'Omg zo fashionably english'

Codeswitching to English as an identity practice in the chatspeak of Dutch young gay men

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Abstract

Although the influence of English on Dutch is mainly visible in a large number of lexical borrowings (De Decker & Vandekerckhove, 2012; Berteloot & Van der Sijs, 2002), a newly compiled corpus of chat conversations between Dutch young adults shows that some native speakers of Dutch codeswitch to English in their Dutch conversations and use English creatively. In this study this is explained as an identity practice for young gay men in a community of practice where non-heteronormative gay-celebratory identities are constructed, due to the connotations of English with the (always English-speaking) entertainment in which these speakers can find multidimensional, young, and 'cool' gay role models.

Keywords: Codeswitching, computer-mediated communication, Dutch, gay identity, identity construction, language and identity

1   Introduction*

Although it is often supposed that English strongly influences computer-mediated communication in other languages (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 245), De Decker & Vandekerckhove (2012, p. 326) show that the amount of English in the chatspeak of a group of Flemish adolescents is limited mostly to borrowings and short codeswitches. In their corpus, they found that 13.3 per cent of the chat messages included at least one English word. However, only 3.3 per cent of the so-called 'intentional'[1] code-switches were multi-word switches, most of which were strongly idiomatic and

rarely consisted of more than four English words (De Decker & Vandekerckhove 2012, p. 327).

This infrequent use of creative English in a vernacular European language is a counterargument against fears of an English-only Europe (Phillipson, 2003), and the fear of the *verengelsing* ('anglicization') of Dutch, as is expressed in the public debate in newspapers and magazines, and in the foundation of special organizations against anglicization, such as the *stichting Nederlands* ('Dutch language foundation'), the *Ampzing Genootschap* ('Ampzing Society'), and the *Stichting Taalverdediging* ('Language Defence Foundation').[2] Instead it supports Mufwene's (2010, p. 48 et seq.) argument that in Europe the acquisition of English serves to communicate with foreign markets and in touristic places, and not to replace the vernacular language.

Edwards (2016) however points out that, although far from replacing Dutch as the vernacular language of the Netherlands, English is more than just a tool to communicate with foreigners, since it has internal prestige within the country too, and is used creatively, expressively, and emotively. She even suggests that in the Netherlands, English is used to construct certain subculture identities (e.g. cosmopolitan, intellectual, hip-hop, or gaming identities). In other words, it seems plausible that there are communities in the Netherlands where the use of English is much more elaborate than in De Decker and Vandekerckhove's (2012) corpus.

This is what one of the authors of the present paper found in his own chat conversations. In some of his conversations, codeswitching regularly occurred on a much more elaborate level, with longer codeswitches and often whole sentences in English. It seems that, as Edwards (2016) suggests, on a micro level, certain groups of speakers of Dutch use English as one of the languages of communication, not only in their professional or academic lives, but also privately in informal conversation. In the present paper, we explore why and how this phenomenon has come about in one specific community of practice.

We describe the chat conversations of young gay men who belonged to a community of practice which constructed a non-heteronormative 'cool' gay identity. We compare these to the chat conversations between one of the members of this community of practice and other people from his wider social network. In the community of practice of these young gay men elaborate multi-word codeswitches occurred frequently. We account for these codeswitches as an identity practice through which members make use of the positive connotations of English and its connection to positive gay role models. In Section 2, we discuss how language and iden-

tity research (Bucholtz, 1999a; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and multiple, differing approaches to codeswitching (Myers-Scotton, 1993a; Auer, 1998; Clyne, 2003) can account for the elaborate codeswitches in the described group of speakers of Dutch. In Section 3, we present a quantitative analysis of the chat conversations in a newly compiled corpus, in order to demonstrate the frequency of multi-word codeswitches in conversations between young gay men in this community of practice. In Section 4, we demonstrate how the positive gayness-related connotations of English are reflected in the chat conversations of members of the community of practice, and in Section 5, we demonstrate how multi-word codeswitches are used in conversation in order to make use of these connotations of English.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Identity practices and indexicality

The chat users in the present research who use multi-word codeswitches are all gay men. At first sight, a potential explanatory factor for their linguistic behaviour might therefore be their sexuality. However, as Eckert (2012) points out in her discussion of three waves of variation studies, it is unlikely that linguistic behaviour would be directly caused by membership of a social (or even biological) category. In her view, social categories are not stable, but are established through (linguistic) practices. Speakers make stylistic choices through which they position themselves in the social landscape, thus constructing their identities. Famously, Mary Bucholtz (1996, 1999a) showed these 'identities' within a group of nerd girls at a Californian high school: these girls constructed an identity of intelligence by using (hyper)correct forms (amongst others). At the same time, these forms indicate membership of a social group and are at the basis of the group and its identity. The use of the forms therefore is a practice that is used by the social group to distinguish itself from other groups, in the same way that other social practices such as ways of dressing can be used by social groups to distinguish themselves from other groups.

It is crucial to the concept of linguistic identity practices that language variants have an indexical value (Silverstein, 2003), i.e. a non-denotational, social meaning. Linguistic features with such indexical value, as Eckert (2012) argues, can also be used by speakers who are not members of the social groups in question, either to mock those social groups, or to use them to associate one's own identity with the indexical meaning of the linguistic features of the social group in question. Ronkin & Karn (1999), for

example, show white Americans mocking AAVE, and Jaspers (2006) describes Moroccan Belgians mocking Standard Dutch. Cutler (1999) and Bucholtz (1999b) discuss white boys using AAVE to construct a masculine identity, and Barett (1998) shows African-American drag queens using stereotypical white women's language to construct femininity. Similarly, it would be possible for Dutch speakers, who associate English with internationality, to use English borrowings to construct an international identity, or as we aim to demonstrate in this article, for Dutch speakers who associate English with gay role models in entertainment to construct a non-heteronormatively 'cool' gay identity.

Identity practices are often situated in 'communities of practice' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992) in academic debate (cf. Bucholtz, 1999a; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This term, originating from the sociologists Lave & Wenger (1991, p. 98) describes the situation in which learning processes take place: a 'system of activities', where its participants share an understanding of its meaning. More concretely, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992, p. 95) describe communities of practice as groups of people who share practices (e.g. ways of talking, ways of dressing, power relations, beliefs, and values) as their members are engaged in a shared endeavour.

In practice, these are mostly tightly knit groups, or 'dense social networks' (Milroy, 1980), such as sports teams, colleagues, or friend groups in high school (cf. Bucholtz, 1999b). However, being in a less dense social network does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to still have a shared endeavour and share the same (linguistic) practices. As we argue in Section 3 the notion of the community of practice proves valuable to demarcate the group of young gay men who codeswitch to English in their chatspeak, even if they are not necessarily a very tightly knit group.

Language and identity research, particularly from the perspective of communities of practice is still a relatively underexplored area of Dutch sociolinguistics, although it has proven to be an effective means of explaining variation. For instance, Cornips (2008) shines a different light on the loss of grammatical gender in certain Dutch ethnolects, which cannot only be attributed to L2 acquisition effects, as she demonstrates its use as an act of identity, serving as an ethnic marker. Similarly, Cornips et al. (2012) are able to explain the use of periphrastic *doen* ('do') in a carnival song as a means of creating local identities. However, language and identity research has not yet been used to explain phenomena of anglicization in Dutch, such as the rise of borrowings (cf. Claus & Taeldeman, 1989) or the use of English in different linguistic domains in the Netherlands (cf. Gerritsen, 1996; Berteloot & Van der Sijs, 2002). Edwards (2016, p. 66, 192) does sug-

gest that the use of English by Dutch speakers can function to construct subculture identities, but this suggestion is not supported by any research. The present paper, however, could provide such support.

The young gay men in our study likely have strong reasons to use English for self-identification. In the heteronormative society that they live in, these speakers face social sanctions (Motschenbacher, 2011, p. 156; see also Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2013, on the Dutch situation) for not fitting the 'heterosexual matrix': the combination of male sex, masculine gender practice, and desiring women, which is normatively favoured and perceived as natural in society (Butler, 1999, p. 194).

As a result of heteronormativity gay people in Dutch entertainment usually play marginal roles, e.g. the role of fashion or make-up guru (e.g. Bastiaan van Schaik, Maik de Boer, Mari van der Ven), the role of gossip queen (e.g. Albert Verlinde), or the role of 'gay best friend' that joins heterosexual women on shopping trips (e.g. Alex Klaassen's character in *Gooische Vrouwen*). There are some gay men who fulfil less marginal roles in entertainment (e.g. Paul de Leeuw, Gerard Joling, and Gordon as the presenters of their own shows), but they, like the other examples above, are always older men. For the young gay men who are studied in our research these are unlikely role models to identify with.

Anglo-American entertainment, however, does offer gay role models who are closer in age. In English spoken films and series, such as the *Eating Out* films and the series *Queer as Folk* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and on YouTube, by YouTubers like Tyler Oakley and Troye Sivan, homosexuality and non-conformity to heteronormative behaviour is not only shown but also celebrated by young, attractive, and intelligent gays.[3] These men are more likely to function as role models than their Dutch counterparts. Even American pop artists such as Lady Gaga can function as role models as they are emphatically in favour of gay rights and non-normative gender expression although they are not gay men themselves. If then one of the young gay men in this study wants to indicate (desired) membership of this broader gay-celebratory community with a linguistic practice, it is most likely going to be by means of using English. It goes without saying that the fact that this community speaks an entirely different language than the Dutch speakers in question is the most salient linguistic feature of that community.

This does not necessarily mean that all (young) Dutch gay men use English, or multi-word codeswitches to English as an identity practice. As Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) point out, the practices of a community of practice are as much a product of the community of practice as they are

constitutive of that community. If either constructing a positive, or gay-celebratory identity is not one of the practices of someone's friend circles, or the use of elaborate codeswitches to English is not, such linguistic behaviour might not be understood or answered, and therefore not be continued. Motschenbacher (2011, p. 162) mentions this as one of the important features of 'homosexual language' (i.e. language that is used to construct a gay identity) pointing out that in order to construct a gay identity a linguistic practice needs to be recognized, understood, and answered.

Therefore we hypothesize that in the corpus of instant messaging conversations (see Section 3.1) elaborate codeswitches are used as an identity practice to construct a non-heteronormatively 'cool' gay identity, which is evidenced as follows: elaborate codeswitches occur in the conversations between young gay men belonging to a shared community of practice in which members construct a gay identity (see Section 3). For them English appears to have a positive indexical value connected to gay identity (see Section 4).

2.2   Approaches to codeswitching

The concept of indexical value (Silverstein, 2003) has similarities with the Markedness Model for codeswitching presented by Myers-Scotton (1993a). She argues that languages, or codes, have indexical meaning, as they are indexical for the different rights and obligations of a conversation (Myers-Scotton, 1998). For example, in her analysis of codeswitching in a conversation in Nairobi, the use of the lingua franca Swahili indicates a neutral set of rights and obligations, whereas using Luyia, which is only spoken by speakers from the same ethnic background, indicates that the rights and obligations of a conversation between 'ethnic brethren' are in place (Myers-Scotton, 1993a, p. 87). Switching from Swahili to Luyia then is marked and shows that a speaker attempts to reduce the social distance between themselves and the hearer.

However, in the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 1993a) codeswitching back and forth need not be marked. Unmarked codeswitching evokes the rights and obligations associated with both codes that are used. This can only occur, in Myers-Scotton's (1993a) view, if two conditions are met:

– All speakers are at least sufficiently bilingual peers in an informal conversation in which only members of the codeswitching group participate
– The speakers evaluate both used codes positively and find it desirable to associate themselves and their identities with the connotations of the codes they use.

The young men in our study all fit this description: they all speak English and are friends with the person they are speaking to in a chat conversation, and we hypothesize that English is used by our respondents in order to construct a certain identity, making use of the indexical value of the code in question, English.

There is however a limitation to Myers-Scotton's (1993a) approach: it only explains the codeswitches in a conversation where codeswitches are unmarked on a macro level: it indicates certain rights and obligations throughout the whole conversation and implies that the speakers generally have positive associations with the codes they use, but it does not explain why in these conversations codeswitches are used at specific moments. This is something the conversation-analytic approach to codeswitching (Auer, 1998) does address. This approach focusses not on the indexical meaning of the different codes that are used, but on the act of codeswitching itself (Wei, 1998). It investigates on a conversational level when and why people codeswitch. Androutsopoulos (2013, p. 681) summarizes nine functions codeswitching can have in computer-mediated communication, such as addressing only one addressee, conveying consent or dissent, or mitigating face-threatening acts. In all cases, the indexical meaning of the codes involved is unimportant.

Our claim, however, is that the two approaches above might be combined, in order to allow for explanations of codeswitching on a micro level, within conversations, by means of their indexical value, amongst others. It has been shown in third-wave variation studies that even small-scale, specific linguistic features (e.g. the pronunciation of /t/ (Podesva, 2004) or a hypercorrect form (Bucholtz, 1999a) can be used to convey indexical meaning. Furthermore, within the framework of Myers-Scotton's (1993a) Markedness Model, Barett (1998), also points to specific codeswitches to show how African-American Drag Queens mark their multiple identities as gay men, African-American men and white women (in drag), although here there are switches in style, not in languages.[4] Our hypothesis therefore is that codeswitching to English in the instant messaging conversations in our study is meant to sort effects on the level of the conversation. Due to the prestige of English (Kahane, 1992) it might be used to cover up for vulnerability in a social situation, and due to its connotations with gay-celebratory, non-heteronormative identities it might be used to contribute to other non-heteronormative identity practices (see Section 5). If this is the case the hypothesis that codeswitches to English have positive gay-ness-related connotations (see Section 2.1) is further confirmed.

Still, the above approaches have not clarified how codeswitching as an

unmarked choice can arise, like it does in the chat conversations in our corpus. Myers-Scotton (1993a) even stipulates that for unmarked code-switching as an unmarked choice to exist, speakers must be in a group with people who already engage in this linguistic phenomenon. This begs the question how the phenomenon can have come into being, when there was no group of (unmarkedly) codeswitching chatters yet. Here Clyne's (2003) approach to codeswitching can contribute, demonstrating how co-deswitches are not always used to sort specific effects, but can also be triggered, or 'facilitated' by certain words: proper names from the inserted language, homophones, borrowings, and other codeswitches. As has been extensively described, English borrowings, both single-word and construc-tional borrowings, are common in Dutch (cf. De Decker & Vandekerc-khove, 2012; Zenner et al. 2013, 2015). The English competence of speakers of Dutch with higher education would then allow them to be triggered into responding to such a trigger with creative English phrases (as opposed to fixed constructional borrowings).

We do not suggest that all Dutch chat users who speak English suffi-ciently well to be triggered into using English will always do so. Rather we expect that codeswitching potentially happens to all of them from time to time. This is the starting point for some speakers who find English parti-cularly prestigious, or want to associate their identities with it, to not correct themselves but press the enter key, or to respond to such codes-witches with their own switches. Once this practice is established, it be-comes possible for them to codeswitch even when there is no trigger. This hypothesis is tested in Section 5.

3   Quantitative analysis: elaborate codeswitches as typical for a community of practice

3.1   Method

The most important claim of the present paper is that codeswitches are more common in the chatspeak of a community of practice of young gay men who construct a gay identity than in other chat conversations. In order to demonstrate this a corpus was compiled of one of the authors' chat conversations on the instant messaging platforms WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger between January 2013 and October 2014.[5] In this way it was possible to compare the conversations between the four members of the community of practice with those between the central chat user and others outside this community. All Facebook Messenger conversations of

more than 9000 words and all WhatsApp conversations of more than 4000 words were included. This added up to a corpus of 1,125,518 words (853,766 from Facebook Messenger conversations and 271,752 from WhatsApp conversations). All conversations were between the central chat user in the corpus, referred to as 'Chat User C' (for *Central*), and fifteen different friends and acquaintances, referred to as 'Chat User 1' to 'Chat User 15'. If Chat User C chatted with one of the other users both on WhatsApp and on Facebook Messenger, the conversations were combined. All respondents gave permission for their chat conversations with Chat User C to be anonymized and used for the purpose of linguistic research.

All of the respondents were in university (in a Dutch *universiteit* or *hogeschool*) or in pre-university education, twelve were between 18 and 23 years old, two were between 24 and 30 years old, and one was under 18 years old. Twelve were male, three female. Eleven described themselves as homosexual, three as heterosexual, one as asexual, one as 'maybe homosexual, maybe bisexual'. The respondents were asked two indirect questions on gay identity construction, so that it was possible to gauge whether they engaged in (non-linguistic) gay identity practices:

– How frequently do you visit gay bars or clubs on a monthly basis?
– How gay would you say your style of clothing is?
  • Not gay at all
  • A bit gay
  • Rather gay
  • Very gay

Anyone who frequented gay bars or clubs on at least a monthly basis or described their own style of clothing as at least 'a bit gay' was coded as 'constructing a gay identity' (nine respondents in total). Anyone who frequented gay bars or clubs on at least a weekly basis or described their own style of clothing as at least 'rather gay' was coded as 'strongly constructing a gay identity' (five respondents). Chat User C was a gay male between 18 and 23 years old describing his own clothing as 'rather gay' frequenting gay bars and clubs on at least a monthly basis, and was also coded as 'strongly constructing a gay identity'.

Very few of the respondents knew each other. There were only three groups of respondents with connections to each other: two groups of four, and one group of five (including Chat User C). One of the groups of four consisted of four gay males between 18 and 23 years of age, all constructing a gay identity, three of whom strongly (Chat User C, Chat User 1, and Chat

User 2). They all knew each other from the same gay bars and parties or through a shared social network which expanded through these parties. For as long as Chat User C knew them he chatted with them on a daily basis, but the others did not have regular contact with each other.

Nevertheless, we maintain that the network of Chat User C, Chat User 1, Chat User 2 and Chat User 3 fits Eckert & McConnell-Ginet's (1992) definition of a community of practice. They might not form a very tightly knit community where all speakers know each other and speak regularly, but this is not necessarily a requirement for a community of practice, according to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992). Instead, what is essential is a shared endeavour and shared practices. This is certainly the case for Chat Users C, 1, 2, and 3, as they all go to the same parties and socially engage with the same broader social network of young gay men. They also share (non-linguistic) practices, such as dressing in a 'gay' way, frequenting the same bars, and constructing a gay identity. No other chat users in the corpus shared these practices or were involved in the same endeavour, and thus they were not a part of this community of practice (although they were probably part of other communities of practice).

In order to gauge the frequency of codeswitching to English in the corpus a list of English function words and highly frequent verbs was compiled. Especially function words are rarely borrowed on their own: in De Decker & Vandekerckhove (2012: 333) they represent only 0,4% of the single-word switches. This makes them particularly useful to find elaborate, multi-word codeswitches. The corpus was searched for these words by means of the concordance programme AntConc (Anthony, 2014). Some of the words on this list (*you, my, the,* and *and*) yielded so many constructional borrowings such as *thank you* and *oh my god* that they were too inconvenient to use. Others were not used as they are part of the Dutch lexicon too (*in* and *he*). The final search terms were *a, be, don't, for, have, I, I'd, I'll, I'm, it, not, that,* and *to.*

All occurences of these search terms were manually checked to find out whether they were indeed part of a multi-word codeswitch. In order to distinguish between codeswitches and borrowed constructions some frequent expressions such as *I know, I guess,* and *love it* were searched for in the chat conversations which contained the fewest of the search terms before the manual check, those with Chat Users 14 and 15, as these were the least likely to contain codeswitches. If in these conversations (106,000 words) a construction occurred more than once, they were seen as borrowings, and if they were not, they were seen as codeswitches. This is in line with Myers-Scotton's (1993b, pp. 180 et seq.) argument that frequency in an

at least moderately big corpus is the most reliable indication of code-switching.

3.2   Results

In the corpus of De Decker & Vandekerckhove (2012) multiple-word switches are relatively rare amongst the so-called 'intentional' (i.e. non-reproductive) code-switches (see above). This contrasts strongly with our findings. Since function words are generally indicative of multiple-word switches, the high occurrence of this category in our corpus is telling. E.g.: our corpus contains 4129 tokens for the function words *a, I, for, it, not, that* and *to*.

The conversations between Chat User C and other members of the community of practice of young gay men who construct a gay identity (Chat User 1, Chat User 2, and Chat User 3) do indeed stand out among the other conversations when it comes to the frequency of codeswitch-indicative English function words and frequent verb forms. Table 1 shows this: the conversations with chat users of the community of practice, Chat Users 1, 2, and 3, divided from the others by a horizontal line, contain 12.1, 10.6, and 6.7 codeswitch-indicative words per 1000 words. The others all contain between 0.2 and 2.9 codeswitch-indicative words per 1000, with the exception of the conversation with Chat User 7, which contained 8.4 codeswitch-indicative words per 1000 words.[6]

Table 1   Codeswitch-indicative words per 1000 words, sorted by membership of the community of practice, by the construction of gay identity, and the chat users' gender and sexual identity

Chat User	Gender and sexual identity	Construction of gay identity	Codeswitch-indicative words per 1000 words
1	Gay man	Yes, strongly	12.1
2	Gay man	Yes, strongly	10.6
3	Gay man	Yes	6.7
4	Gay man	Yes, strongly	2.0
5	Gay man	Yes, strongly	1.6
6	Gay/bi man	Yes, strongly	1.6
7	Gay man	Yes	8.4
8	Gay man	Yes	2.3
9	Gay man	Yes	2.2
10	Gay man	No	2.9
11	Gay man	No	2.0
12	Asexual woman	No	1.9
13	Straight woman	No	1.7
14	Straight woman	No	0.5
15	Straight man	No	0.2

An independent samples t-test yielded that conversations with members of the community of practice contain significantly more codeswitch-indicative words per 1000 words than conversations with a non-member ($t(13) = 5.319$, $p < 0.001$). However, because of the outlier in the non-member group (Chat User 7), that group is not normally distributed, which violates one of the assumptions of a t-test. For this reason a non-parametric test, based on ranking instead of normal distributions, is preferable. A Mann-Whitney U test indicates that the number of codeswitch-indicative words is significantly greater (*Mdn* = 10.6) in conversations with members of the community of practice than in conversations with non-members (*Mdn* = 2.0), $U = 1.00$, $p = 0.009$. In both of the above tests the sample sizes are small, but this is not necessarily a problem in this research, as no claims are made about populations outside of the conversations in the corpus. The 'samples' therefore are the entire population.

One of the most salient aspects of the data is that the occurrence of codeswitch-indicative words varies a lot between conversations which all share one speaker: Chat User C. One possible explanation for this could be that Chat User C does not at all engage in codeswitching, while only the use by the other speakers varies. However, as we will show in Section 5, the codeswitching in our corpus is most often a mutual practice where the speakers respond to each other's codeswitches with new codeswitches. This means that, as was argued in Section 2.1, codeswitching as an identity practice must be recognized, understood, and answered. When it is not, the practice will not be repeated, or at least not as often.

4 The indexical value of English and the perception of gay identities

4.1 Methodology

In order to explore whether in the chat conversations of members of the researched community of practice there are comments which reflect positive connotations of English which are related to homosexuality or gay identities, the following search terms were used to look through the conversations between Chat User C and Chat Users 1, 2, and 3: *Engels* and its English counterpart *English, homo* and its often borrowed English counterpart *gay*, and *flikker* and *nicht* and their English counterparts *fag* and *faggot* (plural forms were included). It was then counted how often these terms were described positively or negatively and whether they were used to describe something or someone positively or negatively if this could be

deduced from the context. Decisive for the coding was the use of smileys (e.g. 'you're so gay <3', where '<3' stands for a heart), surrounding adjectives (e.g. 'vieze ouwe nicht' ('dirty old fag')) or explicit judgments (e.g. 'Wati s engels / een RARE TAAL' ('English is SUCH a WEIRD language')).

4.2 Results

Both words denoting the English language and gay identities were predominantly used in a positive way, if any evaluation was expressed. In the case of the words *Engels* and *English* the uses were almost exclusively positive. These were described positively fifteen times, and negatively only once, when a speaker calls it a 'WEIRD LANGUAGE' (see above). In the other cases it is used in a positive way, as can be seen in examples (1), (2), and (3). Example (3) even shows a connection to non-heteronormative, celebrated gayness. Although not typical for traditionally masculine gender practices, 'fashionable' is a positive term, because of its use to describe women (for whom this would not defy the heterosexual matrix). The gay man describing another gay man's use of English as fashionable is both describing him as non-heteronormative and attaching positive meaning to that.

(1) ik hou van engels
     ('I love english')

(2) *I'm sorry, I'm sure I'd like it*[7]
     if it were in English

(3) Omg zo *fashionably english*
     ('Omg so fashionably english')

In example (4), one of the chat users uses the connotations of English to the extent that he goes so far as to claim that it is easier for him, a native speaker of Dutch and not of English, to speak English than to speak Dutch. After this he even claims that this makes his life harder, by suggesting a certain barrier between himself and the average Dutch person, and acts like a 'true' speaker of English, showing how he identifies with the English language and its speakers, and implicitly showing off his (in his eyes) native-like competence in English.

(4) Speaker 1[8] Ik denk zelfs in het Engels :/
                ('I even think in English :/')

Speaker 1   *Like its easier for me To talk English than To talk dutch :/*
[…]
Speaker 2   Denk je echt in het engels?
             ('Do you really think in English?')
Speaker 2   Dats echt *like shamazin*
             ('Thats really like shamazin [really amazing]')
[…]
Speaker 1   *Haha no its not xD*
Speaker 1   Ti's lastug
             ('Its hard')
[…]
Speaker 2   Hoezo is da lastig?
             ('How is it hard?')
Speaker 1   Omdaaaaaaaaat
             ('Becaaaaaaaause')
Speaker 1   *I dunneur :$*

The search terms denoting homosexuality or gay identities are not evaluated as exclusively positive: they are used positively 54 times and negatively 56 times. This not to say that in general the four chat users evaluated gay identities negatively more often than positively, as some of the search terms were slurs in themselves, and as sometimes the negative uses were insincere and only part of banter. Without the slurs the balance is 48 positive uses against 40 negative uses, and if tongue-in-cheek negative uses are also seen as reflecting positive associations with homosexuality and gay identities, the balance is 55 positive uses against 33 negative uses. At any rate, the four chat users do often use the words *homo, flikker, nicht* and *gay* predominantly in a positive way despite the heteronormative society they live in.

An example of tongue-in-cheek insults can be seen in example 5. Here, Speaker 2 calls Speaker 1 a 'fag', to which the latter responds both affirmatively and with faked indignation, showing that he is not afraid to identify as a 'fag' and playfully subverting the idea that the word would be an insult.

(5)   Speaker 1   De shopflikker is helemaal los haha
                    ('The shopaholic fag in me has been released haha')
       Speaker 2   *O gawd*
       Speaker 2   *You fag*
       Speaker 1   *Thats me haha*
       Speaker 2   Hahaha

Speaker 1   *Im soo offended :o*
Speaker 2   *Good. Hhe*
Speaker 1   *Haha bitch*

Furthermore, the distribution between lexemes showed that some lexemes were less likely to be used in a negative way than others. As is shown in Table 2, lexemes of English origin – especially the word *gay* – were less often used negatively than lexemes of Dutch origin. A chi square test shows that the effect of the origin of the lexemes on their positive or negative use is significant (χ^2(1, N=110) = 6.28, *p* = 0.01) The same is true for the specific terms *gay* and *homo* (χ^2(1, N=88) = 3.96, *p* = 0.05). This can be seen as further evidence of the positive associations these speakers have with English and Anglo-American gay identities.

Table 2 Frequency of positive and negative use of lexemes denoting homosexuality or gay identity

Lexeme	Positive use	Negative Use
Homo	21	26
Flikker	4	2
Nicht	2	13
Total (Dutch)	27	41
Gay	27	14
Fag	0	1
Faggot	0	0
Total (English)	27	15
Total (both)	54	56

5   Qualitative analysis: examples of elaborate codeswitching

5.1   Methodology

As discussed in Section 2.2, we hypothesize that codeswitches are used locally to evoke the indexical meanings of English for conversational purposes, and that they are often facilitated by English proper names, homophones with English, borrowings and other codeswitches. There are two ways in which the indexical meanings of English might be used for conversational purposes. Its (international) prestige, and possibly its connotations with film and television stars in general might be used to come across 'cool' in social situations where that is desirable, for example when some-

one is feeling vulnerable socially. Its connotations with famous gay icons in the English speaking world who are generally young, cool, and attractive, with non-heteronormative identities might be used to contribute to social practices in which gay-celebratory, non-heteronormative identities are constructed. If this is the case, then that is further evidence of codeswitching to English being an identity practice.

To test these hypotheses, block samples of between 3000 and 4000 words were randomly chosen from the chat conversations between Chat User C and Chat Users 1 and 2, as these contained most codeswitch-indicative words (see Section 3.2). Due to the size of the corpus, it was not feasible within the present project to analyse the full conversations. Three block samples were taken from both the Facebook Messenger conversations with Chat User 1 and from the ones with Chat User 2. Another three block samples were taken from the WhatsApp conversation with Chat User 2. The WhatsApp conversation with Chat User 1 only contained 10,486 words in total and was included entirely. All samples together formed a subcorpus of 46,761 words. Within this subcorpus we analysed how the codeswitches were used in conversation and whether they were facilitated by trigger words.

5.2   Results

In the analysis of block samples of the conversations between Chat User C and Chat Users 1 and 2 it was found that codeswitches to English were used to locally evoke the indexical value of English for the members of the community of practice in order to contribute to other identity practices in conversation, and that they often followed trigger words or phrases facilitating codeswitches to English.

Most importantly codeswitches to English were used in conversations where a non-heteronormative, gay celebratory identity was constructed. This was often in the form of banter in which the chat users show off how extraverted and not-normal they are, many times related to some other typically gay practice. In example (6), Speakers 1 and 2 switch to English when they joke around about flying squirrels and unicorns, in caps lock. The topic of the conversation changes rapidly and is much less important than the act of changing topics in a quick, non-filtered, enthusiastic, and humorous way. These acts are a way for the speakers to show how extraverted, social, gay, and 'weird, but in a fun way' they are: they use caps lock, terms of endearment like 'MY [D]EAR' and discuss flying unicorns, which in the eyes of the speakers are probably considered to be a symbol for fabulousness and gayness.[9] The use of English and its positive

connotations with gayness then contributes to this construction of extra-verted, non-(hetero)normative identities.

(6) Speaker 1 *Damn :(Ik wil iemand die kan vliegen zoals die vliegende eekhoorns*
           ('Damn :(I want someone who can fly like those flying squirrels')
     Speaker 2 ik kan wel rollen zoals een vliegende eekhoorn
           ('I can roll like a flying squirrel?')
     Speaker 1 *I'll take it xD!*
     Speaker 2 Ik kan zelfs rollen als een vliegende eenhoorn
           ('I can even roll like a flying unicorn')
     Speaker 2 *FLYING UNICORNS :DDD*
     Speaker 2 ROLLENDE *FLYING UNICORNS :D*
           ('ROLLING FLYING UNICORNS :D')
     Speaker 1 *ROLING FLYING UNICORNS WITH LITTLE BABY PENGUINS!?*
     Speaker 2 *YES MY EAR*
     Speaker 2 haha mn toetsenbord doet een beetje flauw
           ('haha my keyboard is acting stupid')
     Speaker 1 *WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR EAR!?*

In example (7) something similar happens, when in a conversation one of the participants sends a picture of himself in drag (a typically gay practice, cf. Barett, 1998) at a gay party, and asks, in English, whether the other speaker likes the picture. This is already an example of a gay identity practice being connected to codeswitching to English, but it is also fol-lowed by a sequence where both speakers playfully use English (making puns and using non-standard and Dutch spellings) and connect this to English speaking entertainment. Again the speakers portray themselves as 'weird, but in a fun way' as they change topics at a very high pace, (see-mingly) just typing what comes to mind, whilst making puns whenever possible and referring to the English speaking TV shows *Jersey Shore* and *Geordie Shore* and later on the catchphrase 'Do I look bovvered?' from *The Catherine Tate Show*.

(7) Speaker 1 *you like me being a gurl?*
     Speaker 1 *;p*
     Speaker 2 nee houd je onderdelen maar gewoon waar ze zitten
           beeb

('no, you can just keep your accessories where they are babe')

Speaker 1   *joe sjur* [Dutchified spelling of *you sure?*]
Speaker 2   *im shore*
Speaker 1   *jersey?*
Speaker 1   *:D*
Speaker 2   *nope*
Speaker 2   *sweater*
Speaker 1   *sweater shore? :O*
Speaker 1   *sounds like a good show ^^*
Speaker 2   omg ik hou van de accenten van geordie shore <3
             ('omg I love the accents in geordie shore <3')
Speaker 1   hahaha
Speaker 2   die mensen zeiden echt laatst
             ('those people actually, a while ago')
Speaker 2   toen ik twee minute keek
             ('when I was watching for two minutes')
Speaker 2   ze zeiden
             ('they said')
Speaker 2   *Do I look bovvered?*

In example (8) a chat user codeswitches when he claims to engage in the non-heteronormative practice (for a man) of twerking (a type of promiscuous dancing). As much as actually doing this, the act of sharing this with someone is a non-heteronormative practice, which however is seen as fun (especially as at the time this was a buzz word). Although there is no Dutch alternative to using the borrowing *twerk*, the speaker also continues his sentence in English. In examples (9) and (10) extraverted enthusiasm is combined with codeswitches to English.

(8)   Ik *twerk every day*
             ('I twerk every day')

(9) Speaker 1   Hmmmm ik ruik kaasfondue :3
                  ('Yummmm, I smell cheese fondue :3')
     Speaker 2   *ME WANTS*

(10) Speaker 1   Werkt dit?
                  ('Does this work?')
     Speaker 2   *it dooooes*

In other cases codeswitching to English is employed by chat users in situations where they are socially vulnerable. Here the connotations of English as a prestigious language, used by socially gifted or 'cool' role models in English speaking entertainment are employed by the chat users to come across as cool themselves. In example (11) Speaker 1 said something hurtful to Speaker 2 and is nervous that he will not be forgiven. As an apology, he offers to take Speaker 2 out to the cinema, which puts him in an even more vulnerable position as that offer might be rejected. When in the end, Speaker 1 gives in with a slightly daring flirtatious comment he puts himself in a vulnerable position, but also uses English in order to not come across as too vulnerable. In example (12) a chat user does not get an answer to his question for quite a while, and probably feels rejected. In order to still elicit a response or express annoyance without coming across as needy, he uses an English phrase.

(11)   Speaker 1   Sorry :((
        Speaker 1   *Ill make it up to you* [five smileys][10]
        Speaker 1   Ik verzin wel iets heel goeds en leuks
                    ('I'll come up with something really good and fun')

        [...]
        Speaker 2   *It's okay sweety*
        Speaker 2   Maar wel goedmaken ja!
                    ('But yes, you should make it up to me!')

        [...]
        Speaker 1   *Im taking you out to the cinema* ^^
        Speaker 1   En dan met van die overdreven hoeveelheden popcorn
                    enzo :3
                    ('And then with like those exaggerated amounts of
                    popcorn etc :3')
        Speaker 2   Haha [smiley] *as long as I'm allowed to see you :o*

(12)   Ben je alweer aan het leren?
                    ('Are you studying again already?')
                    I take that as a yes

As can be seen in most of the examples above, most codeswitches occur in clusters, after a facilitating word (e.g. *damn* and *twerk*) or idiomatic phrase (e.g. 'I'll take it', 'Ill make it up to you', and 'I take that as a yes'; these might also be seen as constructional borrowings (cf. Zenner et al., 2013)). Once this first borrowing or idiomatic phrase has been produced, however, the

speakers certainly do use English creatively. There are even cases in which codeswitches occur without facilitating borrowings preceding them. In example (7) 'you like me being a gurl?' is not preceded by any facilitating words, but seems to be triggered by the non-heteronormative topic of dressing up in drag or the intention of mitigating the social vulnerability of sharing a photo on this topic.

6 Concluding remarks

In our corpus of chat conversations, codeswitches to English were used as an identity practice to construct a gay-celebratory, non-heteronormative identity. These switches were found much more frequently in conversations between members of a community of practice of gay males who shared the same acquaintances and friends, frequented the same gay bars and parties, and constructed a gay identity, than in conversations with other chat users. This can be explained by the indexical value English has to the members of this community of practice, who only find multidimensional, young, positive, and gay-celebratory role models in Anglo-American entertainment. This is evidenced by their comments on the English language and on gay identities in our corpus, which show that these are linked to each other and that they are evaluated positively. The members' own frequent creative use of English should therefore be seen as a way for them to construct their own gay identities by means of the positive gayness-related connotations English has to them. This is further corroborated by how codeswitches to English are used on a conversational level: they accompany other identity practices such as (seemingly) unfiltered, extraverted, 'weird, but fun' banter, which also help construct a positive non-(hetero)normative identity.

The origin of this phenomenon might be in the relative bilingualism of Dutch higher-educated speakers, which allows them to borrow not just words but also more elaborate constructions and expressions, and even allows them to respond to those with creative English. In most conversational contexts this is strongly marked and possibly inappropriate, but in this community of practice where English is especially prestigious and useful for identity construction it has become desirable behaviour.

What is furthermore remarkable is how much more common codeswitching is in the studied chat conversations in comparison to De Decker & Vandekerckhove's (2012) corpus, even outside the conversations between members of the community of practice (see Section 3.2). As most

of the chat users in the De Decker & Vandekerckhove's (2012) corpus were in the highest level of secondary education in Flanders or in social networks with others who were,[11] level of education does not seem to be able to account for this. Furthermore, the Flemish chat users were not likely much less oriented towards English than the users in our corpus, as they were oriented towards computer gaming. What might account for the difference in the number of codeswitches is a difference in age: the chat users in our corpus were slightly older (mostly between 18 and 23) than the adolescents in the De Decker & Vandekerckhove (2012) corpus (between 16 and 20), and might therefore have reached a higher level of proficiency in English, which might have led to more codeswitching.

The most evident limitation to this study is that we used a corpus of chat conversations immediately related to one of the authors. However, all of the linguistic material was documented at an early stage, and well before the author decided to use it for research. In addition, the size of the group that was looked at is relatively small: it consists of only sixteen chat users. While this may cast doubt on the representativeness of this particular group of chatters vis-à-vis the wider language community, we want to stress that it is not the aim of the present paper to determine general aspects of 'gay' language practices, if these exist. Rather than generalizing over young Dutch gay men's linguistic behaviour, the paper explores the strikingly elaborate use of codeswitching to English in one specific community of practice and tries to find out which processes allowed for this practice to come into being.

As a next step, further research is needed to investigate the use of codeswitching to English in other Dutch speaking groups to which the English language has particularly high prestige or relevance, such as other groups of LGBTQ+ individuals or gamers. This would allow for further insight into the extent to which this phenomenon is present in other marginalized or non-mainstream communities of practice in the Netherlands. This way it would be possible to assess whether the practice has a chance of surviving or even spreading.

Notes

*   We wish to thank the editors and the reviewers for their helpful remarks on an earlier version of this paper.
1.   Code-switches triggered by lexical need or insertions that were merely reproductive (e.g. film titles) were classified as unintentional insertions by De Decker & Vandekerckhove (2012).

2. For newspaper and magazine articles see for example Van der Kwast on hpdetijd.nl, 21 October 2015 <http://www.hpdetijd.nl/2015-10-21/waarom-de-verengelsing-van-onze-taal-een-zwaktebod-is/> and Nijhuis's article on volkskrant.nl, 16 July 2015 <http://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/stop-de-verengelsing-van-hbo-en-universiteit~a4101638/>

3. This is not necessarily to say that Anglo-American entertainment is less heteronormative in general. However, the larger market for non-heteronormative media consumption there has most likely created more opportunities for LGBTQ+ content to be profitable.

4. Although this might not be so dissimilar to ordinary codeswitching, as Gardner-Chloros (2009, p. 113) points out that for codeswitch users lexicons might 'mesh together'.

5. This is the moment we first conceived of the idea to look at these chat conversations from a linguistic perspective. This cut-off point minimizes the interference of one of the authors' own developing ideas about the phenomenon with the linguistic data (i.e. his own utterances) in the corpus.

6. There are multiple possible explanations for this exception. As the only chat user of under 18 Chat User 7 might have been relatively easily influenced by Chat User C's linguistic practices. He might also have been in another community of practice where codeswitching to English is conventional, so that any triggered 'accidental' codeswitching by either Chat User C or 7 might have been picked up on by the other user as a shared linguistic practice, which would be recognized by both and could therefore be answered.

7. In all examples the English that is already present in the original utterances is italicized.

8. To ensure maximal privacy not the names Chat User C and Chat User 1, 2, or 3 are used in examples, but only 'Speaker 1' and 'Speaker 2', where Speaker 1 is always the chat user with the first utterance in the example.

9. The reason for this seems unclear, but a quick Google Image search for 'unicorn' already yields a flood of images of often pink unicorns together with rainbows. Both pink and the rainbow flag are of course symbolic of gay identities, and the 'uniqueness' of unicorns might fit this.

10. Not all smileys could be retrieved in the downloads of WhatsApp conversations. It is only shown that there was a smiley somewhere, but not which one.

11. Personal communication with R. Vandekerckhove.

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