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# Urban youth speech styles in multilingual settings

*Margreet Dorleijn, Maarten Kossmann, and Jacomine Nortier*

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## 1. Introduction and definitions

### 1.1 General introduction and outline

The phenomenon of urban youth language has been enjoying growing academic interest since the late 1990s. In this chapter, we will address issues of language contact related to urban youth languages, such as translanguaging and stylization. The way young people use highly creative ways to express their identities and demarcate group boundaries in urban societies in a globalizing world has attracted scholars from both linguistic, anthropological and sociological disciplines. Although migration, globalization and language contact have always existed, the extent to which these processes have developed over the past decades is undoubtedly the basis of this relatively recent academic interest.

As it stands today, around 50% of the world's population live in cities and by 2050, the number is expected to increase to 70% (United Nations, 2018). These numbers include relatively high proportions of children, teenagers and adolescents. Immense changes have taken place over the past few decades and in their search for a place in society today's young people are confronted with ethnic, linguistic, and rapidly spreading cultural varieties and mixes.

'Urban youth language' is a rather elusive phenomenon, which can manifest itself in different, and often very volatile, ways. This undoubtedly has contributed to the liveliness of the debates about preferred methodology. In this introduction, we will attempt to define and demarcate the phenomenon addressed in this chapter.

Before we do so, we first want to address the question why the multilingual language use of young city dwellers is particularly interesting.

There is no professional or lay dispute about the fact that young people, more than older people, are involved in a dynamic process of discovering themselves and the world. They experiment with different identities, and language is an important tool in their identity work. It is, at the same time, the means by which that identity is formed and negotiated in interaction with others (Eckert, 2008; Eckert and Wenger, 2005; Gal and Irvine, 1995; Irvine, 2001; Verschuere, 2004). As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) point out, this process

takes place in monolingual environments as well, but they argue that the dynamics can be observed more clearly in cases where multilingual resources are being used.

Over the past 50 years, urban environments have proven to be particularly favourable for the development of youth languages that employ multilingual repertoires. The reasons why non-Western European people moved to this part of the world are complex. Among them, decolonization and the need for cheap labour force, played an important role, eventually leading to a high degree of urban multilingualism. In other parts of the world, rapid urbanization, bringing together people from many different linguistic backgrounds, has also provided fertile ground for the development of multilingual styles specific to young people.

## 1.2 Definitions

The title of this chapter is Urban Youth Speech Styles (henceforth UYSS). In Dorleijn, Mous and Nortier (2015), this term was proposed because it seems to cover the phenomenon that most researchers in the field are interested in: styles of speech used by young people in urban areas. While youth styles are also found in monolingual communities, we will restrict our discussion in this *Handbook* to UYSS using multilingual inputs.

We will use the term UYSS in the following way: *linguistic practices involving the use of linguistic material from different languages by young people in a multilingual urban environment, with a performative character, and which the speaker can control*.

The definition that UYSS *are linguistically distinctive speech styles mostly associated with urban youth* entails three dimensions. First, only speech styles (or registers, Mesthrie et al., 2009) are concerned. This means that only ways of speaking are included that, for the majority of their users, are (expressive) stylistic choices that are *deliberately chosen* in order to convey a certain image of the speaker and/or of the way her/his message is meant to be understood socially. Second, we delimit the term to such speech styles that are largely associated with younger members of society living in cities. Finally, we delimit our term to styles that show linguistic deviations from the common norm, parts of which are conventionalized and enregistered (Agha, 2005), that is, they are relatively stable features users can choose to employ. This delimitation thus distinguishes UYSS from the broader category of urban vernaculars, which are not specifically youthful, and do not always have the expressive associations of UYSS. It also distinguishes it from the many expressive registers that are not necessarily associated with youth, such as English *slang* or French *argot*. The linguistic part of the delimitation leaves aside highly individual stylistic choices or play with different (non-UYSS) registers that do not seem to have any conventionalization outside of some very small groups of peers.

Furthermore, by using the preceding definition, we exclude full-fledged languages that were acquired as L1s. The UYSS are used ‘on top of’ one or more functionally unrestricted languages as an extra mode or style (Nortier, 2018b).

The delimitation as given here does by no means imply that UYSS constitute a homogeneous group that can easily be contrasted with other ways of speaking. As will be argued later, UYSS show a great diversity, both as regards their linguistic strategies and their social meaning. Our use of the term UYSS here should not be interpreted as establishing a distinct category, but in the sense of a pre-established basis for comparison,

allowing one to answer questions like: what are the differences and similarities between ways of speaking occurring in contexts X (urban youth) and having the basic characteristics Y (partly conventionalized performative behaviour)? Being not only an analytical or descriptive category, UYSS is used here as a ‘comparative concept’ in the sense of Haspelmath (2010).

Also, when considered as a comparative concept, our definition is not without problems. For example, one may wonder where ‘being young’ starts and ends. Does language use of preschool children belong to the category of UYSS? Are people in their thirties still young? Is the language use of adults who still use UYSS (maybe as a kind of youth reminiscence) included in the definition? (cf. Dorleijn, Mous and Nortier, 2015 for Sheng; Rampton, 2015). Is it viable to exclude language use that is beyond productive control of the speaker?

There are many terms in use that try to capture UYSS (see for example Cornips and Nortier, 2008). Widely used terms include *multi-ethnolect* (Clyne, 2000, among others), *youth language* (Ziegler, 2018), *urban dialect* (Wiese, 2012), *youth interaction* (for example Denjar, Ewing and Manns, 2018), and *contemporary urban vernacular* (Rampton, 2015).

The choice of these labels often reflects differences in approach and methodology, and researchers tend to have strong opinions about which labels not to use. Thus, *multi-ethnolect* is rejected by researchers who argue that a ‘lect’ term implies a (more or less focused) set of linguistic features that separates it from a standard language or other ‘lects’ (cf. Aarsæther et al., 2015). The general term *youth languages* is very broad, and could in principle also include monolingual performative and expressive language play as for example exercised in student associations (e.g., Kiesling, 2001). Equally, it might include the multilingual language use of young people for whom this multilingual use is a way to communicate effortlessly with peers with the same linguistic background, and not at all as a stylistic device to be used for group demarcation or identity construction (Anchimbe, 2015, among others). The term *youth interaction* is even broader and refers to much more than just linguistic aspects. Terms like *urban dialects*, *ethnolects*, *multi-ethnolects* and *contemporary urban vernacular* suggest fixed, conventionalized varieties, something that does not do justice to the dynamics of these ways of speaking. According to Eckert (2008, p. 26), ‘The term ethnolect (like sociolect and the more generic dialect) reflects a view of language as a fixed rather than fluid entity, and of identity as compartmentalized, allowing one to think of an ethnolect as a discrete system indexical of ethnicity alone.’

Specific UYSS come under a broad range of labels, names and instances of which the following are examples from within Europe: *Perkerdansk* (Denmark), *Kebabnorsk* (Norway), *Rinkebysvenska* (Sweden), *Kiezdeutsch* or *Kanakspråk* (Germany), *Straattaal* (Netherlands), *Citétaal* (Belgium), *Verlan* (France, as one of the forms of ‘langue des jeunes’) (see also Nortier and Dorleijn, 2013). Examples from outside Europe are *Iscamtho* (South Africa), *Sheng* and *Engsh* (Kenya), *Camfranglais* (Cameroon), *Engligbo* (Nigeria), *Hong Kong Slanguage*, and *Walikan*, *Prokem* and *Gaul* in Indonesia. Sometimes the labels have pejorative associations, as in the case of German *Kanakspråk*: ‘The word Kanake is a highly derogatory term that has been used since roughly the 1970s to refer to visibly non-German foreigners or presumed foreigners, especially Turks’ (Loontjens, 2006, p. 33). Sometimes the labels are coined by outsiders and sometimes by speakers themselves.

An example of the latter is Dutch *Straattaal* ('Street Language'), which was adopted by René Appel (1999) from users of the style. Moreover, whatever the exact history of such names, African UYSS are often referred to by their users under such terms, such as *Nouchi* in Abidjan and *Sheng* in Nairobi (Kouadio, 2006; Newell, 2009; Mazrui, 1995; Abdulaziz and Osinde, 1997).

The comparative concept UYSS implies one important essentialization: specific ways of speaking are presented as comparable, that is, as a coherent set of features, which can thus be contrasted with other ways of speaking within the community. Some scholars (e.g., Jaspers, 2008; Cornips, Jaspers and de Rooij, 2015) strongly reject this idea. This line of thought questions whether it makes sense to consider a specific UYSS an entity at all. Shouldn't we consider it just a set of more or less independent variables, each variable being put into action for different reasons, producing different kinds of indexicalities? Is there any reason to consider these variables as more than an arbitrary set put together by researchers? Aren't we creating categories that have no root in reality by naming such scientific constructs?

A full deconstruction of the notion of UYSS along these lines seems to miss the point, however. The feeling that there is something 'new' and 'other' going on in this type of language use is shared both by outside observers and by its users (see, e.g., Wiese, 2011b); moreover, as Madsen remarks for Copenhagen UYSS, 'certain linguistic features [...] are perceived as belonging together and represent a certain way of speaking signalling certain social meaning' (Madsen, 2011, p. 275). This is also clear from the remarkable success of naming strategies, not only with scientists and outsiders, but also by users themselves.

## 2. Historical overview of the study of UYSS

In the study of UYSS a dichotomy can be observed between studies that focus on the norms and conventions that exist within a certain style/variety on the one hand, and studies that concentrate on the way in which social actions lead to – or are accompanied by – specific language practices on the other.

The first type of studies has an overlap with 'classic' ethnolect studies such as Wölck (2002). Examples are Wiese's studies (2011a, 2011b) which describe the German UYSS *Kiezdeutsch* as a German dialect in emergence.

For the second type of study, with a focus on UYSS as expressive, performative speaking styles in social action, LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) and Rampton's pioneering study *Crossing* (1995) count as important milestones. LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) introduced the notion of 'act of identity,' which turned out to be a powerful tool to describe the relation between language and identity. They claim that the language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable. Language acts are acts of identity. Rampton's seminal work (1995) used an anthropological, linguistic and ethnographic approach, strongly grounded in Conversation Analysis, which inspired many later studies. As is often the case when a new research field opens up, there are, of course, precursors. An example of this is Hewitt (1982, 1986). Hewitt examined the sociolinguistic impact of the 'London Jamaican' creole used by young black Londoners on the language and culture of young Whites. His study was carried out among working-class adolescents in two areas in South London where young white residents appropriated

characteristics of young Jamaicans. He placed the use of black language forms in the speech of Whites firmly in its social and political setting.

In Scandinavia, Kotsinas was among the first linguists to note a changing way of speaking among young people in Rinkeby, a multi-ethnic suburb near Stockholm in Sweden (Kotsinas, 1988, 1992). The variety was also observed in other suburban areas and its users were young people with a migrant background as well as native Swedes.

Before the anthropological approach gained currency among sociolinguists studying UYSS, there were important variationist studies on language use by specific groups with a migrant background that were then mainly referred to as ‘ethnolects.’ Well-known examples are Horvath (1985) and Wölck (2002), who mainly focus on the correlation of certain phonological features with groups with a minority background. In accordance with the variationist framework, they do not elaborate explicitly on aspects such as agentivity, performativity and expressiveness.

Some recent studies also choose an explicitly variationist approach where respondents are placed in an experimental situation. The objective of studies of this type is to describe linguistic features which may be inherited during the acquisition process or are at least conventionalized. Such studies are important contributions when it comes to the – in our view central – question of what is contributed to UYSS by acquisition and socialization processes and what by agentive action (van Marck, 2016; Hinskens, 2011).

Other studies combine the quantitative description of linguistic aspects with a qualitative description of social action, e.g., Archakis and Papazachariou (2009).

### 3. Critical issues and topics

Two main strategies can be distinguished which set the UYSS apart from the languages that form their basis. The first will be called here ‘L2 stylization’ (cf. Muysken, 2013), the second will be called ‘paralexical insertion.’

#### 3.1 Linguistic strategies: L2 stylization

L2 stylization refers to the emulation of the (perceived) way non-native speakers speak the dominant language. This deliberate use of L2 learner varieties can be considered stylizations (in the sense of Coupland, 2007), meaning that UYSS speakers are very well able to use more standard ways of speaking the dominant language (as opposed to real L2 interference), and that they only choose a restricted set of the many features associated to L2 learner varieties. Three types of L2 stylization are common in UYSS:

- 1 Stylizations of non-native accents;
- 2 Stylizations of non-native syntax;
- 3 Introduction of a restricted group of function words common in code-switching, such as utterance modifiers (Matras, 1998) and expressive interjections.

Stylizations of non-native accents come in two types. The first type is the substitution of certain phonetic features of the dominant language that prove to be difficult for most L2 speakers. One may argue that the substitution of German [ç] by [j] or [ç] in UYSS variants



of German belongs to this type ( Auer, 2013; Wiese, 2012 ). Such substitutions may be considered to be largely independent from the type of L2 that is imitated – similar problems may be expected for L2 speakers with different L1s, and thus one may argue that there is no specific L2 accent that is targeted here. Simplification of this type is far from general in UYSS, and one should beware of presenting UYSS phonetics as simplified versions of the non-UYSS variants. Thus, *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* (cf. Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008 ), while presenting quite different phonetics, maintains the full set of standard Dutch vowel distinctions ( Mourigh, forthcoming ); this is very different from Moroccan L2 accents in Dutch.

The second type of L2 stylization is inspired by the L2 accents of specific L1 groups. The afore-mentioned *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* is a case in point. This variety, used both by young people with a Moroccan background and by people with different linguistic histories as well, features Moroccan-like intonation and syllabification, as well as some other features that are typical for older Moroccan L2 speakers of Dutch. For example, it presents highly complex consonant clusters (at least on the phonetic level), such as [ks x t x hɛm] instead of autochthonous Dutch [ksɛtɛxəhɛm] *ik zeg tegen hem* ‘I say to him.’ This can easily be understood from Moroccan Arabic and Berber, which both allow for this kind of clusters phonetically, but is very different from, for example, Turkish, another important migrant language in the Netherlands.

L2 accent stylization does not just mean talking with a particular (stereotyped) L2 accent. *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* presents us with a clear example of how such stylizations can be inspired by, and still be different from, L2 pronunciations and stereotypes. In many older Moroccan’s L2 Dutch, /s/ is pronounced [ʃ] in all positions of the word, a pronunciation which also belongs to the stereotype of the accent. In *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch*, this pronunciation is found as a stylistic variable, but here, it only takes place under the specific phonetic condition of clusters with sibilants followed by a continuant. Thus, /slapə/ ( *slapen* ) ‘to sleep’ can be pronounced [ʃla:pə], but /ste:ts/ ( *steeds* ) ‘continually’ is consistently pronounced [ste:ts] (Mourigh, 2017a). This shows that the stylization is not just an on-the-spot imitation of a stereotype, but that it is a convention that is not necessarily identical to the stereotype it is based on.

In addition to phonetics, L2 stylization also concerns morphosyntax and syntax. In UYSS based on continental Germanic languages, two features of stylization are widespread. The first feature is the neutralization of grammatical gender. Continental Germanic languages distinguish two or three genders with nouns, whose semantic distribution is highly erratic. Gender is mainly expressed on nominal modifiers. Confusion between grammatical genders is common among L2 speakers, and many of them choose to neutralize genders in favour of the most frequent form. This is something also commonly found in UYSS in this part of the world ( Cheshire, Nortier and Adger, 2015 ).

In the same languages, L2 speakers often use word order deviant from the norm. In continental Germanic, there exists a rule that, in main clauses, the verb occupies the second position in the clause, irrespective of the nature of the first element in the clause. As this first element is often the subject of the clause, it is not unexpected that L2 speakers simplify the system by using strict SV(O) word order. This means that while the dominant variety would have variation between S – V and Adverb – V – S, L2 speakers use Adverb – S – V.



Among UYSS, such constructions are well attested in Scandinavia and Germany (Freywald et al., 2015). The following is an example from Berlin:

1. *ab jetzt ich krieg immer  
zwanzig euro* (Freywald et al., 2015, p. 89)  
from now I get always twenty euros instead of standard  
German:
2. *ab jetzt krieg ich immer zwanzig euro* from now get  
I always twenty euros  
'From now on, I get always twenty euros.'

In addition to phonetic and (morpho)-syntactic features, UYSS that rely strongly on L2 stylizations also feature the use of a small set of borrowed function words. Most of these are utterance modifiers or interjections, such as *wəllah/vallah* 'I swear!; assuredly!' in a large number of European UYSS and *lan* 'post-sentence tag, man' in UYSS with an important Turkish component. However, in some UYSS of this type insertion of function words that are internal to the clause also occurs (Kossmann, 2017a), cf. the following example from *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* in Gouda, where the Tarifit Berber indefinite article *izzən* is used in an otherwise Dutch sentence:

3. *ja, precies, als je bij izzən weg komt* yes precisely  
if you at a road come  
'Yes, exactly, if you arrive there at a road.' (Mourigh, forthcoming)

It is not always easy to decide whether, in a certain situation, an L2 feature as used by a UYSS user is really a conscious choice (as implied by stylization). Many young people with a migratory background grow up with non-native L2 learner variants of the dominant language in their households, and some L2 features surfacing in their speech may not be conscious choices, but rather the effect of linguistic uncertainty about specific features of the dominant language. Thus, on the one hand some users of *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* report gender neutralization as a conscious stylistic choice, using, for instance, the article *de* with nouns that have *het* in the dominant language (Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008). On the other hand, in written internet discourse aiming at the dominant variety of Dutch, some Moroccan heritage young people show large-scale hypercorrection, using, for instance, the non-UYSS article *het* with nouns that require *de* (e.g., *het jongen* instead of *de jongen* 'the boy') (cf. also Cornips, 2008).

In a number of UYSS the target of emulation does not seem to be an L2 stereotype, but rather a regional variant of the dominant language. This is the case in *Multicultural London English*, the phonetics of which are inspired by the Jamaican pronunciation of English (Cheshire et al., 2011). Here the dynamics seem to be the same as for continental European UYSS with the difference that the main target of emulation was a group that already spoke English before they migrated to Europe.

### 3.2 Linguistic strategies: paralexical insertion

The second main strategy in the linguistic constituency of UYSS will be called *paralexical insertion*. The term *paralexicon* has been borrowed from *argot* studies (Dubois et al., 2012; cf. also Mous, 2003). It refers to a large but restricted set of style-specific lexical items that may be used as substitutes for normal lexical items in order to attain a certain stylistic goal. This process mainly targets the lexicon. Such insertions take place into a matrix of more neutral speech. The matrix provides the grammatical grid for the utterance and most of the lexicon, while the style-specific lexical elements are inserted into lexical positions within this grid (Mesthrie and Hurst, 2013). In general, these insertions express concepts that could also have been expressed (with different expressivity) in the matrix language. The matrix of a UYSS can itself be a way of speaking involving a large amount of code-switching between several languages (Mesthrie and Hurst, 2013).

While many concepts have two instantiations – both one or several matrix forms and the paralexical form – many other concepts can only be expressed by means of the matrix language(s). The paralexical set may consist of words from foreign languages, phonologically manipulated elements from the matrix language, and matrix or foreign words with semantic changes. A European example of such a paralexical set in UYSS is Dutch *Straattaal*, which is characterized by a large set of words mainly taken over from Sranan Tongo, the creole language of Suriname, but expanded by words from other migratory languages and by manipulated Dutch and English items. The *Straattaal* paralexical set includes a wide variety of concepts somehow related to street style or otherwise important to adolescent urban life, e.g., *tata* ‘autochthonous Dutch,’ *sma* ‘girl,’ *scoro* ‘school,’ *oso* ‘house,’ *pata* ‘shoe,’ *wagi* ‘car.’

Indonesian provides another example. It has an open pronominal system, which has multiple forms to refer to speaker and addressee. First and second singular pronouns from other languages are easily inserted (Djenar, Ewing and Manns, 2018). Thus, for example, in youth interaction, an Arabic first singular *ana* ‘I’ can be inserted to indicate (or emphasize) the religious (muslim) identity of the speaker. Besides, elements from other Indonesian languages are inserted through ‘crossing’ to play around with (ethnic or other) identities.

Paralexical sets do not only consist of loanwords. They also include – and in some cases predominantly consist of – words in the matrix language that have been manipulated formally (e.g., by truncation or by suffixation, Kießling and Mous, 2004) or semantically. In addition to this, one often finds words whose etymology is fully opaque. A number of examples from Juba UYSS (which has a Juba Arabic matrix) are given in Table 19.1 (Nakao, 2013).

The paralexicon is not always bound to one single matrix language. In South Africa, the UYSS that are called *Tsotsitaal*s in the scientific literature consist of a single (though highly variable) set of potential insertions, which can be combined with different matrix languages (Hurst, 2015). Paralexical sets are thus potentially independent from the matrix language.

Mesthrie and Hurst (esp. 2013), discussing the South-African situation, make a strict separation between, on the one hand, urban varieties of the matrix language (including ways of speaking involving a lot of code-switching), and on the other hand the paralexicon. This

means that the matrix can be quite different from standard varieties but should still not be considered as specific to the UYSS. It also means, according to Mesthrie and Hurst, that the specificity of paralexical UYSS is purely lexical in nature; all unexpected syntactic features would be part of the matrix. While this seems to make sense in the case of most African UYSS, it is problematic for Dutch *Straattaal*, where a paralexical set is combined with a small number of morphosyntactic features, esp. gender neutralization, which do not seem to be common outside UYSS contexts.

It should also be stressed that there is no obligation to use the full set of words belonging to the paralexicon when choosing to use an UYSS. That is, just a few insertions may suffice to reach the intended style. There are no doubt differences between speech communities and speech situations concerning how many (and which) insertions are needed in order for speech to be recognized as UYSS (Dorleijn, Mous and Nortier, 2015).

UYSS with paralexicon are quite similar to the traditional European anti-languages called *argot* – in fact, the same definitions given for *argot* in the *Dictionnaire de linguistique et des sciences du langage* (Dubois et al., 2012, pp. 48–49) would apply to South African *Tsotsitaal*s. The distinction between UYSS and *argot* may be fluid or irrelevant in this kind of speech styles.

The preceding rough division into the strategies L2 stylization and paralexical insertion should not be taken as a strict categorization of different UYSS. Many UYSS combine features from one and the other process; thus, Dutch *Straattaal* combines a paralexicon with L2 influences like gender neutralization. It is, however, interesting to compare to what extent one or the other process characterizes the UYSS more or less. L2 stylizations seem to be extremely common in European UYSS, while only few of them use paralexical insertion as a major strategy. In fact, the Dutch situation is interesting, as two variants coexist, *Straattaal*, which is largely characterized by paralexification, and *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch*, which is a typical instance of L2 stylization. While the two can be used independently, they can also be combined. This is, in fact, quite easy, as *Straattaal* mainly comprises content words, while *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* is rather about phonetics and about functional elements; put otherwise, *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* can be used as the matrix to the insertion of *Straattaal* paralexicon.

Table 19.1 Examples from Yuba UYSS

Loans:	<i>bong</i>	‘clothes’ (< Bari)
Formal manipulations:	<i>bête</i>	‘house’ (< Juba Arabic <i>bêt</i> + UYSS suffix <i>-e</i> )
	<i>bonto</i>	‘trousers’ (< Juba Arabic <i>bontolôn</i> )

(Kossmann, 2017b). Elsewhere in the world, L2 stylization seems to be less common than in Europe, and most UYSS are mainly (or only) characterized by paralexical insertion.

### 3.3 The social meaning of UYSS

Earlier, UYSS were delimited in terms of practices as being typical for urban youth. This, of course, leaves an enormous potential for associations and indexicalities attached to UYSS. To some extent, this is amplified by specific associations to ‘urbanity.’ In Europe and in North America, continents with long histories of urbanization, the adjective ‘urban’ is often associated with lower class urban culture, and, especially, with urban countercultures. Thus ‘urban dictionaries’ as can be found on the internet never concern typical city life registers such as bureaucratic language or languaging in university fraternities. On the other hand, in African and South Asian cities, which have very different population dynamics from Europe and North America, ‘urbanity’ has a strong and (for many people) positive association with modernity and upward social mobility (Nortier, 2017).

Most European UYSS are socially grounded in second or later generation migrants who have been using the dominant language in general society from a tender age. While many of these UYSS transcend ethnic boundaries (and have therefore been called multi-ethnolects, cf. Quist, 2008), users often have clear ideas about which ethnicities are the core users of the style. Thus, for Dutch *Straattaal* Surinamese heritage youth are considered the archetypical users, while uses by other migrant youth may be accepted or not, depending on whom one asks. However, the (quite frequent) use of *Straattaal* by people without a migratory background is considered to be unfitting by other *Straattaal* users (Cornips and de Rooij, 2013; Kossmann, 2017b; Mourigh, 2017b). Thus, while young people with all possible different heritage backgrounds practice *Straattaal*, it still has a clear grounding in certain groups as opposed to others. In other European UYSS, however, ethnicity may be (or have become) less important as an indexicality of the UYSS (Madsen, 2011).

Outside Europe, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, it seems that many UYSS have their roots in jargons related to marginal groups, criminals, prison populations, street children, etc. As a result, some of them still have a strong gang related flavour, as is the case of the different *Tsotsitaal*s in South Africa (cf. Mesthrie and Hurst, 2013). In other cases, the UYSS has taken a different direction. For example, *Nouchi* in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), which is said to have developed among street children, is now commonly used among young people of all kinds of social backgrounds. According to Kube’s study of language use among Abidjan *lycéens* (high school students), over 80% of the interviewees said they knew *Nouchi*; her studies include the most prestigious elite school of the city. About one-third of the interviewees claimed they used *Nouchi* as their main or even exclusive choice when speaking with friends. To these users the indexicalities of *Nouchi* are therefore very different from the anti-elite counter-cultural associations of some other UYSS. In fact, Kube’s research suggests that to most of her interviewees *Nouchi* is just associated with age (Kube, 2005).

The situation of the UYSS in Nairobi is still different. *Sheng*, which has Swahili as its matrix, is associated with youth in general, although some versions of it still imply an element of being streetwise. *Engsh*, on the other hand, which developed as an anti-language to *Sheng*, nowadays ‘belongs’ to educated youth (Dorleijn, Mous and Nortier, 2015). African UYSS do not seem to index ethnic divisions (whether specific groups or more generally ‘migrants’), and there is little reason to assume they have ever done so in the past. European UYSS, on the other hand, have their roots in migrant communities. However,

recently, a number of European UYSS have been said to develop into de-ethnicized youth varieties (Auer, 2013; Rampton, 2015), which would, at least at this point, make them more similar to African UYSS. This was also attested by Freywald et al. (2011) who emphasized this point and proved it through an attitude survey.

Even UYSS that have a counter-culture type of association are not always exclusively used to index a streetwise identity. Thus, Kossmann (2017a) argues that *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* – often portrayed as a streetwise, ‘aggressive’ UYSS (Nortier and Dorleijn, 2008) – is also used by religious, law-abiding girls in order to mark a relaxed, not-so-serious stance towards their discourse. No doubt, similar complicated networks of indexicalities are to be found in other UYSS too.

UYSS are often described as being gendered, and more commonly used among males than among females (e.g., Mesthrie and Hurst, 2013; Nortier, 2017). This seems to be correlated with indexicalities of rebelliousness that are often associated with male behaviour. In UYSS that do not have such indexicalities there is little reason to expect strongly gendered patterning, and in fact, if such patterns are found, they are not very strong. Nortier (2017) reports how male and female young Moroccan-Dutch people comment negatively on Moroccan girls using *Straattaal*. The same participants, however, use *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch* without overt attention being paid to it. Examples from Algeria, Indonesia, and Hong Kong show that both women and men use youth varieties without the overt negative connotations known from Western Europe. Nortier (2017) suggests that this can be explained in the following way: There seems to be a gender restriction for varieties used as anti-languages (Halliday, 1976), while youth varieties that mark socially upward mobility can be used by both males and females.

#### 4. Methodological matters

In order to envisage the multi-layered character of UYSS and the problems attached to its analysis, it is useful to take recourse to Silverstein’s notion of the *Total Linguistic Fact*. This refers to the dynamic ‘mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms contextualized to situations of interested human use, mediated by the fact of cultural ideology’ (Silverstein, 1985, p. 220). For a full understanding of UYSS it is necessary to analyze them not only at the level of linguistic forms, but also on the levels of linguistic practice and ideology and their interaction. According to Silverstein (1985, p. 221) every linguistic category ‘related to our ability to refer and predicate, which, carefully examined, [is] situated at such [a] triple intersection.’ Although early work on UYSS did not ignore practices and ideologies, most attention was paid to the structural linguistic dimension. Quist (2008) explicitly distinguishes a linguistic variety perspective and a level of practices and ideology. These approaches differ methodologically; the variety approach draws on dialectology and Labovian sociolinguistics and explores linguistic features characteristic of a ‘variety’ or ‘lect,’ whilst the practice and ideologies approaches are grounded in the social constructivist paradigm within sociolinguistics and explore the ways social meaning is constructed in situated discourse (Svendsen, 2015; Svendsen and Quist, 2010).

The different layers of the *Total Linguistic Fact* demand different methods. Thus, the level of linguistic form can be studied on the basis of recording of conversations, participant observations and even elicitation (cf. Nassenstein, 2018). Usually, experimental settings

are avoided. However, see Freywald et al. (2011), where an attitudes survey in controlled group samples serves as de facto experiment.

The most common methods for studying the level of linguistic practices are in the realm of linguistic ethnography, which typically couples conversation analysis with interviews and participant observation. In such studies, one remarks a strong reliance on the in-depth analysis of very small groups of users.

The study of UYSS language ideology concentrates on the analysis of metacommentary. Thus, in 2017, a special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review* was dedicated to metalinguistic comments and communities of practice (Dorleijn and Nortier, 2017).

The reliance on spoken conversation as found in the large majority of UYSS studies may be slightly outdated. Nowadays, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), especially social media, is a major factor in the development of new patterns of communication. Undoubtedly, in order to understand UYSS, written data from the Internet plays a central role. Oral and CMC modalities have their own characteristics and challenges (Dorleijn and Nortier, 2012).

The usefulness of CMC data for an ethnographic approach is undisputed (see e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2008, 2013) who has done pioneering work in this approach). Where the aim of linguistic ethnography is to establish how group boundaries are set through language, which (speech) events are ordinary and which are exceptional, CMC provides an excellent resource (see e.g., Kossmann, 2017a; Nortier, 2017). More debate concerns the extent to which CMC data can be put on a par with (spontaneous) oral data (see Androutsopoulos, 2006; Dorleijn and Verschik, 2016). Clearly, written CMC data are different, in terms of the higher level of awareness implied in writing and should not be taken as faithful renderings of oral speech, among others because disambiguation strategies used in oral interaction (such as intonation, loudness, gaze, facial expressions, gestures) are lacking in (written) CMC. In oral communication, there is less time to reflect or to monitor and correct than in written communication, and it is more spontaneous. CMC users can correct themselves more easily than in oral encounters. On the other hand, in CMC, authors have to rely completely on (written) language for their disambiguation strategies, which arguably may lead to the more explicit use of certain linguistic features to convey a certain identity (whereas in oral interaction cues would be given in a different way, e.g., through physical appearance etc.).

In CMC the participants (authors) can play more easily with identities: for example, a middle-aged Dutch woman can pretend to be a 15-year-old Moroccan-Dutch boy if she adjusts her nickname and chooses the right words, unhindered by her physical properties.

## 5. Future directions

Most quantitative and qualitative studies of UYSS focus on particular instances that are either geographically, linguistically, or ethnically restricted – or all three at the same time. The next step would be to bring these case studies together in a comparative study. Earlier, we have identified two linguistic strategies (L2 stylization and paralexical insertion) that seem to apply to most if not all UYSS hitherto described. We could call them universal strategies. Can we, if we compare all individual cases of UYSS, find more universal tendencies? Is it possible to design a model which takes into account social and linguistic



factors which can explain commonalities and differences? Or are UYSS indeed a loose collection of phenomena that have little in common, or are not different enough from other linguistic practices to warrant a separate category? Questions like the preceding can only be answered by a large-scale meta-study.

Work on UYSS generally takes a sociolinguistic, anthropological linguistic or discourse and interaction-oriented approach (often a combination of these). However, UYSS may also provide important insights to functionalist and cognitive linguists. From these perspectives the question of ‘attractiveness’ of the stylistic features that speakers select can be addressed. Why are particular features selected over others? To what extent do universal mechanisms such as iconicity and economy play a role? Do these features possess a certain intrinsic/universal semiotic or emotional saliency?

Furthermore, studies that focus on the perception of UYSS through experiments such as Implicit Association Tests (Campbell-Kibler, 2012) or Matched Guise could yield fruitful results, especially when it comes to distinguishing UYSS from related varieties.

Another direction that has not been explored to the full (if at all) is an alignment with a language acquisition approach. While the register/style approach is dominant in the analysis of UYSS (and part of our preceding definition), one should not rule out that for some users the UYSS has become a neutral way of speaking. Thus, in the case of urban UYSS based on colonial languages, the ‘new’ variant may easily develop a wide range of usages. In such communities, children may become confronted mainly with the new variant, and acquire it as their first language. This seems to be the case at least for some speakers of *Nouchi* in Abidjan (Kouadio, 2006; Newell, 2009) and may be much more widespread. For much of the data discussed previously (e.g., about *Sheng* and *Moroccan Flavoured Dutch*), it is unclear to what extent they are the result of conscious manipulation by speakers, or the unconscious effect of language acquisition processes. Is this determined by individual circumstances of speakers (such as aptness, amount of input, etc.) or can generalizations be made?

This brings us to one more direction which could yield fruitful insights: the historical perspective. How do UYSS change? Do dialects of UYSS develop? In all UYSS, there is much variation and a much higher degree of innovation than one usually encounters in ‘mainstream’ languages. It is often stated, both by speakers and by researchers, that UYSS lexicons are subject to change constantly and that discontinuity of expression is the norm. This seems to be exaggerated, though, and in fact a large number of features prove to be persistent over a relatively long time-span (cf. also Hurst, 2015). As an example, we may adduce the use of Sranan (Surinamese) lexicon in Dutch *Straattaal*, which was already observed by René Appel in 1999. Even though many *Straattaal* users back then and nowadays have no knowledge of Sranan itself, the large majority of the Sranan-based lexicon listed in Appel (1999) is still in use 20 years later. Only few real-time analyses of linguistic change within UYSS have been undertaken so far, but one may speculate that innovations tend to focus on certain expressive and highly frequent parts of the lexicon (like evaluative adjectives and adverbs, or expressions for potential sexual partners and the ways to interact with them), and, moreover, that it is especially the most recent introductions that are substituted by innovative forms. This may lead to the observation that things constantly change, while on the other hand a considerable number of not only lexical, but also



grammatical and phonological features remain the same. The implication of this continuity is that UYSS are not only defined by their dynamics but also present linguistic substance that can be studied as (linguistically, though not necessarily socially) stable features.

## 6. Further reading

Androutsopoulos, J. (2015). Networked multilingualism: Some language practices on Facebook and their implications. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 19(2), pp. 185–205.

This paper proposes the term ‘networked multilingualism’ and presents findings from a case study to explore its implications for the theorizing of multilingualism.

Djenar, D., Ewing, M. and Manns, H. (2018). *Style and intersubjectivity in youth interaction*. Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter.

Djenar et al. (2018) sketch a South-East Asian perspective on (multilingual) linguistic practices of young people.

Nortier, J. and Svendsen, B.A., eds. (2015). *Language youth and identity in the 21st century. Linguistic practices across urban spaces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In this book, linguistic practices from some north-West European countries are compared to each other and practices elsewhere.

Mesthrie, R. and Hurst, E. (2013). Slang registers, code-switching and restructured urban varieties in South Africa. An analytic overview of tsotsitaals with special reference to the Cape Town variety. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 28(1), pp. 103–130.

This article provides a rich overview of the features and analytical challenges presented by UYSS in South Africa.

## 7. Related topics

Processing multilingual data, social factors, borrowing, code-switching, linguistic landscape, and urban multilingualism

## Abbreviations

CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
L1	first language
L2	second language
O	object
S	subject
UYSS	Urban Youth Speech Styles
V	verb

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