elsewhere, i.e. in African cities, in the Americas, in Asia (Nortier and Svendsen, 2015). One expects them to emerge anywhere in the world's large urban multi-ethnic areas: e.g. Kießling and Mous (2004). This is not surprising: multi-ethnolect-users, as we will see below, are very much involved in the process of constructing and presenting a social identity, and such actions are of course an unavoidable consequence of living in the highly dynamic circumstances that multi-ethnic neighborhoods in large urban areas are. In such circumstances adolescents are left as it were in a strange place without a map, and are invited on a quest through a landscape with all kinds of linguistic and cultural possibilities but no clear directions, no obvious dominant tendencies, no fixed social positions, and therefore an appeal is made on their own creativity in designing their identity (Nortier and Dorleijn, 2013).

In recent years, an increasing number of publications on language use by young people in multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts has seen the light. Already in the publications by Rampton (1995) and even earlier in Hewitt (1986) the phenomenon that Rampton coined *crossing* was identified in a British context (Rampton, 1995: 14): “What is language crossing? (...) we can take it as the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker does not normally ‘belong’ to.”

In numerous subsequent publications in- and outside the UK by sociolinguists and social scientists, the concept of crossing was elaborated (Nortier and Dorleijn, 2013 and Svendsen, 2015, for an overview).

As for the Netherlands, René Appel was one of the pioneers (Appel, 1999). He focused on lexical crossing, where lexical items from (American) English and several immigrant minority languages spoken in the Netherlands were inserted into Dutch by teenagers and adolescents in ethnically mixed peer groups. In later publications about crossing in the Netherlands other aspects were highlighted as well, not only linguistic but also ethnological an identity-related work has been published since (Cornips and Reizevoort, 2006; Nortier,

2001; Cornips, 2008; Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008; Cornips and de Rooij, 2013, Dorleijn *et al.*, 2013, among many others). The discussion around the labeling practices of the styles or varieties that are the result of crossing is taken up in Cornips *et al.* (2015).

The basic question to be addressed in this article is whether the identifying characteristics and functions of UYSS can be used and recognized in written form on the Internet as well.

In section 2 characteristics of UYSS as they are used in the Netherlands will be described. In section 3 a closer look will be taken at UYSS on the Internet (mostly through rap) and examples of written UYSS (comments on the rap videos) will be presented and compared to the spoken varieties. Finally in section 4 a short conclusion and outlook will be given.

## 2 Characteristics of UYSS in the Netherlands

For UYSS, it seems that there is a broad range of available linguistic forms that have been enregistered, i.e. socially recognized as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users (Agha, 2005). However, individual groups make their own choice from the full repertoire. Since there is no generally accepted norm as to how UYSS should be used, there is not one single form of UYSS in the Netherlands. Some groups share linguistic characteristics and below examples will be given of features that seem typical for UYSS. For the purpose of this article, UYSS will be defined here as a style in which elements from immigrant minority languages and (American) English are included, on the level of grammar, lexicon and/or prosody. The users of UYSS are aware of its functional restrictions (Cornips and Reizevoort, 2006; Nortier and Dorleijn, 2013). Because of these restrictions, UYSS in the Netherlands are used, so to say, on top of a more unmarked form of Dutch that the speakers use in their daily life. As far as is known about the situation in the Netherlands from the literature and from personal observations by myself and others, no speakers for whom UYSS is their default mode of speaking have been attested yet.

### 2.1 Linguistic Characteristics

One of the most salient characteristics of Dutch UYSS's is the use and amplification of learner variety characteristics at several linguistic levels (Dorleijn and Nortier, 2008). Not all features of learner varieties are found in UYSS, but most grammatical, prosodic and phonetic features that occur in UYSS can be reduced to learner varieties. The form and structure of Dutch UYSS can be distinguished on several linguistic levels. Below each of three levels will be

illustrated with an example, including the lexical level which is the only one that cannot be derived from learner varieties of Dutch. The first example illustrates how lexical elements are inserted into Dutch:

- (1) *Zoek je struggle met mij kill, wordt het geheid een fiti*  
 '(if you are) looking for problems with me man, no doubt there will be a fight'

The example is from a video by rapper Nina,<sup>2</sup> where she raps about the use of her 'Straattaal', street language in Amsterdam. This is a form of UYSS which was labeled by the users themselves (Appel, 1999). In (1) she uses lexical elements from English and Sranan (Surinamese). The noun *struggle* is English and it is used without an article or plural ending. *Kill* and *fiti* are Sranan.

Examples of grammatical characteristics of UYSS are given in (2) and (3):

- (2) *als de puntje op de paaltje dan gaan we dood voor elkaar*<sup>3</sup>  
 'when it comes to the crunch' we die for each other'
- (3) *Keilanders rellen door totdat onze hart stopt*<sup>4</sup>  
 'Keilanders keep on rioting until our heart stops'

In (2), rapper Appa uses the definite article *de* (common gender) twice instead of (neuter) *het*, which is required with diminutives. The original Dutch idiomatic expression is *Als puntje bij paaltje komt* but Appa doesn't use the finite verb *komt* (comes). In (3) *onze* (our) should have been realized as *ons* (without *-e*) since adjectives with neuter indefinite nouns never have *-e* in standard Dutch.

Learners of Dutch as a second language experience problems with its typical word order. In English, the verb always follows the subject. However, in standard Dutch, just like in German and the Scandinavian languages, the verb takes the second position in the main clause, irrespective of the category of the first constituent. Contrary to what is the case with UYSS in German and the Scandinavian languages, where violation of the V2 rule is frequently used as a marker of UYSS, like for example in (4) from Norwegian (Svendsen and Røyneland, 2008), violation of the V2 rule is not a marker in Dutch UYSS.

2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2u-nQmKqOo>, last time accessed in February, 2014.

3 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pYIcJ\\_wZzk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pYIcJ_wZzk), last time accessed in February, 2014.

4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myxTPAVEpdU>, last time accessed in February, 2014.

- (4) *hvis en av oss vinner vi deler halvparten*  
 'If one of us wins we split half'

*Vi deler* is a violation of the V2 rule (standard Norwegian *deler vi*) and in the example it marks the stylized use of Norwegian. Although in Dutch, German and the Scandinavian languages violation of the V2 rule is a typical L2 learner characteristic, it is strikingly absent in Dutch UYSS, where no examples of this type of V2-rule violations have been attested (see also Freywald *et al.*, 2015).

Characteristics of UYSS are also found on the level of pronunciation. There are many instances where the accent of Moroccan learners of Dutch is used - or imitated. Not only speakers with a Moroccan background use and even exaggerate this accent, but it is used in UYSS in general, irrespective of the ethnic or linguistic background of the speakers.

Some examples from 'We zijn Terug' by Relschoppers:<sup>5</sup> Dutch *school* [sxo:l] (meaning 'school') is pronounced as [fxo:l]. Dutch *gezellig* (cosy) is pronounced as [xzɛlx] instead of standard Dutch [γəzɛləγ]: the schwas are not pronounced and the /g/ is harder, sharper. Besides, the /z/ is more voiced than in standard Dutch.

The reason why a Moroccan accent is used instead of other accents is discussed in more detail in Nortier and Dorleijn (2013). For the moment it suffices to say that the Moroccan community in the Netherlands is relatively large (368,838 in 2013: CBS, 2014). They have strong covert prestige in Dutch society. A quote to illustrate this:<sup>6</sup>

- (5) Antillean guy: *Marokkaans is best wel veel nu.*  
 'Moroccan is quite a lot now'

Interviewer: *Waarom denk je?*  
 'Why, you think?'

Antillean guy: *Ja hun beheersen de straattaal, er zijn veel Marokkanen op straat nu.*  
 'Yeah they control the street language, there are many Moroccans on the street nowadays'

5 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myxTPAVEpdU>, last time accessed in February, 2014.

6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTzkerYFxmI>, last time accessed in January, 2013.

'Moroccan' doesn't exist as such, since Moroccans have either Berber or Moroccan Arabic as their native language. It is justified, though, to neglect the distinction when it comes to their accent in Dutch (Dorleijn *et al.*, 2004).

## 2.2 *Practices*

Descriptions of UYSS in- and outside the Netherlands (Nortier and Svendsen, 2015) show that the use of it is restricted to informal in-group situations in which young people from specific subcultures are involved, illustrated by the following quotes, showing meta-pragmatic awareness when using this variety (from the same source as (5) above):

- (6) *Als we Straattaal met elkaar praten zijn we op dezelfde level*  
'When we speak street language which each other, we are on the same level'
- (7) *Ben je een hockey-chick, dan praat je hockeychicktaal*  
'When you are a hockey chick, you speak hockey-chick language'
- (8) *Een kakker? Nooit nooit nooit, hahahaha!*  
'A snotty? Never never never, hahahaha!'

(8) is an answer to the question whether it would be possible for 'kakkers' (snotties) to use Straattaal.

Rampton (2013), however, reports that 'contemporary urban vernaculars' not only occur among young people but are spreading among other groups as well. In the Netherlands there is no evidence for this spread, yet.

Just like there is not one single form of UYSS, there are also more liberal views on who use and don't use it:

- (9) *Straattaal is voor de mensen die het willen gebruiken.*  
'Street language is for the people who want to use it.'

The use of a Moroccan-based pronunciation and lexical elements from Sranan is common outside Moroccan and Surinamese groups, respectively. The use of Moroccan lexical elements, however, used to be restricted to Moroccan groups but is reported to be used among others only recently, as a native Dutch informant from Rotterdam explains (same source as (5)–(9) above). In (10) *herres* (to hit) is Moroccan Arabic:

- (10) *Als je zegt ik ga hem slaan dan klinkt dat niet, dan zeg je ik ga hem herres-en, dat is anders*

'If you say I'll hit him, that doesn't sound (good), then you say I'm going to herres him, that's different.'

In the same fragment from YouTube, one of the interviewees stresses that whoever uses UYSS, always has a choice (not) to do so:

(11) *Als je een sollicitatie hebt gaat het in ABN, maar als je op straat bent gaat het veel stoerder, lossier, veel meer straattaal.*

'When you have a job interview you use standard Dutch but on the street it is much more tough, relaxed, much more street language.'

One can say that there is a cline from 'heavy' to 'light' UYSS which is a characteristic of style (Coupland, 2007). There is no 'rule' as to how many UYSS features should be used in order to be UYSS. Sometimes a lexical item is enough, sometimes some Moroccan pronounced words, and sometimes one or two grammatical features are enough, and all sorts of combinations are possible as well.

UYSS can be used as a secret language, mainly by the incorporation of lexical items that have their origins in immigrant minority languages. The title of Hoogenbooms article on how and when 'Straattaal' (Hoogenboom, 2011) is used by a group of Moroccan descent girls living in Kanaleneiland (a neighborhood in Utrecht with a high proportion of Moroccan descent inhabitants) is revealing: "We give the words nicknames" (translation by JN).

### 3 UYSS and the Internet

#### 3.1 *Are Internet Data Useful or Useless?*

The literature on Computer Mediated Communication or Discourse (CMC, CMD) has focused on communication patterns, multilingualism and language choice, quantitative and qualitative analyses and corpus building techniques (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Danet and Herring, 2007; Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger, 2008; <http://www.languageatinternet.org/> and references there). Huffaker and Calvert (2005) studied gender identity in teenage blogs. However, little is known about the written representation of UYSS on the internet. Among recent publications Leppänen (2007) concentrated on the use of English in youth language in Finland and Ruetten and Van de Velde (2013) reported on a corpus of Dutch by speakers with a Moroccan background. However, their approach was to identify the speakers by ethnolectal characteristics which are supposed to be typical for members of the Moroccan community in the

Netherlands. The present study is one of the first attempts to explore the representation of Dutch UYSS in Internet encounters.

In traditional generative linguistic research, data collection was never the hardest part: the intuitions of the native speaker sufficed. In more sociolinguistic and ethnographic oriented studies, analyses are based on spoken, spontaneous and naturalistic data. It is time consuming to process these data, because the right situations have to be selected, data have to be recorded and transcribed.

The main question in the present article is whether UYSS is used in written form on the Internet and serves the same functions as oral forms of UYSS. If that question can be answered in a positive way, an implication will be that Internet data can be used beside data that have been collected with the traditional sociolinguistic or ethnographic techniques. In Dorleijn and Nortier (2009) some advantages and disadvantages of the use of internet data in language contact (code-switching) studies have been addressed. In that article, language use in internet forums and email were discussed. In the present article, YouTube videos and comments on the videos will play a central role and it will be shown that they are rich sources for analyses of language forms and use.

More recently, Ruetten and Van de Velde (2013) compiled a large corpus of Dutch chat data from speakers with a Moroccan background. Among the challenges they recognize are the fact that only the written language use of a small group is represented and that no information is provided on the contributors' socio-demographic background. However, they mention the semi-spontaneous and relatively little monitored character of chat data. Moreover, nicknames often reveal the participants' identity.

Encounters between people take place on the Internet increasingly, through computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones and young people in particular are part of Internet communities. Instead of talking with 'real' interlocutors, people are getting used to communicating digitally. When speech partners who are strangers to each other meet, there is a lot of information that usually isn't expressed linguistically or otherwise explicitly, for example with respect to ethnic belonging, accent, age, gender or social background. In digital environments people don't see and hear each other and they probably will derive information about their interlocutors from the written text. Sometimes a nickname is informative enough. Any nickname and (real or wannabe) identity can be adopted which is different from encounters in the real world.

Beside nicknames, other means to convey extra-linguistic information are used as well, as will be illustrated in the examples below. Spelling is an important and useful tool to express subtle facets of identity that cannot be expressed by using a standard spelling only (Jaffe, 2000).



The central question in this article was: Can the identifying characteristics and functions of (oral) UYSS be used and recognized in written form on the internet as well? Now an expectation can be formulated: language use in discussions between people who only meet digitally is linguistically rich and full of identifying clues. Below, in 3.3, this expectation will be investigated. In 3.2 an analysis of UYSS use in a rap video will be presented.

### 3.2 *Relschoppers: 'We Zijn Terug'*<sup>7</sup> *Analysis of a YouTube Video*

The main source for data in the present study is [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) where videos are shown, often followed by comments from watchers. These sources are all public and accessible to both participants and observers and contributors are aware of the open character of the sites. The data was mostly collected in an impressionistic way without systematic quantification.

The discussion will be based on a video made by a group of young rappers from Utrecht. Thousands of comments have been written, some of which will be included in the analysis in 3.3. For the purpose of the following analysis all comments given were checked and it was noted what struck as useful in the discussion to follow. The choice for phenomena that are described is rather subjective, therefore. However, the explorative character of this study allows for this methodology and will help establish more clearly what should (not) be taken into account in future studies.

The video studied is highly performative. The actors are aware of their visibility and express the identity they want to convey to their audience. As was mentioned above, the high level of awareness allows the participants to express consciously the identity they desire to express.

The four members of the group in the video ('Relschoppers', troublemakers) have Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds. They started to take rap lessons when they were eleven and when the video was recorded in 2011 they were 14 (most of their voices were not broken yet). The rap is about their life and the tough things they do in Kanaleneiland, a neighborhood in the South-West of Utrecht from the nineteen sixties-seventies, with large flat buildings and a high percentage of migrants (76% in 2011: CBS, 2014).

In 'We zijn terug' (We are back) all characteristics of UYSS that were described above can be found. The language used is Dutch with elements from English and immigrant minority languages, on the levels of lexicon, grammar and pronunciation. In their use of UYSS elements there is no difference between the Turkish and Moroccan group members. From the three linguistic

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myxTPAVEpdU>, last time accessed in February, 2014.

levels discussed in section 2 examples will be given below. First the lexical level will be considered:

- (12) Piz3a: *dit is voor de mocro's, de turken, de anti's*  
'this is for the Moroccans, the Turks, the anti's'
- (13) Billy: *sta ik bij de bakker haal ik een dürüm, koop een basjklita en verhuur'm*  
'standing at the baker's get me a durum, buy a bicycle and rent it out'
- (14) Billy: *geef me doekoe*  
'give me money'

The first rapper is Piz3a or Pizha, also called 'kleine Piz3a' (little Piz3a). He has a Moroccan background. In (12), *mocro's* (Moroccans) is typical for UYSS. The origin is not certain: because of its final long vowel it has a slight Sranan flavor but it may as well have been invented just like that.

The word *dürüm* (roll) in (13) is Turkish and probably rapper Billy (Turkish origin) uses it in order to show his Turkish identity but it is immediately followed by *basjklita* which is Moroccan Arabic. This should not come as a surprise since the use of Moroccan based lexical elements in UYSS is more widespread than the use of Turkish lexical elements, even for speakers of Turkish (Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008). *Doekoe* (money) in (14) is a word from Sranan and well-known since the Dutch rapper Def Rhymz in 1999 became famous with his song 'Iedereen houdt van doekoe' (everyone loves money).

The following examples illustrate UYSS belonging on the grammatical level:

- (15) *Tennispark is ø spot waar we vaak chillen*  
'Tennispark is (the) spot where we often chill'
- (16) *Je weet ø zelf ik ben degene die je down liet*  
'You know (it) yourself I am the one who let you down'

As mentioned above, examples where the V2 rule is violated are exceptional. However, examples (15) and (16) show other grammatical deviations from the standard typically associated with learner varieties: the omission of a (definite) article (15) and a direct object (16).

Pronunciation is a highly salient and recognizable UYSS feature in almost every line in the video. Some examples are given below:

- (17) Piz3a: (...)*de opgeschoren* [opx.fxo:rə] *hoofden, de echte Marokkanen*  
 ‘(...) the upward shaven heads, the real Moroccans’
- (18) Billy: *Billy komt binnen zonder te kloppen*  
 ‘Billy comes in without knocking’

Both (17) and (18) are strongly marked for their Moroccan pronunciation: In (17) the same pronunciation is heard as already illustrated in 2.1 and /z/ in ‘zonder’ (example (18) is strongly voiced.

In the video, another striking phenomenon on the level of pronunciation can be observed. A Moroccan accent in Dutch is marked by strong voicing of /z/, among other things. In the rap song there were several instances where this voiced /z/ was used, but in the same rap and even uttered by the same speaker, there were also occurrences of the opposite: a devoiced /z/, pronounced as [s]):

- (19) *We zijn terug, schrijven teksten op de Dom,<sup>8</sup> we zijn back*  
 ‘We are back, write texts on the Dom, we are back’

In the first *zijn*, /z/ is devoiced and in the second *zijn*, it is strongly voiced (stronger than in Standard Dutch). Both realizations of /z/ are marked. The strongly voiced variant was discussed above. However, the use of devoiced /z/ is typical for the urban dialect of Amsterdam, only 45 kilometers north-west of Utrecht but quite different when it comes to accent. Surprisingly enough, the author and colleagues haven’t observed the local Utrecht accent in UYSS in Utrecht but the accent from Amsterdam seems to be used instead in this rap video. This impression is even stronger when other characteristics are taken into consideration: /ij/ and /ei/ are diphthongs in standard Dutch ([ɛi]) but in Amsterdam they are pronounced as monophthongs: [ɛ]. Likewise, the standard Dutch diphthong /ui/ ([ʌy] or [œy]) is realized as a monophthong [ʌ] or [œ]. In (19) above, /ij/ in the first *zijn* is a monophthong and in the second *zijn* it is a diphthong. There are also examples of /ui/ pronounced as a monophthong as in *wegmisbruikers* in (20):

- (20) *Dit is voor de (...) wegmisbruikers*  
 ‘this is for the (...) road abusers’

8 The Dom tower (‘Dom’) is the symbol of the city of Utrecht.

In her article, Hoogenboom (2011) points to the realizations of the diphthong /ij/ as typical for the accent from The Hague. This is true for the realization of /ij/ but the devoiced /z/ and the way /ui/ is pronounced are typical for the Amsterdam urban dialect (Schatz, 1987).

The Amsterdam dialectal features that were discussed above aren't used consistently all the time, as illustrated in (19) (two forms of /ij/; a voiced and a devoiced /z/ in one line) and there doesn't seem to be a pattern. In other lines, the rappers use the standard Dutch diphthong pronunciation, or in the case of /z/, the slightly voiced standard Dutch pronunciation. Although I am not aware of any systematic research on this topic, it seems to be the case that the rappers' scene centered in and around Amsterdam is exemplary to other rappers. The use of an Amsterdam accent is part of this scene and may be considered as prestigious. The rappers in Amsterdam, the capital, may serve as models for the young Turkish/Dutch and Moroccan/Dutch members of Relschoppers in Utrecht.

Interestingly, another YouTube video shows parts of an interview with members of Relschoppers<sup>9</sup> where the person who used the Amsterdam accent while he was rapping, spoke without an Amsterdam accent in the informal interview. Probably this is due to the lesser performative pressure. The desire to show a certain identity seems to differ according to the performative (i.e., visible) character of the situation.

### 3.3 *How do Invisible Commenters Identify Themselves?*

The video gave rise to a lot of comments (almost 9,000 in February, 2014). In many comments, the authors use nicknames which often reveal aspects of their identity, real or desired. However, there are many examples of people using a name that could be their real name instead of a nickname: *Cor de Vaal* (Dutch), *Patrick Bleijs* (Dutch), *Serhat Kilic* (Turkish) *oualid boulahouwal* (Moroccan). In other cases, the nickname doesn't reveal anything, as *JTBT023* and in yet other cases a geographical hint is given (*MrSoesto35*, Soest being the name of a small town close to Utrecht, with the areal code 035). Examples of nicknames that seem to be chosen deliberately to match a chosen identity are *MissItalie13* ('Miss Italy') and *Marokkaan EL* (Moroccan) and *Belgian Beats*. They have chosen names that express an ethnic or national background (real or desired).

Since nicknames reveal the authors' background only partly (and sometimes not at all), information about their background must be found in the content of their messages. The question to be answered now is: how do the commenters identify themselves and do they use elements from UYSS to do so, even in a written form of Dutch? What do the comments tell about who

9 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMdo3yWnFoY>, last time accessed in February, 2014.

produced them? In other words, as one of the commenters formulated it: (Examples below are uncensored, i.e., including typos).

- (21) *Je Ziet goed aan de Reactie Welke nederlander is en welke Turk Of marokkaan*  
 ‘You can See by the Reaction Which one is Dutch and which one Turk Or Moroccan’

Sometimes a commenter quotes a (part of a) line and comments on it, and in doing so giving insight in his/her identity. The line about the *dürüm* (in (13) above) is commented on in (22) and (23):

- (22) Rickertbitch: *sthaa ik bhij dhie bhakker hhhahhaal ihk duhhhruhm hahahahaha*  
 ‘sthand I at the bhaker’s ggggget myhself a dühhhrühm hahahahaha’

In (22) the accent used by Billy is imitated and exaggerated. The spelling used comes close to ‘Expressive respelling’ discussed by Shaw (2008: 44) as a ‘possibility to represent one’s identity through ‘accent’. There may be several reasons for Rickertbitch to do so: perhaps because Billy has a Turkish background but the accent is unmistakably Moroccan. Whatever the reason, it is evident that the commenter herself wouldn’t use this accent and finds it ridiculous. Another argument for this position is found in the following quote from Rickertbitch where she stresses the fact that she is Dutch:

- (23) *ik ben fucking dutch en in netherlandeeeee*  
 ‘I am fucking Dutch and in Netherlandeeeee’

Interestingly, Rickertbitch seems to deviate from the standard orthography deliberately by using *fucking* instead of *fucking* and *netherlandeeeee* instead of *Nederland*, although accidental typos should not be excluded. Sebba (2003) has called this ‘rebellion spelling’. It is striking that she stresses her Dutchness by using English(-based) lexicon.

The comment in (24) clearly indicates that s/he does not associate with Turks and Turkish, and it is probably written by someone with a Moroccan background, suggested by the use of *tabondjemak* (‘fuck your mother’) which is a Berber/Moroccan expression:

- (24) Brief xxx:<sup>10</sup> *kanker smerige turk tabondjemak “haal een durüm”*  
 ‘cancer dirty Turk fuck your mother “get a durüm”’

10 In this article, parts of nicknames have been replaced with xxx sometimes in order to protect the anonymity of the authors.

Here the nickname does not reveal the background of the commenter ('Brief xxx') so we have to rely on the content of the comment which is informative enough.

Apart from quoting, other identifying clues are given as well, as in the following example where reference is made to the content of the rap video:

- (25) Allard xxx: *maar hij durft wel dat is wel fucking respect voor die mocro terwijl mocro's normaal vrij weinig kunnen behalve een grote bek hebben en haat aan alles*  
 'but he has guts, that is fucking respect for that mocro while mocro's usually can't do pretty much except giving a big mouth and hate to everything'

Allard is a Dutch name and indeed he presents himself as someone who probably is not Moroccan. Quite a few times discussions go 'off topic' and develop in directions that are not related to the video anymore. An example is (26):

- (26) Rachid xxx: *Wat een satelliet oren heeft die turk*  
 'What a satellite ears that Turk has'  
 Meltem xxx: *wejo niet zo tergen turken. gek*  
 'wejo not (or don't provoke) like that against Turks. fool'

Rachid is a typical Arabic (Moroccan) male name and Meltem is a Turkish female name. But the names are not strictly necessary since these comments themselves are rich in terms of their identification potential. The exclamation *wejo* is used more by girls/women than by boys/men. The word *tergen* means 'to provoke', but it might be a typo: *tegen* means 'against'.

In Dorleijn and Nortier (2008) we showed that people with a Moroccan background use a lot of self-irony which we found hard to find in the material that was collected among speakers and authors from Turkish origin. An example is (27), from [www.amazigh.nl](http://www.amazigh.nl),<sup>11</sup> the website about Berber matters in- and outside the Netherlands, where a participant with a Berber background wrote on the forum page (January, 2006):

- (27) *het riffijnse berbertuig is namelijk verantwoordelijk voor alle shit hiero..*  
 'the riffian berber scum happens to be responsible for all shit here..'

11 Accessed in October, 2007.

This is the same phenomenon as can be observed in (28), by a commenter with, obviously, a Moroccan background:

- (28) Mocro xxx: *als je durft zeg je dit tgn een mocro voor zen neus en dan zie je of je neus niet is gebroken kk hoerezoontje*  
 ‘if you dare you say this to a Moroccan ‘in front of his nose’ and then check whether your nose is broken you cc (=cancer) son of a whore’

The nickname Mocro xxx indicates a Moroccan background, and so does the ironic undertone and the sort of ‘proudness’ of being tough and aggressive.

### 3.4 *UYSS Features in Written Comments*

In section 2 above, characteristics of Dutch UYSS in oral language use as represented on YouTube (in raps and interviews) were presented and illustrated. Below examples will be given of the use of UYSS features in written texts, as they were attested in the comments to the video by Relschoppers. It will be shown that the same features that mark spoken UYSS are used in written forms, and that they serve as identification clues.

Lexical markers of UYSS are frequently used. As in spoken data, the choice for certain lexical material is determined by or marks ethnic belonging:

- (29) Mootje xxx: *Billie: haal een dürüm xD wollah wahed vetzak is dat man*  
 ‘Billie: get a dürüm xD wollah wahed fat ass he is man’

Probably, (29) was produced by a commenter with a Moroccan background: Mootje is the Dutch short form for Mohammed (-tje is the diminutive). Interestingly enough the short form Mo for Mohammed is only used for Moroccans, although the name Mohammed occurs in languages other than Moroccan (Arabic, Berber). In the same vein, other Moroccan names are shortened as well, such as Ap (or Ab) for Abdullah. As far as I am aware, no research has been conducted on the use of the short form Mo. *Wollah* (I swear) originates in a Muslim culture and it has become a UYSS marker in general. *Wahed* is a Moroccan Arabic indefinite article or numeral (one) and as far as I know only used by people with a Moroccan background.

Example (30) is interesting since it does not involve a lexical UYSS element. *Ezel* (donkey) is a word that is almost friendly in Dutch but the equivalent in languages such as Turkish, Arabic or Berber has a strong negative load. And indeed, the nickname Soefian refers to a Moroccan background:

- (30) Soefian xxx: *ps je bent dom ik bedoel een ezel*  
 ‘ps you are stupid I mean a donkey’
- (31) Abigail: *whahahh ik ga brokko als ik deze reacties lees hea*  
 ‘whahahh I go broke when I read these reactions hea’

The (female) name Abigail could be European or Caribbean but it definitely is not a common name in Muslim cultures. She positions herself in a UYSS context by her choice for the word *brokko* (broke, broken), which stems from Sranan (Agha, 2005).

- (32) Biertje xxx: *ik betaal allahverdomme belasting over jouw kanker uitkering!!!*  
 ‘I pay goddamn taxes over your cancer remittance’

Obviously, (32) was uttered with the intention to insult Muslims, and the author probably has a Dutch (European) background, which is also indicated by the nickname ‘Biertje’ (beer). In Dutch, *godverdomme* (‘god damn’) is a heavy curse but in (32) god is replaced with allah, presumably with the intention to shock or insult Muslims.

- (32) TurkseChick: *Ewaaa, kkr nederlanders wat komen jullie kkr dom praten, jullie zijn kkr jaloerss omdat jullie niet kunnen rappen, ah kkr ballie’s, als wij voor jullie neuss staan jullie vallen neer aah zimmers, kkropmann, wat komen jullie kkr stoeer praaten als je dese liedje haat wat luisterjedan en jaa ze zijn btr dan julliEee, ( kaasekoppen zijn jaloers)*  
 ‘Ewaaa, ccr (cancer) Dutch, you talk ccr stupid, you are ccr jealouss because you can’t rap, ah ccr balls, when we stand in front of you, you drop down, homosexuals, fckoffman, what you talk so ccr tough for if you hate this song why doyoulisten to it, yeah they are btrr than youUU, (cheese heads are jealous)’

The text in (32) indicates that it is produced by a Moroccan speaker: the first word *ewa* (well) is used in Moroccan languages, and the same is true for *zemer* (homosexual). The nickname, TurkseChick, however, suggest that the commenter has a Turkish background. *Deze* is a UYSS marker on the grammatical level, the wrong gender is used (instead of *dit*). In the third line the word order is deviant form standard Dutch: (...) *jullie vallen* would have been (...) *vallen*



*jullie* (a rare violation of the Verb Second rule (cf. the discussion of the V2 rule in 2.1 above). That leaves us two possibilities: either the commenter uses a wannabe-nickname that doesn't reflect her ethnic identity or the use of Moroccan-based lexical elements is less restricted than we thought, i.e. it is also used by people who don't have a Moroccan background.

Another grammatical UYSS characteristic is illustrated in the following example:

- (33) *Hahahah, mensen kunnen ø niet tegen omdat ze zo jong al beroemd zijn geworden*  
 'Hahahah people can't stand (it) because they became famous so young'

In (33) a pronominal object is omitted, a feature characteristic of learner varieties of Dutch which are used in UYSS by fluent speakers of Dutch as well when they use UYSS.

UYSS features on the level of pronunciation can easily be expressed in written form, as was already illustrated in (22) above.

- (34) Mohamed xxx: *bachkleettaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-aaaaaaaa (...)*

In (34) all attention is directed towards the word *bashklita* and the way it is pronounced (cf. (13) above). The reason might be that the author with the nickname Mohamed xxx and therefore possibly having a Moroccan background, is struck by the fact that Billy (Turkish origin) uses this word that is primarily associated with Moroccans.

- (35) *senorbanaan: DE OPGESJHHHSCHOREN HOOFDEN!*

The male person who wrote (35) could be anything, according to the nickname (*senorbanaan*; mister banana). However, he is struck by the Moroccan pronunciation in the rap. The typical and salient Moroccan pronunciation of *opgeschoren* (cf. (17) above) is imitated and exaggerated.

It was relatively difficult to find written examples illustrating a typical UYSS pronunciation. There are roughly two types. The first one is illustrated in (34), (35) and in (22) above, where a word or a few words are quoted and exaggerated. The other type is the stylized use of address forms and exclamations. Examples are *hatersssss*, *tazzz* (shit), *gangsterssss*, *tjappiesss* (idiots), *boyzzz*, probably illustrating a Moroccan or more generally a pronunciation characteristic of second language learners.

### 3.5 *Flemish Participants*

The comments that were discussed so far are written in the variety of Dutch that is used in the Netherlands. In the Dutch speaking part of Belgium (Flanders), Flemish Dutch is spoken and in written form there are only slight differences with Netherlands Dutch. For speakers of Dutch it is not too difficult to recognize typical Flemish features that are used among the comments.

- (36) Kenny: *k vint da een goe*  
I 'find tha(t) a goo(d)'
- (37) Moestafa xx: *als ge zo blijft voort doen*  
'If you continue like that'
- (38) Bensablon: *misschien zult ge ooit wel goeie teksten schrijven*  
'maybe you will some time write good texts'
- (39) Rapperlover: *da ge dnkt da ge alles zyt*  
'tha(t) you think tha(t) you are everything'
- (40) GamerYigit: *wa lulde gij?*  
'wha(t) are you bullshitting?'

In (36) and (39) the final *-t* in *dat* (that) is not written which reflects the Belgian way it is pronounced: word-final consonants are deleted frequently. The same is true for *wa* ('wat', what) in (40) and *goe* ('goed', good) in (36). The second person singular subject pronoun *je* or *jij* (Netherlands Dutch) is usually *ge* or *gij* in Belgian Dutch, as in (7), (38), (39) and (40).<sup>12</sup> *Voort doen* (continue) in (37) is an expression that is not used in the Netherlands, just like the word *zyt* (are) in (39). In *dnkt* (think) in (39) an /e/ was omitted (*denkt*). This is a form of shorthand sms-writing which probably has nothing to do with Flemish or UYSS features.

In this study, following Ruetten and Van de Velde (2013) the analysis was based on a selection of contributions in which *ge* (or *gij*) occurred, complemented by the other characteristics mentioned.

The nicknames Kenny in (36) and Rapperlover in (39) don't reveal anything about a Belgian or any other ethnic identity and in the case of Moestafa and

12 *Ge* and *gij* occur in the Dutch province Noord-Brabant as well. In this study, however, this is not taken into account.

Bensablon we may assume a Moroccan background. In (40) the commenter has a Turkish background: Turkish *yigit* means hero. (40) might also be (Dutch) Brabants, the dialect spoken just north of the Belgian border.

In the following two examples the same Flemish markers are used while at the same time explicit reference to a Belgian background is made, and in (42) even a mixed Belgian/Moroccan identity.

- (41) Soepflip: *billy gij kunt ni in een normale bakker durums eten ik weet ni na welke gij ga ma da ligt zeker dan niet in België*  
 ‘billy you can’t eat dürüms in a common baker’s I don’t know which one you go to but it certainly isn’t in Belgium’
- (42) Astrid xxx: *ik ben Marokaan en woon in belgie wa ga gij doen U fucking nederlandse vriendjes haale ofwa ni zo grote mond hebbe als ik u ken of kende gij zou op de grond liggen met 1 box*  
 ‘I am Moroccan and live in Belgium wha(t) are you going to do get you(r) fucking Dutch friends or wha(t) you have a big mouth if I know you you would lie on the ground with 1 box’

It is interesting that a European nickname (Astrid) and a Moroccan identity as expressed in (42) seem to go together well. Beside the Flemish characteristics mentioned above, she also uses *ga* instead of *gaat* and *ni* instead of *niet*. Just like *gij, u* in Netherlands Dutch is a polite and rather formal form, contrary to Belgian Dutch where it is a common and informal address form.

In (43), someone with a nickname (Goran) which may or may not be native Belgian calls the Moroccans *makake* which is an abuse word for Moroccans used in Belgium only, not in the Netherlands (Jaspers, 2005). This word and the use of *u* indicate a Belgian background.

- (43) goran xxx: *vuile makake gaa gwn naar u land*  
 ‘dirty macaques jst goo to your country’

Just like *dnkt* in (39) above, *gwn* in (43) is a short form without vowels and it is used in texting. The standard written form is *gewoon* (just, normal). The short forms are not immediately associated with a UYSS identity. (see also De Decker and Vandekerckhove, this volume).

It is striking that among almost nine thousand comments on the video by Relschoppers there does not seem to be a single instance where UYSS features are used in obviously Flemish contributions. A random search on ten websites with comments on other rap videos by popular Dutch rappers with a migrant

background (such as Keizer, Skiezo and Ali B) gives the same results: contributions that can be identified as Belgian by the use of features such as those discussed above, or by explicit reference to a Belgian background, never show any characteristics of UYSS in a way that is common among users of Netherlands Dutch.

In Flanders there are forms of UYSS but they are different from Netherlands Dutch UYSS. Jaspers observed and described communicative patterns among a group of young Moroccans in the city of Antwerp who denote their way of speaking as 'Illegal Dutch'. He found that they are skilled users of the Antwerp dialect but they don't seem to use elements from immigrant minority languages and English the way it is done in the Netherlands (Jaspers, 2008).<sup>13</sup>

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

In this article characteristics and practices of UYSS in the Netherlands were presented and discussed. There is not one single Dutch UYSS and urban young multi-ethnic identities can be expressed in several linguistic ways that do not necessarily co-occur. Contrary to recent findings by Ben Rampton in the UK (Rampton, 2014), UYSS practices in the Netherlands seem to be restricted to young people from specific subcultures and to specific domains and topics.

Since communication increasingly takes place on the Internet through computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones, it may not come as a surprise that UYSS is also used in digital communication. In the present article, a rap video was analyzed which showed that UYSS features are part of popular language use by multi-ethnic groups of young people.

After the video was published, thousands of comments have been written. An analysis revealed that apparently characteristics from oral UYSS are used in the written comments as well in order to construct and express identities. The rappers on the video were all young males, while the commenters were both male and female.

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13 Beside 'Illegal Dutch' another Belgian form of UYSS, *Citétaal*, is described by Marzo and Ceuleers (2011). On page 451 they write: "The term *Citétaal* was originally used to refer to the language spoken by Italian immigrants in the Eastern part of Flanders (Limburg) and diffused in the former ghettoised mining areas (the *cité*). It is a melting pot language, based on Dutch but with a high amount of code mixture from immigrant languages, mostly Italian and Turkish." It would be interesting to see whether, and in what ways *Citétaal* is used on the Internet. Among the comments on the Relschoppers video there were no examples that stood out as *Citétaal*.

In the analyses some other unexpected phenomena were observed: In the first place the rappers from Utrecht with Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds seemed to use an urban Amsterdam accent in their Dutch. Undoubtedly this is related to a higher status/prestige and fashionable association connected with the Amsterdam accent. Future research will have to shed light on this phenomenon: how widespread is it? Does it only occur in rap? Is it restricted to certain ethnic groups or has it spread among other groups and subcultures as well?

And secondly, participants who apparently live in Belgium (or are perhaps otherwise connected to Belgium) and who use Belgian Dutch don't use any of the identified UYSS features in their comments. In the article, a rather impressionistic way of identifying Belgium commenters was used. More work has to be done on recognizing identification clues.

Data from the internet as described in this article are linguistically rich and seem to add information that otherwise is given in non-linguistic hints.

The present study is based on rather impressionistic data collection methods. However, even this small first inventory revealed the usefulness of internet data and showed that although it cannot replace oral naturalistic data, it can be used beside oral data, since it reflects the ways people identify themselves and others. More structured and systematic ways of data collection in the future are needed to explore the possibilities and the techniques to make full use of the seemingly endless stock of internet data.

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