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# Multi-ethnolects: Kebabnorsk, Perkerdansk, Verlan, Kanakensprache, Straattaal, etc.

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## 1. Introduction

In large urban areas all over Europe where many relatively recent immigrant communities of various ethnic and linguistic origin have settled, highly specific slang-like linguistic styles emerge among multi-ethnic adolescent groups. In these styles, elements from immigrant languages are combined with the dominant language of the society. For example, in the Netherlands, one can encounter utterances such as in the following example from Dorleijn and Nortier (2008b):

- (1) wreed *olmazmi*                    **ah**    **sahbi?**  
          *wouldn't [that]be great*    **VOC** **my friend?**<sup>1</sup>.

The use of elements of the three languages in (1) does not imply that the speaker is necessarily of Dutch, Turkish or Moroccan origin. He/she may be so, but may as well be of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi or any other origin. Similar speech styles can be found all over Europe (and, *mutatis mutandis*, all over the world.)

In this chapter we want to discuss the position of multi-ethnolects among contact languages. We will argue that it is a type of contact language. We define the term multi-ethnolect for the moment as follows:

A linguistic style and/or variety (cf. the discussion below) that is part of linguistic practices of speakers of more than two different ethnic and (by consequence) linguistic backgrounds, and contains an unusually high number of features from more than one language, but has one clear base-language, generally the dominant language of the society where the multi-ethnolect is in use.

Below, we will refine this definition after having discussed some notions we believe to be relevant with respect to multi-ethnolects.

The term contact languages implies a certain degree of stability of the varieties that would fall under this category, but multi-ethnolects are in fact more often than not quite ephemeral phenomena. They are, at most, pre-stages or initial stages of stabilized contact languages. And this is precisely why we would like to argue that they deserve a place in a study on contact languages (along, in fact, with other synchronic manifestations of language contact). The synchronic study of linguistic contact will undoubtedly offer insights about how language contact actually ‘works’ in daily interaction. It may shed light on the mechanisms and processes of propagation, spread, conventionalisation of linguistic features, through which more stable contact varieties and contact languages emerge/have emerged. Therefore, if not for other reasons, it deserves to be discussed in a volume on contact languages.

In this chapter we will set out with the discussion of a few notions and terms we consider relevant for the concept of multi-ethnolect (in section 2) and as we go along, we will discuss several research perspectives and methods and the different questions those perspectives seek to answer. We will argue that in order to come to a full understanding of multi-ethnolects, it may be rewarding to study them from diverse perspectives, with more language-structure-oriented, variationist, quantitative survey approaches at the one end, and detailed, ethnographic, micro level conversation-analysis-oriented approaches at the other. These two types of approaches may prove complementary in a fruitful way, especially if they are based on the study of the same datasets and/or the same groups of respondents.

In section 3, we present a selection of important earlier and current research on multi-ethnolects. In section 4, we will position multi-ethnolects within a typology of contact languages. We will end with a brief conclusion in 5.

## **2. Concepts, terminology, definitions**

In this section, we will discuss certain notions we consider relevant with respect to multi-ethnolects. First of all, we want to contrast the term multi-ethnolect with the more familiar term ethnolect. Then we will discuss the (macro) sociological circumstances that seem to encourage the emergence of multi-ethnolects. After that we will address the issue whether one should speak of varieties or rather of styles in the case of multi-ethnolects. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the mechanisms that may be at work in the emergence or creation of multi-ethnolects, linguistic features that characterize multi-ethnolects and the diverse functions that multi-ethnolects are often observed to perform. At the end of this section we will discuss a few research gaps. We need a more refined definition of multi-ethnolects, present some questions that in our view are in urgent need of research, a few methods that may turn out to be fruitful when investigating multi-ethnolects and some alternative terms that have been proposed for the term multi-ethnolect.

### **2.1. Multi-ethnolects vs. ethnolects**

Multi-ethnolects enjoy increasing attention in sociolinguistic research. Since the last decades several multi-ethnolects have been attested and discussed in the literature (see section 3 below). In the previous sentence the term multi-ethnolect is, for reasons of brevity, presented as if it were a clear-cut phenomenon, but the reader should bear in mind that this is not the case.

One is tempted to ascribe this recent attention to the fact that multi-ethnolects have emerged only recently, in the wake of migration waves toward western urban areas; that they are, in fact, a logical product of late modernity but, as one can infer from, for example, studies by Kießling and Mous (2004), multi-ethnolects certainly exist outside the western world as well. Moreover, multi-ethnolects are not a new phenomenon, but more a phenomenon of all times, that was only waiting for linguists to give it a name. For example, Walt Wolfram reported already in 1974 on Puerto Rican-American groups where, as Fought (2006: 450) formulates it,

“(...) adolescents in particular have been found to use certain features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in their English.”

The study of Wolfram (1974) reports on Puerto Rican-speakers in New York using AAVE habitual *be*. This would probably have fitted well under the label of multi-ethnolect. Wolfram attributed this to frequent contacts of these Puerto-Ricans with AAVE-speakers, which, of course, makes sense, cf. the discussion further below.

The term multi-ethnolect should not be confused with the term ethnolect, although there is a reference to the common and overlapping notion of ethnicity in both terms. Where multi-ethnolects may have been attested, labelled and classified as a consequence of research approaches prevailing today, the term ethnolect pertains to studies of a more variationist type. In the sociolinguistic tradition, ethnicity has always been considered as an important social variable, along with regional background, gender, class, which as such is expressed in the language use of individuals.

Research on this topic takes as a starting point that some (isolated or clusters of) linguistic variables are indexical for the ethnic background of speakers, whereas, by contrast, one of the characterizing features of multi-ethnolects is, that speakers use features that are taken from another than their own ethnic/linguistic resource. The focus of research on ethnolects is largely oriented on language structure, driven by questions such as: to what extent do elements related to ethnicity contribute to the emergence of a stable linguistic variety? Or: how do ethnolects contribute to language change? Yet other questions could be: to what extent and in which way do ethnic elements contribute to the emergence of a contact variety of a given language and/or a mixed language? To what degree and how can the occurrence of an ethnic variety be explained by the process of second language acquisition? Definitions of ethnolects like the following typically reflect matters such as:

“... [an ethnolect is] a variety of a language that results when speakers of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds attempt to speak the dominant language (e.g. 'Chicano English')”

(Danesi 1985: 118). Another type of definition with more diachronic connotations is developed by Wölck and Carlock (1981: 17), specifically for ethnolects of English:

...the English of the descendants of immigrant families long after their original language is lost (...) a linguistic variety of a majority language whose special structure has developed through a history of community bilingualism.

Questions and definitions like the above take as a starting point that an ethnolect is a variety spoken by L2-speakers in which their L1 is reflected. Research of this type often implies that the ethnic features in such a variety are beyond the control and monitoring of the speakers, in other words, that ethnolects reflect what one is, rather than what one does. Examples of such studies are Labov (1972a) and Wolfram, (1974a).

During the past few decades, however, the orientation in studies of language variation and language contact has shifted towards different types of questions and research methods that can be conceived as complementary to the above mentioned research. This other type of research is mostly

qualitative in orientation and it makes use of ethnographic fieldwork methods. Therefore, recent studies are more focused on the social meaning and/or the interactive function of certain 'ethnic linguistic variables'. In this type of research, questions of the following type are asked: What communicative intentions are served by ethnic elements? Why are these elements used, and in which (situational or conversational) contexts? What communicative effects are obtained by which linguistic means? Which linguistic means are used in which way to construct/present an identity? Rampton's work on linguistic practices ('crossing', - as it is coined by him) among young people in multi-ethnic peer groups, is a groundbreaking example of such research (cf. Rampton 1995), though the topic has received some attention earlier as well (see section 3 below). As will be inferred from the overview of the literature below, this type of research on multi-ethnolects is mainly concentrated in North-Western Europe and the United States.

## 2.2. Macro social, political and macro sociolinguistic circumstances

As can be inferred from the research presented in section 3 below, multi-ethnolects are typically used by speakers of diverse ethnic backgrounds, including the dominant, mainstream background. Multi-ethnolects appear to be typically urban phenomena that emerge in particular among adolescents in a context of migration in cities. We already remarked in the introduction that multi-ethnolects are mainly attested in big cities in Western Europe, but this should certainly not be taken as an indication that multi-ethnolects occur only there. One expects them to emerge anywhere in the world large urban multi-ethnic areas: cf. e.g. Kießling and Mous (2004) and see also further below. This is not surprising: below it will be illustrated that users of multi-ethnolects are to a high degree involved in the process of constructing and presenting a social identity, and such actions are of course unavoidable consequences of living in the highly dynamic circumstances that multi-ethnic neighbourhoods 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 and challenges 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.

That multi-ethnolects are mainly observed in circumstances such as described above, does not mean that they occur there exclusively. But these circumstances seem at least to facilitate the emergence of ethnolects. However, if we stick to the definition of multi-ethnolects given in the introduction, we should include centenarians in rural environments as well, as long as they are of diverse ethnic background and speak a variety in which elements from more than two languages can be found. There is, for example, a brief report on a specific variety of Arabic, called Mahallemi, which is spoken by (elderly) people of diverse ethnic backgrounds originating from the Kurdish area of South-Eastern Turkey, and contains elements of Kurdish, Turkish and (Aramaic) Turoyo (Leezenberg and Dorleijn 1998). This variety still needs to be investigated further, but at first sight it seems to share characteristics with (other) multi-ethnolects. As we will discuss further below, the function rather than the formal aspects should form the crucial part of a definition of multi-ethnolects. People with heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds find themselves together and are in need

of a new group-identity. Under such circumstances a multi-ethnolect is likely to emerge.

Apart from social developments like mass migration, urbanisation etc., the need for a new group identity may emerge because of concrete political developments or even incidents. An example is the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands, where the multidisciplinary research program TCULT was carried out in a multi-cultural neighbourhood between 1998 and 2002. In those days, there was no indication of the existence of the specific multi-ethnolect MFD, 'Moroccan Flavoured Dutch' as it was labelled by Nortier and Dorleijn (2008). However, a few years later, this MFD multi-ethnolect, spoken by adolescents of a Moroccan, Turkish, Dutch and other ethnic backgrounds had emerged (Dorleijn and Nortier, 2006; Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008). In this multi-ethnolect, especially Moroccan (Berber and Arabic) elements were added to the base language (Dutch). This happened mainly – but not exclusively, on the level of pronunciation.

Respondents indicated that the growing anti-Muslim attitude in the Dutch public opinion following the assassination of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and the 9/11 attacks in New York a year earlier, caused Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds to flock together. Thus, they would form a group with one migrant identity, in stead of separate ethnic groups along national lines (i.e., Moroccans, Turks etc.). In the Netherlands, the term 'allochtones' is used for migrants and their descendants, where no distinction is made between separate ethnic groups. Adolescents of, e.g. South-Asian origin would not belong to this group, though these are, strictly speaking, allochtones as well. The assumption that Muslim or immigrant identity plays an important role in this matter is based mostly on anecdotal information. A young woman with a Turkish background (18) told us that she sometimes feels more 'allochtonous' (i.e., 'an immigrant'; 'a foreigner') than Turkish, and an Afghan (17) said that he felt insulted when he heard nasty things about Moroccans in the Netherlands, since "... I am a foreigner, too!". The way we interpret this, both informants expressed solidarity with other ethnic minority groups.

For the actual structural and formal manifestation of a multi-ethnolect, sociolinguistic tendencies like language maintenance and shift, degree of multilingualism, etc. in the ethnic groups that contribute to the multi-ethnolect, seem to be important factors as well. For example, one of the multi-ethnolects attested in the Netherlands (Nortier and Dorleijn 2008; Dorleijn and Nortier 2008) draws in particular on Moroccan resources, rather than, e.g., from Turkish, even though both communities in the Netherlands are comparable in terms of size and cultural background. The sociolinguistic situation of both communities differs considerably, e.g., in the role the mother tongue plays in each of the communities, and in the prestige that is attributed to it, and makes the Moroccan elements more prone to appropriation by members of other groups, as will be explained below.

Apart from Dutch, which is the dominant language among second and third generation speakers, two languages are spoken in the Dutch-Moroccan community: Colloquial Moroccan Arabic and Berber, which are mutually not intelligible. Although the two languages differ considerably, there are similarities on the level of pronunciation and prosody. An estimated 70% of the Moroccans living in the Netherlands are Berber speaking. Although most Berber speaking Moroccans are more or less familiar with Moroccan Arabic, this does not imply that every Berber speaks Moroccan Arabic fluently. Therefore, Dutch is often the unmarked mode within the

community. Another reason for the preference of Dutch is the low status the Moroccan oral languages have. Classical Arabic (or fus-ha) is a language with high status, used in formal situations and only learned through explicit education but most Moroccans in the Netherlands are unable to use this high status language. In daily communication it plays a minor role.

In the closely knit Turkish community in the Netherlands, on the other hand, Turkish is still very vital (cf. Eversteijn, 2002; 2011). The unmarked mode among Dutch-Turkish bilinguals is the bilingual code switching mode, which is considered an in-group mode by its speakers and by (Dutch) outsiders; the latter often complain that they feel excluded in all-Turkish company, “because they speak Turkish all the time” (cf. Backus 1996; Nortier and Dorleijn 2008). Moreover, by using Turkish, one shows his/her Turkish identity and pride of being so. A final reason why (phonetic) elements from Moroccan languages are easily taken over by other groups is the fact that the Moroccan community is more open to outsiders than the Turkish community, and therefore, their way of speaking Dutch is easier recognized and more admissible than the way Turks use Dutch. It is not surprising, then, that Moroccan elements play a more conspicuous role than Turkish elements in this Dutch multi-ethnolect, as may be inferred from the following conversation (Nortier and Dorleijn 2008: 133-134). M is a Moroccan girl (16); I is the Dutch interviewer and T is a Turkish girl (16):

- (2) *M: (...) ik zou niet met een Turks eh groepje kunnen eh praten, (...) die praten ook alleen maar Turks, daar zou ik niet zo gauw bij willen zitten*  
 ‘(...) I wouldn’t be able to talk with a Turkish group (...) they speak only Turkish, I wouldn’t want to sit with them.’
- I: Want ze praten Turks dus dat is echt een belemmering voor jou*  
 ‘Since they talk Turkish, so that is a real hindrance for you’
- T: Ja bij Marokkaans is dat niet zo, die praten gewoon echt Nederlands, daar kan je gewoon bij staan of zitten of wat dan ook. (...) ik heb echt nooit Marokkaanse meisjes gezien die Marokkaans praten, die lopen alleen maar Nederlands te praten*  
 ‘Yes, that’s not the case with Moroccans, they really speak Dutch, you can easily sit or stand with them or whatever (...) I’ve never seen Moroccan girls who speak Moroccan, they go round speaking only Dutch.’

In some multi-ethnolects, elements from one (of several) contributing languages are predominant, as is the case with Moroccan elements in the above mentioned Dutch multi-ethnolect. Similarly, Turkish is predominant in German multi-ethnolects (cf., e.g., Dirim and Auer 2004). This may partly be due to the fact that speakers of such a language constitute a majority within the multi-ethnolect speaking group, but this is not necessarily the only factor. It is also likely that the speakers of the language that predominantly provides ethnic elements have a certain covert prestige compared to other ethnic groups. For example, in the Netherlands, respondents repeatedly have stated that Moroccans are tough and Turks are dull (own fieldnotes). One is tempted to assume that also intrinsic salient features of the pertinent languages may play a role. Again in the Netherlands, respondents have also repeatedly declared that the Moroccan accent is more ‘fun’ than other accents (Nortier and Dorleijn 2008: 136-137); M is a Moroccan girl (16); D is the Dutch interviewer; A is an Afghan (17) and T is a Turkish girl (16).

- (3) *M: Het is algemeen bekend dat Marokkanen een beetje leuk, ja, een beetje leuk accent hebben.*  
 ‘It is generally known that Moroccans have an –uhm kind of funny accent’
- D: Is dat omdat er meer Marokkanen zijn dan Turken?*  
 ‘Is that because there are more Moroccans than Turks?’
- A: Nee*  
 ‘No’
- D: Is dat zo? In Utrecht misschien wel.*  
 ‘Is that so? In Utrecht maybe there are?’
- T: Nee volgens mij niet, er zijn meer Turken!*  
 ‘No, I think there are more Turks!’
- D: Maken ze meer lawaai? Offe*  
 ‘Do they make more noise? Or uh’
- T: Ja, Marokkanen zijn meer aanwezig*  
 ‘Yes, Moroccans manifest themselves much more’
- M: Nee, maar ’t accent valt gewoon heel erg op. Ik gga naar şgool, ik denk van hallo! Dat merk je gewoon heel sterk*  
 ‘No, but the accent is striking. ‘I am going to school’ [said with multi-ethnolect-pronunciation] Then I think wow! That is something you just notice very strongly.’

An example of the saliency of a Moroccan accent is the popular Dutch/Surinamese stand-up comedian Jörgen Raymann. In his tv show *Raymann is laat* (‘Raymann is late’) he plays with foreign accents in Dutch, not only Surinamese (his own background) but also Moroccan, i.e. as the Moroccan butcher Ahmed<sup>2</sup>. He is popular among a broad audience which is not only Dutch but Surinamese and Moroccan as well, among others. But also Moroccan comedians, such as Salaheddine and Najib Amhali<sup>3</sup>, who are both able to speak Dutch without a noticeable Moroccan accent, use this accent in an exaggerated way in their shows. In a hilarious scene, Salaheddine even teaches his Dutch audience how to speak with a Moroccan accent.<sup>4</sup> It is of course likely that saliency of linguistic features *does* play a role. The question in which way, exactly, these linguistic factors interact with social and sociolinguistic factors is an empirical question that is still waiting for a straightforward answer.

### 2.3. Variety, style, stylistic practice

Although this is not the place to discuss all intricacies that are associated with the concept of style versus the term variety, we must devote a few words to these terms, as they appear to be relevant for the definition of multi-ethnolect.

Quist (2008: 44) rightly remarks: “A ‘lect’ term like ‘multiethnolect’, implies a (more or less focused) set of linguistic features that separates it from a standard language or other ‘lects’.” However, the term multi-ethnolect as it is used in this chapter (and by Quist) is not something fixed or clearcut. Although some obvious features can be pointed at, and although a lay audience immediately would be able to identify a multi-ethnolect as such, it is yet too early to speak of fixed, standardized varieties. A certain degree of conventionalisation is inevitable, though. After all, time is needed to develop into such a focused variety, (and of course the right social circumstances are needed as well), and this type of ethnolect has the tendency to be ephemeral.

Another argument not to consider multi-ethnolects as independent varieties of standard languages, is the fact that they are only used in particular circumstances and/or with particular interlocutors, as transpires from most of the work on this topic. They can be put on and taken off like a glove. Therefore the term ‘multi-ethnic style’ would have been more appropriate in this respect. ‘Style’ or ‘linguistic style’ is a complicated topic in which several dimensions play a role, (cf. Rickford and Eckert 2001; Auer 2007; Coupland 2007; Keim 2008, Quist 2008). What concerns us here is that linguistic style can be mobilised by speakers in the appropriate situation, and can be associated with specific situations and/or interlocutors, and/or specific interaction types. Style, a “clustering of linguistic resources and an association of that clustering with social meaning” (as defined in Eckert 2001) implies some agentivity by the speaker, something one *does*, rather than something one *is*. As is reported by numerous researchers on the topic, metalinguistic awareness among speakers of multi-ethnolects is high (cf., e.g., Svendsen and Røyneland 2008): the use of multi-ethnolects is a deliberate choice.

#### 2.4. Mechanisms of interference

Thomason (2001; 2004) has proposed seven mechanisms of interference that have been at work in contact varieties. With multi-ethnolects, we are dealing with linguistic contact in action, so it is an ideal locus to see which of these interference mechanisms do play a role, and how. The first and second of Thomason’s mechanisms are code-switching and code alternation, the difference being that code-switching may take place in the same conversation with the same speaker, while in code alternation, speakers use “one of their languages in one set of environments and the other language in a completely different set of environments.” (Thomason 2001: 136). These two mechanisms do not seem to play an important role in the formation of multi-ethnolects. Of course, in multi-ethnolect single words (typically tags, discourse particles and formulaic expressions) from several languages may be inserted by speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Typical is the use of *wallah* ‘I swear’ (literally: ‘to Allah’; originally Arabic but also used by speakers of other languages such as Turkish, for whom Islam plays a role), cf. the example below, taken from Quist (2008: 47):

- (4) A: *Jeg så Sabrina i dag*  
       ‘I saw Sabrina today’  
       M: *Wallah?*  
       A: *Ude foran bussen*  
       ‘next to the bus’  
       M: *Wallah?*  
       A: *Wallah*

However, this does not fit in the definition of code-switching and code alternation, as not all users of a multi-ethnolect are bilingual and the two mechanisms are mainly used by- and among - bilinguals.

The third mechanism that Thomason proposes is ‘passive familiarity’: adopting features from a language one understands but never speaks. Thomason notes that “(...) Perhaps the most common type of situation in which passive familiarity is a significant mechanism of structural

interference is in a shift situation when some features are adopted by original target-language speakers from the version of the target language (i.e. the TL2) spoken by members of the shifting group.” (2001: 141-142). This seems to be the case with the users of multi-ethnolects as well. But what Thomason implies, is that this mechanism would operate below the level of consciousness of the speakers and without the intention of social meaning. Multi-ethnolect users, however, though using words from languages they never speak as such, do this deliberately, and there is social meaning attached to it as well. Thomason (2001: 145) mentions the use of AAVE-elements in the prison slang of white inmates in the State Correctional Institution of Pittsburgh as an example. The situation there is comparable to what is going on in multi-ethnolects, where linguistic features that don't 'belong' to the speakers are adopted in the act of crossing. However, this example differs widely from the other examples she gives for this mechanism, so this sort of phenomenon could be classified as stylisation rather than as passive familiarity, since the latter does not seem to imply something like deliberate action of the speaker.

The fourth mechanism (negotiation) is not relevant here in the sense Thomason uses it, i.e., as strategies employed by the speakers in order to attain a better understanding of each other, also known as convergent strategies. According to Thomason, this is typically a mechanism to make communication more effective, to meet communicative needs. However, as will be shown below, one of the functions of multi-ethnolects is to express social meaning, not to facilitate the expression of referential meaning.

The fifth mechanism Thomason proposes is: second-language acquisition strategies. For multi-ethnolect speakers in general this is not a central mechanism. However, interlanguage features often do play a role in the creation of multi-ethnolects. In many ethnolects it is observed that typical interlanguage features become stylised, exaggerated and stereotyped to form an integral part of a multi-ethnolect. (cf. Cornips 2008, and below) For the same obvious reasons, the role of Thomason's sixth mechanism, bilingual first-language acquisition, can be ignored here, too.

The seventh mechanism, however, 'deliberate decision' is an important mechanism in the creation of multi-ethnolects. In fact, most linguistic characteristics seem to be based on this mechanism. "Sometimes a group of people will deliberately change their language in order to differentiate it more sharply from those of neighbour communities". (Thomason 2001: 150). In the case of multi-ethnolects this mechanism is applied by the groups under consideration, in order to differentiate themselves from the mainstream society.

Several ways in which languages can deliberately be manipulated have been attested in the literature. Mous (2003: 222-223) lists a range of strategies that are used in lexical manipulation, which is often encountered, as Mous suggests, in certain registers within a language: respect, taboo, secret languages etc., in short everywhere "(...) people are conscious about which form of the paralexia they are using (...)" and "(...) decisions as to which form to use are probably always conscious and functional." (Mous 2003: 218). Among the strategies Mous lists, borrowing and word-inversion seem to be important strategies in multi-ethnolects. Word inversion is a much encountered strategy in ludlings and secret languages, but is also attested in multi-ethnolects like Verlan, Bahasa Gaul and Bahasa Prokem (see discussions and references in section 3 below). The borrowing of words is a very common strategy in multi-ethnolects. This is particularly true for words that structure a conversation (discourse particles, tags) or the

whole communicative situation (greetings, formulaic expressions) as well as ‘taboo’ words. Interestingly, also the deliberate insertion of function words is attested. One respondent told us that it is common to insert the Arabic numeral and indefinite article *wahed* ‘one’ in stead of the Dutch ‘*een*’, because, as he told us in a metalinguistic interview, inserting content words is easy and no fun, inserting function words is more of a challenge (unpublished fieldnotes of the authors)<sup>5</sup>.

There are also reports of the manipulation of grammatical elements (mostly stereotyped L2 ‘mistakes’) in a number of West-European ethnolects (cf. Nortier and Dorleijn 2008). In the following fragment from the metalinguistic interview mentioned above, R is the respondent and I is the interviewer):

- (5) R: *Dat is het slechte Nederlands*  
‘That is the bad kind of Dutch’  
I: *En heeft dat ook een naam?*  
‘Does it have a name?’  
R: *Ja, niet echt, maar ’t is in principe dan eh lidwoorden die gebruik je dan expres verkeerd.*  
‘Yes, not really, but in principle you uhhh... just use the articles deliberately in the wrong way.’  
I: *Ja, ja, die gebruik je dan exprès verkeerd, net als-*  
‘Yes! So you use them in the wrong way deliberately? Just like-’  
R: *Ja dus*  
‘Yes, like’  
I: *Die meisje*  
‘That girl’ [*dat meisje* in standard Dutch - neuter demonstrative pronoun].  
R: *Die huis zeg ik dan. Terwijl ik weet ik bedoel ik weet heus wel dat het dat huis is, maar ’t staat zo dom als ik dat op straat zeg, als ik zeg*  
‘I would say that house [*dat huis* in standard Dutch]. At the same time I know, I mean, I am very well aware of the fact that it should actually be *het huis*, but it would make a stupid impression if I would say...’ [*het* is neuter definite article]  
I: *Ja*  
‘Yes’  
R: *Als ik zeg dat huis*  
‘If I say *dat huis*’  
I: *Jaja*  
‘Yes, yes’  
R: *’t Is gewoon die huis* [*die* is common gender demonstrative pronoun]. *Maar als ik met jullie spreek dan wordt ’t gewoon dat huis.*  
‘It is just *die huis*. But when I speak with you [the authors – both Dutch and middle-aged] it is just *dat huis*.’

Other important deliberate strategies are concerned with pronunciation, intonation and prosody. Metalinguistic awareness about these features is very high among the users of multi-ethnolects where these play a role (cf. the following (Norwegian) metalinguistic data, taken from Svendsen and Røyneland (2008: 72):

- (6) *hissig (.) jeg veit ikke på tonefall og lik som trykket på orda det virker mye mer hissig* (Thomas)

‘aggressive (.) I don’t know in intonation and like the stress on the words it sounds a lot more aggressive’

- (7) *tonefall fra arabisk og ting og tang* (Anders)  
‘intonation from Arabic and stuff’
- (8) *det blir litt sånn annet tonefall* (Maia)  
‘it’s kind of a different intonation’
- (9) *du får veldig mye sats da (.) i ordene (1.0) her nede så får du stort sett sats i alle ordene [...] det blir mye mer trykket ned da* (Ummar)  
‘you get a lot of force/stress (.) in the words (1.0) down here you get force/stress in all the words [...] it’s more squeezed down’

The last part of example (3) above, repeated as (10) here, is an illustration of the saliency of a Moroccan accent in Dutch, of which the (Moroccan background) speaker is well aware:

- (10) *Nee, maar ’t accent valt gewoon heel erg op. Ik gga naar şgool, ik denk van hallo! Dat merk je gewoon heel sterk*  
‘No, but the accent is striking. ‘I am going to school’ [said with multi-ethnolect-pronunciation] Then I think hello! That is something you just notice very strongly.’

To summarize, linguistic features of multi-ethnolects consist of exaggerated and consciously stereotyped interlanguage features (grammatical structures, pronunciation, prosodic features), of insertions of formulaic expressions, greetings, discourse particles, all kinds of interjections, sometimes (taboo)content words and even occasionally function words from diverse linguistic sources that are not necessarily one’s own (‘crossing’ as it was coined by Rampton 1995). In some multi-ethnolects also word reversion is attested. These characteristics are (mainly) the result of conscious agentivity by multi-ethnolect users, and they always carry social meaning.

## 2.5. Functions of multi-ethnolects

The main characteristic of multi-ethnolects is, that their function is confined to ingroup communication. It is a style, actively brought about by the speakers. It is used to index social identities rather than to express the ‘collective’ identity (ethnicity, gender, class, etc.). The use of a multi-ethnolect is a continuous act of identity, a way of seeking a position within the ingroup and towards consolidating ingroup solidarity versus the outgroup. Interestingly, in the literature it is reported that the kind of social identity that users of multi-ethnolects wish to convey, is fairly universally a tough, ‘gang-like’, ‘street’-identity. It is generally associated with other non-linguistic stylisation, like clothing, musical preference, etc. On the level of in-group interaction, multi-ethnolects are often observed to perform the specific function of playfully joking around. It has been noticed in earlier research that on the intra-conversational level multi-ethnolect use may be topic-related (Nortier, 2001; Cornips and Reizevoort 2006; Cornips and De Rooij, 2003). The task of the researcher, then, is not so much oriented toward description of the linguistic structural properties themselves

of the multi-ethnolects, as well as to describe and find universals in the way these are mobilised to symbolically express these identities.

## 2.6. Multi-ethnolects redefined

In the light of the discussion above, we may expand the definition of multi-ethnolect now, to include not only linguistic and makro-sociolinguistic aspects, but also the aspects that are perhaps the most crucial: the way it is created and the functions it has:

A multi-ethnolect is a linguistic style that is part of linguistic practices of speakers of more than two different ethnic and (by consequence) linguistic backgrounds, and contains features from more than one language, but has one clear lexical and grammatical base-language, generally the dominant language of the society where the multi-ethnolect is in use. It is largely the result of the conscious agentivity of its users, and it has the function to index social identities.

We will now turn to a selection of studies on multi-ethnolects.

## 3. Research on multi-ethnolects: a selection

The past few decades an increasing number of studies on multi-ethnolects has been published. By way of example, some work on multi-ethnolects will be presented below, to illustrate the development of this relatively young field. Of course, we don't pretend to give a complete list, the overview is far from exhaustive.

Although there are huge differences between the studies, they have a lot in common as well. In the first place they mostly concentrate on young people in urban areas. This circumstance, as was discussed above, is typical for multi-ethnolects to emerge. The studies discussed below all stress the young people's basic need to express and often even construct identity through the use of non-native linguistic elements. They also stress that language is just one way to express identity and in order to fully understand the role language plays, it is necessary to adopt a holistic view in which not only language but all aspects of communication are included such as body language, clothing or music style. Everybody has a repertoire of identities, not just one. Among friends and peers, the identity is different from the one in school, at work, or at home among family members.

In all studies mentioned, elements from the language or variety spoken by immigrant groups, often stigmatized and with strong covert prestige, are appropriated and used by young speakers of other varieties, including mainstream and high prestige varieties. Judging from studies that have appeared on the topic, the conclusion could be drawn that multi-ethnolects emerge only in the Western world (cf. also the discussion above). However, the emergence and use of multi-ethnolects is a global phenomenon. In the following, we will pay relatively much attention to a only few non-Western studies, as we are not aware of the existence of more studies outside Europe and North-America.

Although we have more or less clearly defined what a multi-ethnolect is, we will not strictly adhere to this definition in our (rather arbitrary) choice from the literature. Some of the varieties studied are maybe

ethnolects rather than multi-ethnolects (cf. the discussion in section 2). The reason why we include them here is that they all are concerned with questions of identity in ethnically mixed peer groups, where members adopt elements from each others' languages which in their turn are used to express this identity. Finally, it should be noted that the term multi-ethnolect that we chose to use, is not always the term that is used in the works mentioned.

### 3.1.1. United Kingdom

In his book from 1986, Hewitt describes the relations and interracial friendships between black and white adolescents in the South-West of London. He focuses on the sociolinguistic impact of London Jamaican Creole on both black and white adolescent speakers. The use of Creole in English is not standardized, there is no 'average' of the number of Creole elements in English (cf. also: Sebba 1997). This is typical for all multi-ethnolects discussed further on.

Rampton introduced the term "crossing" in his book from 1995. It is one of the most influential publications in the field of multi-ethnolects. Crossing refers to language sharing and exchange in order to overcome race stratification, thus constructing a new dimension of mixed youth, class and neighbourhood or group community. The phenomenon is illustrated by describing communication and friendship between Panjabi, Afro-Caribbean and English speaking youth. The following example illustrates this (Rampton 1995: 41) :

- (11) *Participants:* Mohan [15 In M] (Indian, male), Jagdish [15 In M], B(en) R(ampton).  
*Setting:* 1987 interview. Mohan and Jagdish are talking about interactions with black peers. 'Raas klaat' is a term of abuse in Creole. [Simplified transcription]

Mohan: we sometimes we just say you're a 'raas klaat' and all this  
Jagdish: yeh yeh stuff like that... they even know some Panjabi words as well

In more recent work, Kerswill, Khan and Torgersen (2008) demonstrate that London is the source of innovation in British English speech. Linguistic innovation was found among young inner-city non-Anglo speakers specifically and among inner-city speakers with dense multi-ethnic friendship networks generally. They thoroughly studied phonetic and phonological aspects. Their conclusion is that the continued use of certain characteristic features into adulthood is the key to understanding the influence of multicultural speech on British speech more widely. (Kerswill, Khan and Torgersen 2008)

### 3.1.2. Belgium

Stefania Marzo is currently conducting a study on *Citétaal* 'City language', which is used by young people in the former ghettoized mining areas in Belgium. It is characterized by typical ethnolectal features such as morphological overgeneralization and borrowing. Like in the Dutch,

German and Scandinavian forms of multi-ethnolects (below), common gender is overused, at the cost of neuter. Quite consistently /s/ is pronounced as /sh/: /stijll/ sounds like /shtijll/ 'style'.

Since the first and largest group of guest workers who migrated to the Belgian mining areas were Italians, there is still relatively much Italian influence in this *smeltkroestaal* 'melting pot language', which is mainly used in the old Flemish speaking mining areas in the eastern part of the country. The influence is recognizable on the intonational and lexical levels in particular. An example is the verb *scasseren* 'to irritate, to tell lies', which is based on Italian *scassare* 'destroy' and used as in the following fragment: (Ramaekers 1998)

- (12) A: *Ik ga trouwen*  
 'I am going to marry'  
 B: *Scasseer niet!*  
 'don't tell lies!'

This variety is used by young people, both with an immigrant and non-immigrant background. According to the people who use it, *Citétaal* is not used in order to be tough and cool but just for fun and to create a sense of togetherness (Marzo 2005, 2008).

More to the west, a multi-ethnolectal youth variety has been studied in Antwerp, where Flemish is spoken as well. Jaspers (2008) reports on young immigrants of Moroccan descent who are aware of the stereotypical image of the Moroccan who has a poor command of Dutch, as in the following example (Jaspers 2008: 98-99).

- (13) Jamal: (...) *da's nie Marokkaans, die spreekt gewoon Vlaams maar met fouten d'r in*  
 '(...) that's not Moroccan, he just speaks Flemish but with mistakes in it'  
 Imran: *wij spreken zo nie*  
 'we don't talk like that'  
 Jamal: *(die spreekt) me fouten wij helemaal nie*  
 '(he speaks) with mistakes we don't talk at all'  
 Imran: *toen wij in 't lagere school zaten okee t-toen, toen misschien toen spraken wij toen spreken wij misschien zo van die rare, raar accent en dan onthouden die da (...)*  
 'when we were in primary school okay t-then, then maybe then we spoke then we spoke perhaps like a strange strange accent and then uh they remember that (...)'

They play with this belief and use the 'poor' accent in front of native speakers of Dutch but at the same they also use versions of the local Antwerp dialect to establish their identity. In his article, Jaspers (2008) also gives a critical discussion of the term ethnolect.

### 3.1.3. United States

Just like Jaspers, Eckert (2008) criticizes the use of the term ethnolect. She discusses the role of ethnicity in the construction of a peer-based social order among preadolescents in California. She shows that the Chicano

pattern does not simply index ethnicity, but indexes the place in the peer-based social order as well, regardless of ethnicity.

On the East coast, multi-ethnolects are found as well. We mention here the work by Cecilia Cutler (1999), who described the use of AAVE by a white boy in New York, who grew up in a white neighbourhood and had white friends. Black culture was supposed to represent a forbidden narrative and a symbol of rebellion.

In 2008, Cutler focused on immigrants from Eastern European countries in New York City, who strongly feel affiliated with hip-hop culture. This is expressed through stylization and use of characteristics from hip-hop culture which sets them apart from their compatriots who wish to identify themselves with the white mainstream language and culture. In the following example from Culter (2008: 15), an 18 year old Bulgarian who emigrated to the US at age eight uses characteristics of African American English:

- (14) *She is PISSIN' me off! All the shit she's sayin'. I [a:] feel like smackin' 'em. I'm like "Ø you stupid? Do you hear what you're (r-Ø) saying"? (...) She Ø mad racist! (...)*

In the example above, typical AAVE features are monophthongal /a/ in stead of /ay/; /r/-lessness, Ø-copula and the use of *mad* as an intensifier.

#### 3.1.4. Sweden

Ulla-Britt Kotsinas described Rinkeby-svenska in Sweden (Kotsinas 1988, 1992, 1998). This variety was observed in Rinkeby, a suburb of Stockholm, with a predominantly immigrant population. It is characterized by the use of a deviant grammar and pronunciation of Swedish and by the use of elements from minority languages in. Originally it was used by immigrant youth though it is spreading now; Kotsinas observed the phenomenon in Swedish used by second generation speakers, born in Sweden.

From the early eighties onwards, she has published about the use of elements from minority languages in majority varieties. Beside lexical elements, she also discusses the restricting and expanding characteristics on the grammatical level of Rinkeby-svenska. The most striking characteristic on the phonological level is prosody, "(...) which is often described as 'choppy' or 'uneven' by the speakers themselves. Exactly what it is that gives this impression cannot easily be analyzed. One explanation may be the non-occurrence or smaller frequency of certain reductions and assimilations common in native spoken Swedish, another may be slight changes of vowel length." (Kotsinas 1998: 136).

Like in other languages with a grammatical gender distinction such as Dutch, Norwegian and Danish, the common gender is often overgeneralized and also used for neuter words: *en bord* is used in stead of *ett bord* (a table). "Very frequent is the replacement of the inverted word order by a SV order in sentences with a topicalized short temporal or locative adverbial, e.g. *igår jag var sjuk* 'yesterday I was ill' (correct in English but not in Swedish)." (Kotsinas 1998: 137). These were examples of simplification, but there are also expanding processes such as the incorporation of new words that find their origins in immigrant languages. Examples are *chok* (çok) 'very, much' and *güsel* (güzel) 'nice' from Turkish or *tjora* 'steal' from Romany.

Research on Rinkeby-svenska, started by Kotsinas, has expanded to other geographical areas such as Göteborg and Malmö, and nowadays Swedish multi-ethnolects are studied, often in close cooperation with researchers from the other Scandinavian countries (Fraurud, 2004; Fraurud and Bijvoet, 2004; Bodén 2004).

### 3.1.5 Denmark

Pia Quist published work on multi-ethnolectal Copenhagen. In an article from 2008 she presents two perspectives: one is a variety approach, and the other one is a stylistic approach where the multi-ethnolect is seen as part of a range of stylistic repertoires in a local community of practice. Examples to illustrate the variety approach resemble the Swedish Rinkeby-svenska examples above, e.g., the SV order is used in sentences that require inversion in Danish (Quist 2008: 47):

- (15) *når man er i puberteten man tænker mere*  
'when one is in puberty one thinks more' [in stead of correct Danish 'thinks one']

According to Quist, only a holistic view in which a variationist and stylistic analysis are combined can help to understanding the multi-ethnolect.

The multi-ethnolect she describes is not to be seen as a secret code. The use of it is not restricted to speakers of Danish as a second language only; also native Danish adolescents use it.

Jørgensen published about multilingual youth groups (2001) and 'polylingualism' among urban youth in Denmark (Jørgensen 2008). Polylingualism is defined as follows:

Language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best as they can, regardless of how well they know the involved languages; this entails that the languages users may know – and use – the fact that some of the features are perceived by some speakers as not belonging together. (Jørgensen 2008: 143)

Pia Quist and Janus Møller (2003) have published an overview of the study of youth language in Denmark.

### 3.1.6 Norway

Svendsen and Røynealand (2008) describe characteristics of the multi-ethnolect used in Oslo, Norway, by migrants and indigenous Norwegians. They draw parallels with comparable phenomena in the other Scandinavian countries. Like Kotsinas (1998), they (and their informants) observe characteristics on the level of prosody, as quoted in example (16) below:

- (16) *eller så høres det ut som de går rundt og er forbanna konstant [...] blir så hardt [...] [tonen, trykket] helt feil'*  
'Or it sounds like they are constantly angry [...] it's so harsh [...] [tone, stress] all wrong'.

(Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 72). Like in the other Scandinavian languages, deviant syntactic patterns that are characteristic in interlanguages are also observed in language use by native speakers (Svendsen and Røyneland 2008: 75):

- (17) *hvis en av oss vinner vi deler halvparten*  
'if one of us wins we split half' [in stead of correct Norwegian *deler vi*]

Aarsaether (2010) observes that the majority of the multi-ethnolect speaking adolescents in his study carried out in Oslo consider the use of multiethnic youth language an optional linguistic practice. He observes that there seems to be a link between ethnicity and the use of multiethnic youth language but its use is not restricted to adolescents with a immigrant background. It is also used by adolescents with a Norwegian background (especially by girls who wish to create a contrast to the 'posh' West End of the city), to construct an identity as a young 'Eastender' in Oslo.

### 3.1.7. Germany

Several publications have been written on the emergence of multi-ethnolects in German cities. In all cases, Turkish plays a crucial role. We mention here the work by Dirim and Auer (2004) who describe young people in a major German city (Hamburg), who learn and use Turkish together with German. These young people do not necessarily have a Turkish background.

Imken Keim (2008) has written about 'power girls' in Mannheim, young female immigrants with a Turkish background, who revolted against both traditional Turkish and German norms. Beside a preference for certain clothes and behaviour, specific communicational patterns are part of the identity of power girls. Both Turkish and German play an essential role, which makes this more a code-mixed variety than a multi-ethnolect.

Arnulf Deppermann (2007) discusses *Türkendeutsch* or *Kanaksprak*, which is developed and used by second and third generation immigrants, predominantly male. What they have in common with Imken Keims power girls is that they rebel against German mainstream society and the values it represents and at the same time they refuse to continue their parents' life style as well. However, the variety they use is German in the first place, German is the main lexifier language. Originally, Kanake refers to the indigenous population of Polynesia, but in modern German the meaning has got a negative connotation ('nitwit'). Nowadays, *Kanake* is a pejorative term, used for people with foreign, southern looks. The difference with Turkish/German power girls is that *Kanaksprak* is not only used by speakers of Turkish origin, but also by Germans, Romanies, Moroccans, Egyptians, etc. Characteristics of *Kanaksprak* are found on all linguistic levels: phonetically, e.g., sometimes the umlaut is omitted as in *grunst* instead of *grünst* ('gets green'); /ch/ is coronalized and becomes /sch/: *Ich* is pronounced as /isch/ (also common in some non-standard varieties of German, i.e., in the Berlin area). Word order patterns are different in *Kanaksprak* as in the following example:

- (18) *hab isch gekauft neue BMW*  
Standard German: *ich habe einen neuen BMW gekauft*

'I bought a new BMW'

According to Androutopoulos (1998), adverbials *voll* 'full', *echt* 'real', *Scheiß* 'shit' etc. belong to German youth slang. They are also used in Kanaksprak. They use highly ritualized opening/greeting formulae such as *was geht – was geht* 'what's up?' (examples from Deppermann 2007: 329) Freidank (2001) is a parody on Kanaksprak.

### 3.1.8. The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the first serious article about an urban youth variety was published by René Appel (1999) where he showed that young people from several ethnic backgrounds use *Straattaal* 'street language'. The variety is characterized by the use of lexical elements from minority languages, and its use is restricted to informal communicational settings. There seems to be a strong preference for words from Surinamese (Sranan) in this Amsterdam variety. In his 1999 article he presented some frequently used *Straattaal* words with their translation, in a somewhat simplified version:

<i>Duku</i>	Money (Surinamese)
<i>Lusu</i>	Gone (Surinamese)
<i>Chick(ie)</i>	Girl (English)
<i>Oso</i>	House (Surinamese)
<i>Afoe</i>	(Last) part (Surinamese)
<i>Faja</i>	Fire (N), now meaning very, dirty (Adv/Adj)
<i>Fittie</i>	(Surinamese)
<i>Kill</i>	Fight (Surinamese)
<i>Fatoe</i>	Guy (Surinamese)
<i>Tata</i>	Joke Surinamese)
	Dutch person (Surinamese)

These are all common day-to-day words. They often have multiple meanings, such as *afoe*: a part, a half, a cigarette that has been smoked partly, the last part of a cigarette, or a puff.

In 2001, Nortier published a book on two varieties: Murks and *Straattaal*; the former being mainly an accent used in mono-ethnic Dutch speaking groups who imitate immigrant peers jokingly. The latter, characterized by non-native lexical elements, is predominantly used in multi-ethnic peer groups (Nortier 2001).

Nortier and Dorleijn (2008) found that in order to express identity, the use of a Moroccan accent is spreading among young people with not only Moroccan but also Dutch, Turkish, Greek and many more ethnic backgrounds. The authors showed that the accent is used whenever the speakers find it suitable to express a certain identity and that it can be stressed or exaggerated if necessary. A quote from Nortier and Dorleijn (2008: 138) underlines this statement:

- (19) *Nederlandse taal klinkt gewoon niet, dat Marokkaans accent zorgt ervoor dat het “rap-achtig” wordt net als in de Bronx NY*  
'Dutch just doesn't sound good, that Moroccan accent makes it sound more "rap-like" just like in the Bronx NY.'

The overgeneralization of common gender is characteristic of multi-ethnolects in the Netherlands. Leonie Cornips (2008) asks the question

whether this loss of grammatical gender distinction is the consequence of incomplete second language acquisition only, or an active act of identity. Cornips and de Rooij have published about a variety of Straattaal which is used among young people with a Surinamese background. In Cornips and de Rooij (2003), specific attention is paid to the overgeneralization of the common gender. In Cornips and Reizevoort (2006) interviews with some speakers of Straattaal are analyzed, about the use of Straattaal, among other things, as in the example:

- (20) (...) *Hij gaat dus geen Straattaal praten met zijn moeder snap je? Maar (...) als een vriend van hem vraagt **eej hoe was scoro vandaag?** Hoe was het op school ja? Dan zegt ie **nooooh scoro was weri man** (...)*  
 ‘(...) So he is not going to talk Straattaal with his mother you see? But (...) if a friend of his asks **eej hoe was scoro vandaag?** How was school today yeah? Then he says **nooooh scoro was weri man (...)**’  
 (school was tough, man)

Ariën van Wijngaarden and Hanke van Buren currently carry out a project in which the use of Dutch by Turkish and Moroccan teenagers is investigated (van Wijngaarden 2008). The study aims to explore the roots of ethnolects, which result from the interaction between second language acquisition, multilingual language use, and ingroup/outgroup dynamics in urban settings. One of the research questions is whether there is any evidence of spread of ethnic varieties to peers outside of the ethnic group? If so, do ‘uniquely’ ethnolectal traits spread to peers outside the ethnic networks merely because of their ‘covert prestige’ or also (rather) because they represent less marked options? An example of the type of phenomenon that is studied, is given below:

In standard Dutch, pronouns preceded by a preposition normally refer to an animate object, as in (21) and (22). To refer to inanimate objects, the neuter pronoun (e.g. *het*) is replaced by an R-word like *er*, as in (24). The resulting combination (e.g. *ervan*) is traditionally called *pronominal adverb*:

- (21) *Jan houdt van **hem**.* [masc, + animate]  
 ‘Jan loves him.’
- (22) *Jan houdt van **haar**.* [fem, + animate]  
 ‘Jan loves her.’
- (23) \**Jan houdt van **het**.* [neut, - animate]  
 ‘Jan likes it.’
- (24) *Jan houdt **ervan**.*  
 ‘Jan likes it.’

Although *ervan* in (24) is written as one word, pronominal adverbs are frequently split up, as in (25):

- (25) *Jan houdt **er niet van**.*  
 ‘Jan doesn’t like it.’

In the corpus, several instances of non-standard like use of pronouns in prepositional phrases have been found. These include (a) the omission of *er*, (b) inanimate pronouns preceded by prepositions and (c) deviations from

standard Dutch with respect to splitting up pronominal adverbs. In the project, the possible ‘roots’ of these phenomena will be examined, including (but not necessarily limited to) substrates, second language acquisition and surrounding local non-standard varieties of Dutch.

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. There is even a tv commercial in which two grey-haired grandmothers are talking over a cup of coffee. They use Straattaal which is totally unexpected for grandmothers, just like the topic of their conversation (driving too fast on a motor cycle)<sup>6</sup>. 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 (November, 2010).<sup>7</sup>

### 3.1.9 France

With respect to Verlan in the suburbs of the major French cities, we refer to work by Meredith Doran (2000, 2010), who described the use and structure of this variety of French in which characteristically words are used backwards, among other things. The word Verlan itself is an inversion of *l’envers*, ‘backward’. Lexical elements are borrowed from argot, Romani and other minority languages spoken in France. Other publications on Verlan are, among others: Lefkowitz (1989; 1991); Sherzer (1976); Dubois et al. (1970).

Verlan emerged among immigrant youth but it is spreading rapidly through a broader group of young people all over the country. It has the characteristic of a secret language and its social status is low. Below is a poem in Verlan<sup>8</sup> (left column), an explanation of the Verlan forms (center) and a rough translation into English (right column):

J'neco ap La Marseillaise	J'neco ap = je ne connais pas la Marseillaise = French national anthem	‘I don’t know La Marseillaise
Mais c’est ici que je mange mes fraises		But I belong here
Au deblé, j’suis céfran	deblé = bled céfran = français	At home I am French
Et j’suis robeu en cefran	robeu = beur (Verlan for arabe) cefran = France	And here I am an Arab
Kéblo entre ici et là-bas	kéblo = bloqué	Blocked between here and there
Des fois j’ai envie de me séca	séca = cassé (ici j’ai envie de partir)	Sometimes I feel like leaving
Mais c’est près d’Paris qu’j’ai grandi		But I grew up near Paris
Et l’Algérie j’l’ai tchav’ quand j’étais p’tit	tchav’ = left (Romani)	And I left Algeria when I was small

Alors où j'me vétrou?	vétrou = trouve	So where do I find myself?
J'me sens perdu, c'est chelou	chelou = louche	I feel lost, it is bizarre
Fierté d'être un Parisien	un djéz = un Algérien	Proud of being an Algerian
Tous les soirs, c'est Allah que je prie.		Every night I pray to Allah.'

### 3.1.10. Africa

African cities are melting pots of cultures and ethnicities where a large variety of new urban varieties and multiethnolects have seen (and will see) the light. Here, we mention three studies: Slabbert (1994); Goyvaerts (1988) and Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997).

Slabbert (1994) describes the situation in Johannesburg where Tsotsitaal is spoken. This variety is originally used by Afrikaans speaking Tswana. Tsotsitaal was used as a secret language used by thieves and street gangs. Nowadays it is disappearing in favour of Isicamto, which in its turn is associated with a gang with a Zulu background. It has traces from Zulu, English, and a range of other languages. Isicamto started out as an urban youth language but is spreading now to other groups as well. In the example, Afrikaans, English and Zulu are recognizable:

- (26) *If u-roof-a i-bank ya-se-lokishi-ni u-ya-tabalaza?*  
 'If you rob a bank in the townships, is that fighting for survival?'

The word *roof* has roots in Afrikaans (Dutch); *bank* in English; *lokishi* is from English location and *tabalaza* has its origins in Zulu (*zabalaza* 'struggle').

Goyvaerts (1988) wrote about the use of Indoubil in the major cities in Zaire, Indoubil emerged in the sixties in Kinshasa as a mix of Lingala, French and other European languages. In the beginning it was associated with criminal practices and drugs, later it developed into a more general youth variety. Musicians, traders and migrants helped spreading it to other parts of the country, where Swahili became the basis, in stead of Lingala. Indoubil was only used among socially equal people, never in front of strangers, elderly people or superiors. It was used in places where many ethnic groups gather, the more heterogeneous, the better the chances for Indoubil to be used. Indoubil was used to bridge ethnic gaps. Nowadays, Indoubil is being replaced by a newer version called Lingala ya Bayankee. The function is more or less equal to the function of Indoubil. In the following example from Indoubil, elements from French can be traced (no gloss given by Goyvaerts):

- (27) *minasikia niko kao. nigo omar kusumba finite na nigo kulakse mu bakotelete ya kartum*  
 'I'm feeling tired I'm on my way to the market to buy some cigarettes and then I'm going to walk around for a while in the outskirts of town.'

*Kao* is derived from French K.O.; *omar* from *au marché* 'at the market'; *finite* from *fini* 'finished' and *bakotelete* from French *côtelette*, *côte*, 'side', 'outskirt'.

Abdulaziz and Osinde (197) described the situation in Kenya. In the Eastern part of the country, Sheng is used among young people, a mix of Swahili, English and some other local languages. Sheng started out in Nairobi, about 30 years ago, and the first speakers were teenagers whose behaviour was so deviant that they were not accepted by the mainstream society. It was a typical secret ingroup language, not understandable for outsiders. Nowadays it has spread to other school youth in the east as a means to distinguish themselves. English and some French are recognizable in the example:

- (28) *See you akina pass for mwa morrows in your wheels (...)*  
'Come for me tomorrow in your car'

*Mwa* is related to French *moi* 'me, my'; *morrows* is from 'tomorrow' and *wheels* is a pars pro toto for car.

Engsh is the youth variety of the posh areas in Nairobi. The name Engsh is derived from Sheng by inversion. The main basis is English, beside other languages such as Swahili and other local languages. Engsh is associated with young well-to-do European immigrants, rich South-Africans and Asians, wearing fashionable clothes, going to discos, who can afford to smoke and drink. The speakers of Sheng are from lower social classes and find Engsh speakers not very attractive imitators. Both varieties are in a constant state of change. (Examples from African multi-ethnolects: Maarten Mous, personal communication)

### 3.1.11. Indonesia

Nancy Smith-Hefner (2007) described the use of bahasa (language) Gaul in Jakarta, Indonesia. Originally, Gaul belonged to marginals and delinquents, but nowadays Gaul is more positively associated with social and economic upward mobility and an internationally oriented youth culture. Being Gaul goes hand in hand with the use of certain (often English) words. Someone who doesn't use those words cannot be considered Gaul. Gaul is not only used in in-group situations but also with adults or other people who are not assumed to share the same youth values. According to the author (Smith-Hefner 2007: 191),

(...) Gaul style is fast, fluent and self-confident. It is achieved through prosody, intonation and gesture as well as pragmatics. *Kacihaan deh lho* 'too bad/what a pity' is said with a lispy, singsong falling/rising intonation and accompanied by an S-like movement traced in the air with the index-finger moving downwards. The response, *biarin* 'leave it/whatever', is accompanied by a similar gesture, but moving upward. So what *gitu lho* 'who cares' and *Please deh*, want to know 'come on tell me', are also pronounced with a characteristically playful prosody, often accompanied by a shrug or laughter.

A variety spoken in Jakarta in the past was bahasa Prokem (Chambert-Loir 1984). Contrary to Gaul, Prokem was an argot (a thieves' slang) and used to have strong negative connotations. It consisted of a few hundred words, the grammar and the rest of the vocabulary was Jakarta Indonesian. These words were not new words but duplicates of already existing words. One of the characteristics was that existing words were played with, they were turned round, or *-ok-* was inserted in the middle of existing words. Thus

*burung* 'bird' became *rubung* and the word *prokem* was derived from *preman*, which in its turn derived from Dutch *vrijman* 'free man'. According to the author, Prokem was not a youth language in itself but served as one of its many sources.

### 3.1.12. *Hong Kong*

Rodney Hale Jones (2008) explores the construction of social meaning among skateboarders in Hong Kong as an example of the ways global and local discourses interact in contemporary youth cultures. There are three aspects of Hong Kong skateboarders' discourse. The first is the interaction between global and local flows of discourse, not just in the language skaters use, but also in multimodal forms of the construction of meaning like music, fashion, skateboard stickers, and of course, the physical performance of skating itself. The second is the way various social groups interact around skateboarding in Hong Kong, where a diversity of individuals come together in order to produce a fertile environment for 'language crossing'. Finally, it focuses on the way skateboarders in Hong Kong interact with their physical environment, the compositional and representational mode of skateboarding in which participants strategically appropriate aspects of time and space from their urban surroundings and impose their own socio-spatial rhythms upon them, a process of using time and space to both 're-write' the city and to compose their own socio-cultural identities within it.

## 3.2. Discussion

### 3.2.1. *Spread*

In some of the studies mentioned above, a variety that started out as a youth language, has spread to other social and age groups as well. Isicanto in Johannesburg is an example, and Verlan in France is also spreading outside the suburbs where it was spoken originally. As far as we know, these varieties have not developed into native languages. They still fulfill a role in certain domains and circumstances, and they are not acquired as a first language by children. Multi-ethnolects do not necessarily spread outside the group where they were established, and varieties such as Verlan and Isicanto seem to be rather exceptional in that sense. Towards the end of this chapter we will return to the question whether there are more differences or similarities between multi-ethnolects or multi-ethnolects on the one hand, and other contact languages and varieties such as pidgins, creoles, mixed languages, mixed codes and interlanguages on the other hand.

### 3.2.2. *Quantitative vs. Qualitative approaches*

Most older studies discussed here have used ethnographic and qualitative methods. In this field, large quantitative studies are exceptional. However, the interest in the field is increasing, and therefore the money available for larger projects, too. There are some larger quantitative studies currently being carried out, such as the one in Amsterdam/Nijmegen (Netherlands) and in several cities in the Scandinavian countries.

The studies by Kerswill et al (2008) in the UK and the Roots of Ethnolects-project that is currently being carried out by Ariën van Wijngaarden en Hanke van Buren in the Netherlands (van Wijngaarden 2008), are typical exponents of the variationist tradition. In their work, structural analyses are more foregrounded than in work by other researchers. Of course, this doesn't mean that they close their eyes for identity matters, which in turn are central in other studies. They use quantitative methods to collect and analyze their data.

The project that is carried out in Oslo is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. In their study, the Norwegian researchers pay attention to both the (objective) distribution of linguistic features and the interpretation of (subjective) interviews about style and social categories in a broader sense than merely linguistic features.

One of the characteristics of multi-ethnolects is that they are subject to rapid change. What is fashionable this year or this month, may be outdated next year or next month. If the aim of a study is to describe the situation, it may have changed before the data are analyzed. There is a danger in quantitative studies in that respect: they are time-consuming. But if the aim is to find underlying linguistic mechanisms leading to the emergence of new varieties, the situation might be different.

We have noticed another danger which we, however, do not necessarily associate with a quantitative approach: by establishing exactly what a certain multi-ethnolect is, researchers actively create a standard that would not always have occurred in the natural situation. An example is Murks, in the Netherlands. A small group of (white) teenagers in the city of Utrecht used a non-native accent in informal in-group situations. Some of them called it Murks. For most of them, however, it did not have a name. After the publication of Nortier (2001) the label Murks spread and started to get used by people using the variety themselves. And even in 2009, Nortier was approached by the impresario of two well-known rappers, who said that the rappers would not use any Murks (which, they thought erroneously, was suggested by the author). Murks has acquired a sort of emblematic status, which it never had in the time that it was described for the first time.

Although most studies on multi-ethnolects are qualitative and focused on identity matters, we want to ask the question here whether the research on multi-ethnolects should be based on qualitative ethnographic in-depth studies or whether a combination with a more quantitative approach would give more insight. In the studies cited above, some linguistic features are quantified, but other relevant aspects would also benefit from a more 'statistical' approach. For example, how widespread is the use of multi-ethnolects? How many members of a certain age group within a certain geographic area use the multi-ethnolect, how many are aware of its mere existence? What is the (numerical) relation between attitude and actual use of a multi-ethnolect? What is the relation between membership of a certain subculture and the use of a multi-ethnolect? For example, in a study on the mixing of languages and cultures in Utrecht, carried out between 1998 and 2002 (Bennis et al. 2002) it was found that heavy-metal fans are less inclined to use a multi-ethnolect than rappers and hip-hoppers. We don't know whether this is true for all members of these subgroups and how significant such memberships are in relation to the variety used.

### 3.2.3. *Other questions*

Some other questions that could be asked actually have been dealt with in the studies mentioned above. These questions have to do with gender (are the users of multi-ethnolects boys or girls? how is the distribution?), with social class and educational background. Such questions can be answered by conducting in-depth interviews but a more survey-like method may throw a new light on the phenomenon.

A recurrent question in the studies above has to do with standardization. For the outside world, multi-ethnolects are ways of speaking that belong to 'the other'. A multi-ethnolect is often thought of as a separate language that can be learned: You speak it or you don't speak it. But in fact, the majority of multi-ethnolects should be considered as a color or a flavor on top of a well-established base language. There is no such thing as a separate grammar, or a lexicon. Where does a multi-ethnolect begin? Is the use of a single word in a longer conversational setting enough to identify as a speaker of a multi-ethnolect? Or should multi-ethnolectal words or features be used in every sentence? In the article about Bahasa Gaul (Smith-Hefner) it was mentioned that for a speaker a certain number of Gaul elements have to be used and recognized in order to be identified as a Gaul speaker. How many features of a specific multi-ethnolect style cluster must speech contain in order to be identified as 'multi-ethnolect'?

The studies presented above are all concerned with oral language use. Multi-ethnolects in written form are not rare either (cf. Androutsopoulos 2006, among others) Dorleijn and Nortier (2009) have reported on written (multi-) ethnolects in Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch bilingual Internet forum sites, as well.

### 3.3. Are multi-ethnolects urban phenomena?

The studies on multi-ethnolects are all carried out in urban contexts. Above, in section (..) we discussed why it is less obvious to find multi-ethnolects in rural areas (though they may be not entirely absent). Urbanization is a global tendency. In cities worldwide people live close to each other, old physical ethnic boundaries may vanish and new boundaries emerge, along other than ethnic lines, based on, e.g., social class. Therefore, members of different ethnic groups may get in touch with each other, leading to all sorts of mixing, of which language is one. Therefore, the presence of members with different ethnic backgrounds, and the fact that they need to share the same physical space, distinguishes urban from rural areas, which are therefore more favorable for multi-ethnolects to develop.

There are places outside the cities where new ethnolects might develop, such as the Dutch centers where asylum seekers and refugees live before they can get hold of a residence permit, or are sent back to their country of origin. In these centers, up to a few hundred people stay between a few months and some years. We are not aware of any study where the emergence of typical asylum seekers varieties of Dutch or other varieties is described. Moreover, we are not sure whether such varieties would exist at all, since proficiency in Dutch is low and the length of stay is too short for a new variety to develop. After their stay in such centers, people usually don't stay around but move to other parts of the country, depending on available work and housing.

Steurjestaal takes an exceptional position. It arose in a place that superficially has a lot in common with the asylum seekers' centers in the Netherlands. This mixed language arose in an orphanage on the island of

Java, Indonesia which was founded by 'Pa' van der Steur in 1885. The orphans were called *Steurtjes* 'little Steurs'. Hence the name Steurtjestaal 'Steurtjes language'. They would stay in the orphanage for several years, five hundred at a time. Steurtjestaal developed within a few years after the founding of the orphanage. According to Hadewych van Rheeden, who investigated Steurtjestaal, newly arrived orphans from all over Indonesia had to learn Steurtjestaal as soon as possible in order to be accepted as group members (van Rheeden 1998). The orphans often had indigenous mothers who were abandoned by their partners, Dutch militaries.

Although both the orphanage and the Dutch asylum seekers' centers are places where people from a diversity of backgrounds live together for some time, this does not necessarily mean that a new language will emerge. The refugees don't have as much in common as the orphans in the orphanage, who shared a common background (Indonesian mothers, Dutch fathers) and language: all orphans would speak some form of Malay, among other languages.

#### **4. The social and linguistic positioning of multi-ethnolects - a taxonomy of contact varieties**

Finally, we want to address the question whether it is justified to position multi-ethnolects between other forms of contact languages and varieties from both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. In some respects, there are similarities with other, longer established contact phenomena such as creoles and pidgins. In other perspectives, multi-ethnolects don't fit in. We will discuss this in more detail now. We want to stress that this discussion is a first attempt to include multi-ethnolects in a range of contact varieties and we hope that this -at its best- will trigger more discussion. In what follows, we will restrict ourselves to pidgins and creoles, mixed languages, interlanguages and code-mixed varieties, since they seem to have most in common with multi-ethnolects, at first glance.

Multi-ethnolects don't emerge from any form of communicative need, and in that sense they differ from pidgins and creoles. In the same vein, multi-ethnolects differ from interlanguages that are used by people who otherwise can't make themselves understood. The members of ethnic groups who use a multi-ethnolect don't need it for their daily communication. After all, most multi-ethnolects are forms of a base language. However, they share this characteristic with mixed languages such as *Media Lengua*, since they both emerged from a desire of group members to express an identity to distinguish themselves from others. Code-mixing or code-switching (we won't go into the difference here) takes a middle position. It is not used out of communicative need. Sometimes bilinguals switch codes in order to distinguish themselves from other speakers. In those cases, code-switching is marked. In unmarked cases, code-switching or mixing is part of the normal communicational patterns of a speech community (Myers-Scotton 1993).

Some contact languages are typically in-group phenomena and others are used between groups. Pidgins and interlanguages are used between members of different groups who otherwise are not able to communicate. Of course, this is strongly related to the reason why they emerged at all. If they developed out of a need to communicate with other groups, they will be used between groups. If they were born out of identity needs, and the wish to be distinguished from others, the emerging variety is used within

the group, ‘against’ outsiders. Mixed languages, multi-ethnolects and code-mixed varieties are typically ingroup phenomena.

Most types of contact languages are difficult to discuss in terms of standardization. Compared to long-established official languages such as English or Portuguese, they allow a high degree of variation. Relative to each other, however, there are interesting differences. The term conventionalization, rather than standardization, is appropriate here, since there may be no standard but at least some consensus about what belongs to a variety and what does not. Compared to pidgins, creoles are much more conventionalized, and the degree of conventionalization should be seen as a continuum rather than an absolute presence or absence of conventionalization. On this scale, creoles are more conventionalized than pidgins, although there are nuances (cf chapter xxx and xxx, this volume). Although both mixed languages and code-mixed varieties are based on two languages (usually), the former are strongly conventionalized and the latter are not. The same is true for interlanguages, in which structural belonging to one or the other language may differ from speaker to speaker, synchronically, but diachronically as well. In that sense, multi-ethnolects have more in common with code-mixed varieties than with mixed languages or interlanguages.

Of all contact languages mentioned here, only creoles and mixed languages can be native languages, although there are exceptions to this rule. Multi-ethnolects are based on, or even forms of established languages that are mother tongues, though not necessarily for all speakers. In the African context, however, there are multi-ethnolects that have become native languages (e.g., Sheng) and we could ask ourselves whether they still should be called multi-ethnolects or perhaps rather mixed languages or other varieties. Bakker and Matras (2003) have described mixed languages that resemble the multi-ethnolects we have presented above. Instead of distinct categories, it would perhaps be better to assume a continuum where it is possible to distinguish prototypical mixed languages, multi-ethnolects etc., as Bakker and Matras suggested in the introductory chapter of their book from 2003. It is exactly the status of this type of criteria we want to question here. Someone in the Netherlands, e.g., may have learned Berber as a first language, acquired Dutch as a second language, and in addition use a multi-ethnolect based on Dutch. Interlanguages are never first languages, per definition. In code-mixing, usually one of the two languages involved is the native language.

The question whether multi-ethnolects can be distinguished from other contact languages on the basis of the number of languages they are built on, is not to be answered with a simple yes or no. Creoles and pidgins don’t necessarily have a fixed number of base languages, i.e. languages they are directly derived from. For mixed languages, it is more clear, though exceptions do occur: the most prototypical mixed languages are mainly built on two ‘parent’ languages, where one usually provides more lexical and the other more grammatical material. Code-mixed varieties and interlanguages are built on two languages though exceptions are possible here, too. Multi-ethnolects as we know them from Western Europe and North-America have one strong base language and an unspecified number of other languages that provide some lexical elements, some phonological and sometimes some grammatical features.

Another dimension on which multi-ethnolects can be related to other contact phenomena, is the function of the varieties. Most pidgins are functionally restricted, and so are multi-ethnolects. They are only used in

specific situations, under specific circumstances. In formal situations or, e.g., in teacher-pupil communication, multi-ethnolects cannot be used, since they are typical low-status in-group varieties. Communication between teachers and pupils are instances of more formal between-group encounters. Other contact varieties such as mixed languages are also in-group varieties but they can be acquired as first languages. People who use mixed languages can be in touch with each other under all circumstances, theoretically, at home, at work, during leisure time, thus using their language for all possible functions. Multi-ethnolects only exist when peers are together, and not when individuals are at home with their families, or in class, for example. Code-mixing may be used without any functional restriction, depending on the type of code-switching (marked versus unmarked) and the degree of conventionalization (and of course the obvious restriction of the interlocutor, who needs to be familiar with the mixed code and/or the languages that contribute to it). Interlanguages are used without restrictions, except on the level of proficiency. For the users of interlanguages there is no other possibility, which brings us to one of the earlier mentioned core differences between contact varieties. For some of them it can be stated that they are the only available means of communication. It seems that the most important dichotomy in contact varieties is exactly along this line of communicative vs. social need.

The similarities and differences between some contact varieties as they are discussed here are summarized in the table below. Along some lines, multi-ethnolects shares characteristics with pidgins, in other respects they have more in common with mixed languages, code-mixed varieties or interlanguages. Surprisingly, code-mixed varieties and multi-ethnolects share most characteristics.

There are more possible characteristics or parameters than we chose to use in the table below. The discussion so far seems to justify the positioning of multi-ethnolects as contact varieties.

*Table 1:* A comparison between six contact varieties

Insert Table 1

## **5. Conclusion**

Multi-ethnolects share a number of characteristics with some contact varieties, but differ most conspicuously from some others, in that they are not yet a conventionalized variety and mostly ephemeral. As can be inferred from the literature discussed above, though, some multi-ethnolects are quite longstanding and even spreading outside the original group, such as some African varieties and French suburban Verlan. Others may vanish along with changing social circumstances, e.g. changing migration patterns, etc. As we observed above, one characteristic of a multi-ethnolects is, that it contains linguistic elements from migrant languages from socially stigmatized communities (and is often a stigmatized linguistic style itself). As the pertinent groups merge with society and go into the process of social mobility, the multi-ethnolect will probably die out. This was the case with the use of a Surinamese ethnolect which was highly stigmatized (and

therefore had strong covert prestige) in the Netherlands, in the seventies of the last century. Multi-ethnolects constitute, however, a locus where language contact can be caught, as it were, 'red handed', and may therefore shed light on which social, communicative, interactional patterns and processes are at work in the creation of contact varieties.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Normal type is Dutch, Italics is Turkish and boldface is (Moroccan) Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwjEAQBKzkl>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq9q2SMnKGO>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpPb4Uj3v5c> (at 3 minutes)

<sup>5</sup> This informant was a member of the Moroccan community in Rotterdam, spent a lot of time outside with his friends and at the same time he held an academic grade in Arabic. This combination made that he was able to reflect on linguistic matters that he might not have been aware of without his academic background.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp5R7Dx6krU>

<sup>7</sup> <https://veiligbetalen.gebarentrum.nl/abowoordenboekflv2.asp>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.didaweb.net/mediatori/articolo.php?id\\_vol=1354](http://www.didaweb.net/mediatori/articolo.php?id_vol=1354)