Stylizing Standard Dutch by Moroccan boys in Antwerp

1. Introduction

The integration of ethnic minorities into affluent Western societies and their job markets has over the last three or four decades become an increasingly important political issue. Widespread conviction that the best way to ensure this integration is through schooling, has made these minorities' school careers, and particularly knowledge of a standard language and literacy skills, become important political issues too (cf. Collins & Blot 2003). In spite of systematic underperforming of specific (ethnic or social) *groups* however, what many discourses about minority school careers or calls for equal opportunities have in common is their focus on the individual, and on the acquisition of neutral, *passe-partout* skills. Laudable as this concern for individual well-being is, and obvious as it might seem that potential workers' employability is best appreciated through high scores on individual tests, the downside of this focus is that underperforming at such tests easily legitimizes disadvantageous social positions or leads to individual pathologization. As Varenne & McDermott argue, "individuals must be the units of concern and justice, but they are misleading units of analysis and reform […] we must look away from individuals to preserve them" (1999, p. 145), and carefully document their social conditions. A similar look 'away from the individual' can be found in critical literacy studies and social theories of learning that consider learning, literacies and other skills as (part of) communicative practices that are "inseparable from values, senses of self, and forms of regulation and power" (Collins and Blot, 2003, p. xviii; also

see Street, 1995; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Standard languages are in this view anything but neutral skills: they involve learners in a social negotiation with the social practices that accompany them, and with the identities and power relations their use brings about.

Of course, this makes it questionable that standard languages will be embraced by those groups whose senses of self tend to differ from the self embodied in standard language use. Nonetheless, standard languages' self-evident status is guaranteed in everyday practice, even by those who are probably not going to speak them very much or very well. My purpose in this article is to examine the role of a standard language in a multilingual educational context and to illustrate something of the struggle of social agents within their unequal social entourage. More specifically, this article examines ethnographic data that show how Standard Dutch is legitimized as well as humourously contested by Moroccan adolescents in a regular secondary school in Antwerp, Belgium. The data analysed here also show how these adolescents' practical insight on its use, function, and meaning reveals the socially coloured character of Standard Dutch and its constraining effects, both of which in contrast with how it is generally imbued with pure and emancipatory qualities in mainstream discourse. I will indicate how this legitimizing/contesting activity is organised by a local practice they refer to themselves as "*belachelijk doen*" ("doing ridiculous") or "*tegenwerken*" ("counteracting"); how stylizing linguistic varieties they find extremely meaningful and alien to their own lifeworlds, such as Standard Dutch, was an important part of this; and how this led to a practice that can be described as 'linguistic sabotage'. This means that, on a theoretical level, this article investigates the dynamics of hegemony.

2. Hegemony, schools, standard languages

Despite its popularity in neo-marxist analyses of class, Blommaert et al. point out that

hegemony – how people (learn to) reproduce their own subordination or (learn to) accept

others' intellectual and moral leadership – "is always about more than class relations in

the abstract, or rather, it refuses to abstract class and class relations from the manifold

relations […] which enter into the particularities of lived, historical experience" (2003, p.

3; see also Williams, 1977). In other words, hegemony helps us to look at aspects of daily

life and connect them with their social structures and hierarchies (see e.g. Bourdieu's

discussion of taste and its role in constructing social stratification (Bourdieu, 1994)).

Hegemony thus foregrounds the social, i.e., collective, constructedness of inequality, in

an era where social class and inequality are being increasingly discursively eliminated by

a rhetoric of choice and individualism that reduces social inequality to individual moral

disposition, perseverance, or to the different social/ethnic programming of individual

brains (cf. Blommaert et al., 2003). Hegemony is never constant, though, and is

challenged by discontent, deviations and forms of resistance. Here too, the 'particularities

of lived experience' are important: acts of resistance are never 'clean' and hegemony-

free, but they are usually 'messy' social practices in which both contesting as well as

hegemony-reproducing impulses can be found (cf. Erickson, 2004). Below I will pay

attention to 'bricolaging' practices that are often simultaneously legitimizing and

contesting. In my data this tension or ambiguity, at least to some extent, appears to be

guaranteed by humour. This is not just in the sense that deviant behaviour can be

explained as 'only a joke'; what I often find are humourous hypothetical and exaggerated projections of real conflict and extreme co-operation. These often have a mitigating effect on those occasions when expectations about acceptable behaviour are heightened, but nonetheless eventually reproduce the normativity they exaggerate and playfully call attention to, as well as the high status of a variety such as Standard Dutch.

If Gramsci's original conception of hegemony invoked a situation where an elite guides or teaches a subordinate mass, it is hardly a surprise that schools have been identified as sites where hegemonic learning processes take place (Bourdieu, 1991; Giroux, 1983; Heller, 1999; Hymes, 1996). It is there that (western) pupils encounter a standard language and dominant representations of reality, as well as the epistemological and ideological perspectives that support these representations. As Bauman and Briggs (2003) point out, the logic behind these perspectives, or the hegemonic status of a standard language, derives from long-standing conceptions of language and tradition, and more precisely, from the modernist concern to abstract language from its supposed unstable meanings and social-traditional indexicalities. In this view, language should be a referentially precise tool: a linguistic realisation of rational thinking on which to found individual enlightenment, scientific progress and ultimately, social progress. However, the basis from which this pure language was to be forged, or the specific discursive practices that were to be elevated as universal/neutral, were (and are still) situated in specific elitist social circles that exclude groups (women, the poor, country folk, the illiterate, non-Europeans, and now especially ethnic minorities) whose language varieties and other habits are portrayed as provincial, partisan, frivolous, folkloristic, ignorant or ambiguous, and therefore unsuitable for any modern ventures. The image of a pure

language thus legitimizes and structures unequal social relations, and excludes those who, because of their traditional ways of speaking, are deemed incompetent to contribute to progress and a civilized world.

Purifying language, in other words, made it "faceless, decontextualized, abstract, and socially and historically disembodied" (Briggs and Bauman, 2003, p. 314), and it is these qualities that have led to the representation of standard languages as a kind of neutral 'technology of the intellect' with which one can measure and rank individual people, and assign them a corresponding place in society (cf. Collins and Blot, 2003). It is therefore, rather ironically, that standard languages have often become one of the crucial elements in progressive discourses on equal opportunities. This "salvation through education" (Collins and Blot, 2003, p. 7) is of course supported by the widespread assumption that learning is an individual phenonemon, or an autonomous process, in spite of its interpretive and thus interactional character (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The way in which Moroccan boys in my study frequently stylize and thus 're-indexicalize' or hybridize Standard Dutch at least points to how combating inequality through improving individual linguistic skills might not be as evident as it is often held up to be.

3. Stylization, performance, authenticity

Methodologically, *stylization* has been an important entry for analysis in my research (see Coupland, 2001a, for an extensive discussion). Originally associated with Bakhtin's notion of 'double-voicing', speech stylization can be defined as the "intensification or

exaggeration of a particular way of speaking for symbolic and rhetorical effect"
(Rampton, 2001a, p. 85), and as "the knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles
and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the
current speaking context … a form of strategic de-authentication" (Coupland, 2001a, p.
345), which can in fact also refer to gestures, visual imagery, music, clothing, hair, make-
up, etc. There is some leverage in claiming that stylization as a kind of social action is
intimately bound up with contemporary highly-mediated and reflexive western societies,
where prestigious and stigmatised linguistic commodities and identities intensily circulate
and transcend as well as crosscut their local and less local contexts (cf. Coupland, 2001a,
p. 347).

Stylizations are different from the classical 'stylistic variation' or 'style-shifting'
phenomena described in quantitative variationist sociolinguistics (Labov, 1972; Trudgill,
1974). The latter approach showed how social hierarchies are inscribed on routine speech
patterns, and how groups 'style-shift' in different social contexts: they produce higher
usage of 'ing' in words like *dancing* in a 'formal' style (often also 'register') rather than
informal 'in' or 'en' as in *dancin'*. Traditionally this approach involved (1) identifying
phonological and morphosyntactic features (typically a standard and vernacular form)
that are routinely produced differently according to the formality of the context or the
composition of the speaker's audience; and (2) quantifying the extent with which this is
done (cf. Hudson, 1996). The primary interest in much of this work, however, was to
retrieve linguistic data that were as close as possible to people's 'natural' style or
everyday speech, i.e. speech uninfluenced by the researcher's presence or by other
(mostly modern) factors precluding 'real', un-monitored speech (cf. Bucholtz, 2003).

A problematic dimension about this early approach was that the search for conventional patterns and systematicity weeded out the exceptional and only paid sparing attention to self-conscious speech;[1] language users tended to be depicted as unconcerned with communicative purposes and merely responsive to changes in a pre-existing and simplified external world (Coupland, 2001b; Eckert and Rickford, 2001; Schilling-Estes, 2002). Stylizations, in contrast, are usually quite exceptional and remarkable (they do not predictably follow situation-shifts), they emphatically involve a creative and highly self-conscious speaker who alludes to self-perceived categories and identities, and incidentally, they are often triggered by the researcher's presence. Instead of quotidian speech, stylizations are short-lived, and typically have a studiedly artificial and explicit metapragmatic quality, often in the form of formulaic phrases or hyperbolic intensifications of a specific style or variety. There's no attempt, or at least no long-lasting one, at speaking the employed linguistic material idiomatically or systematically across different contexts.

Theoretically, both supposedly 'natural' styles as well as highly contrived stylizations can be reconciled as two extremes of one continuum when we resort to social constructionist theory, and to the concepts of performance and routine in particular. Social constructionism holds that how we speak is more than the mere reflection of or response to pre-existing social structures. Rather, it is one of the primary ways language users actively and creatively shape and re-shape their social surroundings, be it though in close relation to the constraining normativity that has led up to these surroundings in the first place (cf. e.g. Giddens, 1976). In principle, thus, all language use is a question of *styling*, of creatively and at every moment selecting – in a socially consequential way –

from a range of available linguistic resources that have social meaning. Hence, rather than being 'natural' products, dialect styles are a form of discursive social action, or the product of social practice rather than mere variation (cf. Coupland, 2001a; 2001b, p. 200-201). This does not only put into perspective the 'authentic' quality of speech, but it also points to the *performative* nature of our daily language use and identity work (cf. Bucholtz, 2003; Cameron, 1995, p. 15-16; and see Goffman, 1959). Being is doing, or presenting oneself in a certain way, and this is always done in a context where certain kinds of doings and linguistic clusterings already exist and where one is always (perceived to be) (dis)affiliating with others and the practices and communities these others are part of. Certain linguistic clusterings or styles can come to be named (Valley Girl, burnout, hip hop, and of course the 'known' languages and dialects as they are locally perceived) and parts of them others find appealing can consequently be used to 'self-style' and present oneself as masculine, urban, carefree, rebellious, a.o. Within this frame, researchers have elucidated different processes of self- and other-styling (Bucholtz, 1999; Cameron, 2000; Cutler, 1999; Eckert, 2000, 2001; Pujolar, 2001; Rampton, 1995, 1999a,b; also see Eckert and Rickford, 2001).

Style is thus the performed product of an individual's perception of the social world and the place she occupies in it or aspires to. In addition to being performative-perceptive, social constructionism holds that social action is imbued with *routinization*, and that people expect routine and predictable (or normative) behaviour from each other (Garfinkel, 1967; Giddens, 1984, p. 60ff.; Goffman, 1971). Certain kinds of self-presentation and styles have to be repeated, in other words, and this repetition brings along habit and unconsciousness, and makes these constantly repeated actions come to

seem as 'natural' and fixed aspects of our behaviour. Stylizations, however, typically involve *spectacular* fragments of language, non-conventional sets of actions which are aesthetically marked and usually described as performances or verbal art (cf. Bauman, 1977; Coupland, 2001a, p. 346; Hymes, 1996; Rampton, 2001a). Generally, a performance puts the focus on form, it often reframes ordinary language and signals that what is said is to be understood in a special sense, it is geared to the enhancement of experience in the present moment, and it spotlights a performer whose actions and communicative skill are consequently (morally) evaluated by an audience. Their deviation from routine behaviour and their often explicit evaluation makes performances a useful entry for the analysis of ideology and (hegemonic) language use. Producing a stylization is thus in a sense like setting a cat among the pigeons, and below we will see how these humourous linguistic projectiles can cause frame trouble or accentuate the hegemonic routines they deviate from.[2]

Data in which speakers are 'putting on' raise the question of authenticity. In the first place, this is a practical empirical question. The analyst has to investigate the interactants' frame or sense of what is going on, and decide who 'owns' the speech that is produced (Goffman, 1974; 1981). Beyond this, there is the question of how one can generalize on the basis of such data, considering their remoteness from what Bucholtz ironically calls the "the gold standard of authenticity in variationist sociolinguistics", viz. "the most vernacular speaker at his most casual and unself-conscious, and hence most systematic" (2003, p. 406). After all, parts of the data discussed underneath have 'observation paradox' written all over them, so to what extent is this exceptional inauthentic language use informative about routine unobserved interactions? Space limits

prevent a discussion at length (for this, see e.g. Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 1994), but it might be useful to point out that (1) since ethnographies are never transparant windows on reality, such 'inauthentic' data are not necessarily to be discarded as obscuring a reality outside of the research context; (2) 'inauthentic' data in fact invite a recognition of ethnographic research as a practice of data *constitution* and as a contact situation that merits study in its own right (cf. Auer, 1995; Fabian, 1995); and (3) in this case, research-induced data are relevant because they are informative about how a group of adolescents deals with its hegemonic circumstances. When we see that in this case the researcher is a white intellectual and thus successful product of the society Moroccan boys live in, my research can be regarded as similar to (and part of) the happenings it set out to investigate, and becomes manifest as a contribution to a (bourgeois) tradition of activities in which such boys are being problematized, observed, investigated, contained. Hence, the traces of these boys' perception of the research(er), and of the kinds of information they think are relevant for it/him and the 'objectivity' that needs to be observed thereby (which they often considered fun to disturb), are extra empirical data on how they go about with hegemony or with whom they see as its representatives. I will now first describe some of the contexts in which this research took place.

4. Contexts

Knowledge of Dutch, and especially of Standard Dutch, is a sensitive issue in northern Belgium. One reason for this is that Belgium in the 19th and 20th century has seen the ascent and flourishing of a nationalist 'Flemish movement' that has led to the acquisition

of linguistic rights for speakers of Dutch, and eventually to the construction of a separate political and monolingual zone in the northern part of Belgium that is called Flanders (Deprez and Vos, 1998; Hermans, Vos and Wils, 1992).[3] Alongside the social emancipatory motives of the Flemish movement an important idea was that authentic Dutch-speaking folklore – the Flemish *Volk* – was under duress by the general appeal of French and the modernity it represented, and needed to be protected from this. This movement has been highly successful in view of the position of Dutch in Belgium today – illustrated, a.o., by the fact that every Belgian prime minister since 1979 has been a (bilingual) Fleming – and it confronts the Flemish community with important contradictions, as is the case for other successful Western national minority movements (Heller, 1999; Pujolar, 2001; Woolard, 1989). After all, contemporary Flemish autonomy within the Belgian state has considerably eroded the basis of solidarity from which that very autonomy was demanded, viz. the low value of Dutch for achieving socio-economic welfare. Having in a sense beaten their exterior enemy, and considering the continuous economic decline of the French-speaking south of Belgium since the 1960s, it has become increasingly difficult for Flemings to claim that they suffer a French-favouring regime.[4] On the contrary, the self-evidence of a monolingual Dutch norm within Flemish boundaries has made Dutch speakers face the fact that they themselves are now a majority as opposed to ethno-linguistic minorities in Flanders. And it has confronted them with how to proceed from defending to now also defining one's autonomy and cultural identity, and with how to find new ways of socio-political mobilisation (cf. Heller, 1999, p.15).

Rather than leading to new community-building projects however, this challenge has up to the present resulted in a political discourse that mainly tries to revitalize the conditions for the old monolingual logic that always legitimized Dutch-speaking self-determination in the past (cf. Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998; Gal and Irvine, 1995). Hence, we find obligatory citizenship courses for unemployed non-EU newcomers, an exclusive emphasis on the individual acquisition of Dutch as the highway to integration (to the detriment of fostering political participation), an abnormalization of the presence of other languages on Flemish territory, a pathologization of ethnically inspired political activity, and the prominence of ethnic and linguistic minorities in social scientific research. All this is supported by the perpetuation of a discourse of crisis which emphasizes the need for continuous Flemish nationalist action against, a.o., EU-multilingualism and globalized English-dominated market-capitalism, despite the indisputable position of Dutch in Flanders, Belgium and the EU.

What contributes to this linguistic sensitivity is that the specific language for which rights were being demanded has been subject to considerable debate itself. Instead of developing a standard Flemish, 19th century Flemish intellectuals decided to adopt, after years of discussions, the Dutch that was then used as the standard language in the Netherlands (Deprez, 1999; Willemyns, 1996).[5] Northern Dutch was considered authentic, i.e., it was viewed as not corrupted by French and foreign occupation, and it was felt to be 'one's own language': it was the standard that would have been most likely developed by the Flemish had there not been the separation of the Low Countries due to the 80 Years' War in the 16th and 17th centuries (which eventually resulted in the economic and cultural decline of the north of Belgium). An additional argument was that

northern Dutch, as a prestigious national and modern variety, was considered a variety under the patronage of which a further spread of French could be avoided. Appropriating this foreign but 'authentic' and authoritative standard ended up forcing an entire population into a language learning process, in which local Flemish varieties had to be discarded as symbols of a 'bad' history of cultural decline and provincialism. In sum, a foreign modern standard was brought in to revitalize and protect a local tradition it was at the same time supposed to replace. All this has led to a strong awareness of a monoglot standard and the imposition of a purification regime (cf. Briggs and Bauman, 2003; Cameron, 1995; Silverstein, 1996).[6] Consequently, this monoglot norm has imbued other and non-standard varieties with a lot of social meaning, which enhances their eligibility for social identity construction and play.

Paradoxically thus, the Flemish pursuit of linguistic rights for a specific linguistic variety eventually led to a situation in which one linguistic hierarchy was replaced by another (cf. Blommaert, 1999; Jaffe, 1999). Indeed, the 'people' whose language was protected and made official turned out not to be the 'people' that spoke Flemish varieties, as this last group (and their local varieties) became the object of a purifying regime in which again one specific variety (Standard Dutch now instead of French) was considered crucial for obtaining access to socio-economic success and cultural development. In other words, the frenchification that had been dreaded was changed into a regime of 'Standard-Dutchification', in which speakers of Flemish varieties were confronted with the same difficulties that the Flemish movement had opposed.

It is also significant that this research took place in Antwerp, where the consecutive electoral victories of the extreme rightist anti-Belgian and anti-foreigner

party Flemish Interest (formerly Flemish Block) has made inter-ethnic interaction a very problematic and risky arena where negative stereotypes are frequently being exchanged and experienced. Inner-city young males with Moroccan backgrounds in particular are easily identified with crime, trouble, and anti-social behaviour, and often find a polarized and mistrustful atmosphere when in the presence of whites - which is in fact sometimes parodied by Moroccan boys with utterances such as "'*t zen weeral die makákskes zene*", Antwerp dialect for "it's them little wogs again".[7] These stereotypifications also bear on language: Moroccan boys' usual image is that of incompetent or unwilling speakers of Dutch; they are viewed as lacking the diligence and dedication to learn it properly and consequently integrate into Flemish society.

5. Ethnographic observations

The data I draw on in this paper are the result of two and a half years of fieldwork in one secondary school (between May 1999 and April 2002). Data-collection involved participant observation, interviewing, individual (audio) recording, classroom (audio) recording, and feedback-interviews on extracts from the recordings. This resulted in a corpus of 35 hours of individual audio-recording and 35 hours of simultaneous classroom recording,[8] and 45 hours of interviewing. The fieldwork concentrated on two classes in their last years of secondary education (thirty-five pupils in two different groups; in each group Moroccan boys took up 2/3[rds] of the total amount of pupils; there were three Turkish boys, nine Flemish boys and one Flemish girl;[9] ages varied from 16 to 21; backgrounds were working class, all minus two were Belgian-born).

The school I visited (here called "City School") offers non-university bound technical and vocational curriculum tracks. The two groups I studied followed electro-mechanics as a main subject, a technical curriculum that placed them, according to the unofficial symbolic hierarchy between different curriculum tracks in Belgium, in between the 'higher' academic track and the 'lower' vocational one.[10] All (male and female) teaching staff members involved in electro-mechanics are of white Flemish background. Relations between pupils and teachers were mostly friendly and constructive, however. There was a general consensus among pupils that there was a lot of racism outside school walls, but not within.

Though monolingual *de jure* (as all official and subsidized schools in Flemish Belgium), the City School in fact has a highly multilingual population. Many pupils lived elsewhere in Europe until quite recently and bring their competencies in French, Italian, Polish and Russian with them to school. This multilingualism was also quite noticeable in the two electro-mechanics classes I visited, where different Turkish, Arabic, Berber and Dutch varieties were used on a daily basis. Six boys had an Arabic background, the rest of them spoke Berber at home, though in all cases, expertise in these home languages varied quite a lot.[11] Many Moroccan boys themselves noticed that they continually switched between their home language(s) and Dutch, and that they borrowed elements from other varieties, depending on their interest and ability, and on the friends, music or media a particular variety was associated with. "We mix everything" was a frequent answer when I asked Moroccan boys about their daily language use.

The boys I followed around had a fairly good vernacular competence in Dutch, but systematically struggled with formal situations and the 'right' kinds of literacy they

require. Writing especially was problematic. It made boys sigh that "Dutch is difficult"
and teachers complain about the 'horrifying' texts their pupils produced. Moroccan boys
had a lot of trouble with spelling correctly and writing full grammatical sentences, and
often found (Standard) Dutch syntax and morphology difficult. Typically, they made
errors of gender in articles (*de boek* instead of regular neuter *het boek* [the book]);
adjectives were inflected incorrectly (*een goede boek* instead of Dutch *een goed boek* [a
good book]) as were demonstrative pronouns (*deze boek* instead of correct *dit boek* [this
book]), to name only a few of their writing problems. Reading aloud wasn't without
difficulties either; during formal public speeches or presentations Moroccan boys
frequently acquired a failing identity. Some of the trouble with articles and adjectives
could also feature in their (informal) vernacular routine Dutch, and speakers sometimes
wrestled with the article-system of Antwerp dialect (and said *nen interview* or *ne maske*,
with masculine articles, where it should be *een interview* and *e(en) maske* [a girl], in
Antwerp dialect).

Moroccan boys themselves acknowledged that there was a 'perfect' way of
speaking they considered beyond their ability, but, comparable to other working class
youth, this was often seen as the product of an extremely studious attitude that was
remote from the air of casualness they liked to construct. Furthermore, their linguistic
'imperfectness' notwithstanding, they systematically and repeatedly presented themselves
as competent speakers of Dutch, especially in relation to recent immigrants, and
sometimes even as better speakers than their Flemish classmates, who spoke a lot of
Antwerp dialect and thus 'bad' Dutch according to general language ideologies –
something that was also corroborated by the head of the school.

Their problematic formal competence in (Standard) Dutch, and the fact that their

multilingual backgrounds were seen as partly responsible for this, was sometimes

considered all the more reason why the City School should continue to have a Dutch-only

policy.[12] Thus, the City School has a monolingually Dutch teaching staff, it does not

provide for ethnic minority languages, and the school moreover applies general language

rules such as "When at school, speak Standard Dutch". And because of the high number

of Moroccan boys in them, the following language rules were developed for the electro-

mechanics classes:

- We gebruiken vanzelfsprekend standaardtaal (Algemeen Nederlands) tijdens de les.

- In de les worden geen dialecten en zeker geen vreemde talen die slechts een klein groepje

  begrijpt gesproken. Iedereen moet iedereen altijd kunnen begrijpen.

Translation

- Obviously, we speak standard language (Standard Dutch) while in class.

- During class the use of dialects is not allowed, and certainly not the use of foreign languages

  which only a small group can understand. Everyone should always be able to understand

  one another.

Some teachers emphasized that these rules were necessary from an emancipatory

perspective in order to 'give pupils the opportunity to learn Dutch', while others framed

them in terms of widespread conventions such as politeness and respect. In practice,

some staff members did invest in maintaining classroom monolingualism by reminding

pupils of school rules and reducing the amount of non-public language use. Others,

however, tended to be less strict and said it wouldn't go down well with these boys to be

brandishing the school rules booklet all the time, and one teacher matter-of-factly said she'd tolerate other languages 'as long as she didn't hear it' (but she suffered hearing loss on one side). Use of dialect was corrected by some (especially by the Dutch teacher), but overall this was less of an issue than in academically oriented curriculum tracks elsewhere, and generally, there was a tendency to be somewhat lenient towards the standard quality of pupils' Dutch since teachers believed pupils would not be needing an academic competence in their future workplace.

Nonetheless, the fact that the school felt that an elaboration of the general language rule was necessary makes clear that it considered the multilingual and predominantly Moroccan character of these electro-mechanics classes as one in which linguistic hegemony was losing touch or needed to be re-enforced as something obvious (see e.g. the 'obviously' in the first rule). Clearly, it made these boys quite aware of the expectations around speaking Standard Dutch, and at least in interviews, it seems that they were generally willing to live up to these requirements, as the next paragraph shows.

6. Interview reports

In interviews we can see that, on an explicit level, Moroccan boys agree with the hegemonic status of Standard Dutch [SD] as a prestigious and necessary language. In contrast with their generally rather sparing use of this variety, Moroccan boys appeared to value SD as quite important. In particular Dutch classes were experienced as 'very useful', and as offering many practical guidelines for 'later', i.e., which is when they would be applying for a job or conferring with their future colleagues, or when moving in

institutional contexts where non-standard varieties are considered inappropriate. Besides, Moroccan boys point out, being skilled in SD would help speakers to make a good impression, and several times Moroccan boys referred to the intellectual authority a competence in this variety provides, as the Dutch teacher in their view exemplified:

Example 1

Yassin: die behéérst het Nederlands

Imran: als die met [.] moeilijke woorden begint, dan kunde gij nie verder

Translation

Yassin: he [litt. 'that one'] really *commands* Dutch

Imran: when he starts with [.] difficult words, then you can't go any further

         [meaning: then you can't beat him in a discussion]

Thus, Moroccan boys were well aware of the necessity of speaking SD when under evaluation, and of the authority and verbal superiority associated with this variety. Next to this, they pointed out that SD was not only useful in Dutch class or within City School walls, but also beyond these boundaries in the weekend or evening jobs some boys were doing, or when they were scheduled for temporary apprenticeships.

Nevertheless, they did not situate this variety into their own friendship networks or leisure time activities. Rather, SD was associated with polite, serious and adult interaction with outsiders. However, they felt that using SD in informal contexts would make them vulnerable to be called a "nerd" or "slimeball" by their friends. Sometimes Moroccan boys said that SD use did not impose itself because teachers would not be speaking SD themselves, or, not taking into account their Flemish classmates, speaking

SD would not be necessary "because they are only Moroccans in our class". Moroccan boys thus seem to view themselves as SD-speakers 'upon request' (in their evening job or in very specific contexts at school), who as yet still refrain from inserting this variety into their informal daily routines or project a potential elaboration of its use into their future adult lives.

In practice however, and in contrast with these interview reports, on many occasions in my data Moroccan boys were putting the hegemonic status of SD as an 'obvious' and legitimate variety to the test by stylizing it and using it in inappropriate ways. This stylization practice was in fact not restricted to SD alone. Moroccan boys frequently played around with Antwerp dialect and 'illegal Dutch' (or foreigner Dutch). The latter two varieties were also extremely meaningful for these boys and related to *uncool* social horizons: 'illegal Dutch' referred to the language use of recent immigrants and refugees (all viewed as 'illegal' by these boys) and conjured up images of total incompetence and vulnerability for stereotypification by whites (cf. Rampton's discussion of Stylised Asian English: Rampton, 1995); Antwerp dialect was highly associated with disgruntled working class whites, and since the extreme rightist Flemish Interest party thrives on the latters' vote, it easily evoked images of racism (although features of this dialect were extensively used to construct a masculine identity, similar to other working class males (cf. e.g. Gal, 1995; Pujolar, 2001). Clearly, their uncool character made these varieties very eligible for stylizing them. How this is done with Standard Dutch is explained in the following paragraphs.

7. Stylizing Standard Dutch

In my data there are 31 instances in which SD is stylized, 3 of those were noted, 28 were

taped – I relied on a number of criteria to decide whether performance was stylized or

routine.[13] Very often in these examples, SD was associated with teachers, interviewers

and researchers, whose language practices and participant roles usually include the

management and distribution of turns in conversation, the formulation of sometimes

probing questions, and the evaluation of participants' answers. Thus, the adolescents used

SD to evoke interview roles, either as interviewer ("*aangezien de omstandigheden heel*

euh indrukwekkend zijn, zou ik graag een perspectief willen..." [as the circumstances are

uh very impressive, I would like to have a perspective…]); or as interviewee ("*ja*

inderdaad, daar ben ik mee eens" [yes indeed, I agree with that], or "*dat is het probleem*

van de maatschappij tegenwoordig" [that is the problem of the society at present]). At

other moments SD was used to evoke people who were doing research for various

reasons, and who seemed to be either from the police ("*druggebruik ik herhaal drug,*

BOB, en euh jongeman, met wie spreek ik?" [drug abuse I repeat drug, BOB[14], and uh,

young man, who am I talking to?]), or the media (see the evocation of interview roles

above). Doing scientific research seemed to belong to this same semantic domain:

wearing a microphone was sometimes called "doing undercover work", and those who

were wearing one were often loudly accused of being a spy or (police) informer;

interviews were sometimes playfully presented as interrogations (Imran, immediately

after I put on the recorder: "where were you on January 15, 1999?"), or as moments

where information was being exchanged that could be of interest to the head of the

school. Stylizations also evoked teachers, as when Jamal reproached his fellow

classmates during an interview ("*jongens, jongens, jongens, een beetje aandacht asjeblief?*" [boys, boys, boys, a bit of attention please?]), or as in the following example:

Example 2

Participants and setting: Interview with Mourad [20], Adnan [19], and Moumir [21], all of Moroccan descent, and JJ [25, Flemish descent]. February 2001. I've just asked these boys in which cases they think they'll be needing Standard Dutch. Moumir explains that last year they had to write a job application letter, but Mourad and Adnan find it highly amusing that Moumir in this way implicitly admits that he has to repeat the year (see line 10). Stylized Standard Dutch is in bold. Unmarked (non-bold) text here and in the following examples is 'routine', vernacular Dutch.

1 JJ: en wa ga der dan just van nodig hebben?

2 Adnan: (ge leert) beter praten of zo [.] als ge later voor een job ga

3   solliciteren of zo [..] dan gad'u tenminste nie belachelijk maken hé

4 Moumir: da was vorig jaar (   ) ook euh [..] brief ook kunnen

5   schrijven zo 'k heb da zo- zo zo'n sollicitatiebrief [..]

6 JJ: ja

7 Moumir: en euh [.] en dees jaar gaan wij da ook nog zien hé?[..] hé mannen?

8   en euh [.] dus euh [..] ja

9 Mourad & Adnan: [lachen] [2.0]

10 Mourad: [hangt vlakbij microfoon, smile voice:] **u bent dus een dubbelaar**

                                [yː bɛnt dʏs ən ˈdʏbəlaːr]

11   [gelach]

12 Adnan: Moumir Talhaoui [lacht]

13 Moumir: (   )

14   [gelach]

15 Mourad: 22 JAAR

16 JJ: | (en hebde)

17   [gelach]

18 JJ: maar maar allez als ge zo euh als ge zo kijkt naar [etc.]

Translation

1   JJ: and what exactly will you be needing from it?

2   Adnan: (you learn) to talk better or something [.] when you go and apply

3   for a job or something [..] then at least you won't be making a fool of

             yourself

4   Moumir: that was last year (   ) also uh [..] could write a letter like that

5   I've done such- such such an application letter [..]

6   JJ: yeah

7   Moumir: and uh [.] and this year we're also going to be seeing this isn't it?

8   [viz: the letter] [..] isn't it guys? and uh [.] so uh [..] yeah

9   Mourad & Adnan: [laughing] [2.0]

10 Mourad: [very close to microphone, smile voice:] **so you are a repeater**

11   [laughter]

12 Adnan: Moumir Talhaoui [laughs]

13 Moumir: (   )

14   [laughs]

15 Mourad: 22 YEARS OLD

16 JJ: | (and do you have)

17   [laughter]

18 JJ: but but right when you uh when you take a look at [etc.]

In lines 7-8 Moumir is seeking Adnan's and Mourad's confirmation for his story ("*isn't it guys?*"), but then seems to realise that they are not repeating the year as he is, and thus

cannot confirm whether they'll be writing a job application letter this year. This realization is clear in Moumir's second question for confirmation which this time also involves an address ("*guys*"), whereas before he only used a "we" to which he also counted himself. Moumir is in other words putting himself in a different position than his two classmates, and suddenly becomes someone who's addressing them about what they can expect this year in class. Moumir's story halts in line 8, and is followed by laughter in line 9, which suggests that Moumir is suffering face-loss and stops speaking because of this. Mourad discloses the precise content of Moumir's face-loss quite explicitly in line 10: the latter has unexpectedly and much to the amusement of his mates exposed himself as a repeater, and as someone who is ashamed of this (or who does not want to give his classmates the opportunity to start teasing him about this again, which they often did because he was somewhat ashamed of it, in contrast with Mourad who had to repeat a grade several times). Mourad does this in a stylized SD: he uses careful pronunciation and the formal pronoun 'u' [you].[15] By assuring its acoustic audibility (speaking very closely into the microphone), Mourad constructs his utterance in line 10 as an explicit and reputation-damaging disclosure (cf. Goffman, 1974, p. 83ff.), that needs to be assured of inclusion in the recording and later transcription of this interview – which is perhaps why we find the extra biographical information about Moumir in lines 12 and 15. The sequential positioning of Mourad's disclosure is not unimportant: Moumir is formulating his utterance in lines 4 to 7 initially as an answer for me, but when he halts in line 8 it is Mourad who in line 10 initiates the following turn instead of the regular authority in this interview, viz. the writer of this article. Mourad's self-selection here, and the fact that he comments on what Moumir says, are both characteristics of a turn-

allocating authority, as teachers and interviewers usually are (cf. Macbeth, 1991, p. 285; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1978, p. 45). This aspect, and the fact that a stigmatised school identity is revealed in Standard Dutch are evidence that Mourad's evaluation is teacher-like. The fact that Mourad speaks in my place invokes my role as a researcher, and potential situations in which I would be eager to reveal things about them, or would perhaps see repeating as morally deplorable in view of my own – in their eyes 'perfect' – school career.

Of course, the fact that Mourad is stylizing SD here could be triggered by the explicit question about their use of this variety in line 1, and most probably perhaps because there's a microphone on the table. Indeed, while producing a stylization, Mourad does things that are not usual in ordinary conversation: he brings his mouth closer to the microphone, articulates very clearly, and he and Adnan mention the full name and age of a friend they've known for years. They're clearly enjoying the new possibilities a microphone gives them, and are thus aware that everything they say is now irreversibly on tape, and possibly something they can be confronted with later. This was in fact not the only example where there is special attention to the microphone, and where the Moroccan boys seem to be experiencing the situation as slightly different from normal life, or are paying attention to how they should be (linguistically) behaving and how this behaviour reflects on their moral identities (hence the use of *Standard* Dutch). In addition, the interview-situation itself was also quite unusual for these boys. Unlike the rather unobtrusive low profile role I usually preferred to play when doing participant observation, an interview implied that I suddenly came to the fore as an explicit turn-

allocating authority who was very much in charge of the situation and who was asking them a lot of questions (see also example 6).

8. Ritual sensitivity

Unusual moments such as these are what Goffman calls 'ritually sensitive' moments, i.e. moments at which actual or potential rips show up in the routine fabric of social life, or moments where constraints apply "regarding how each individual ought to handle himself with respect to each of the others" (Goffman, 1981, p. 16). It is then that one often finds ritual or symbolic action geared to showing respect for the social order and the personal identities it protects, and designed to remedy potential transgressions. As Rampton (2002, p. 492) indicates, it is not unusual that in such cases one draws on linguistic material that has a "special significance above and beyond the practical requirements of the here-and-now", as SD in this case clearly is. This could also be noticed above, where SD was used on such sensitive moments as requests ("*euhm wat denkt u van euhm"* [uhm, what do you think of uhm] and mild reproaches ("*jongens, jongens, ...*" [boys, boys, …]), and also in the rest of my data, occasions such as these appeared to be extremely inviting for stylizations.

In addition, what unites most of the examples given above, is the fact that each time, Moroccan boys are dealing with a situation where a greater access to their 'territories of the self' comes into being (cf. Goffman, 1971, p. 38ff.), and experience that the control of their personal domain (information, freedom of movement, own thoughts, etc.) is somewhat threatened by questions and remarks that raise the stakes or heighten

their accountability. This is what we can also notice in the following example, where we can see that this heightened access involves the perception of heightened evaluation, and where we can find active negotiation around the conditions of observation:

Example 3

Participants and setting: January 2000. Karim [18, with microphone], Aziz [17]. Karim has just been given a microphone by the researcher and is walking around on the playground, trying to involve his friend Aziz in a conversation. Stylized Standard Dutch is in bold, stylized Antwerp dialect is in italics.

1   Karim: en [.] hoeveel hebde gij gestudeerd vandaag? [.] hoeveel hebde gij

2   gestudeerd vandaag?

3   Aziz: **wablieft? voor eh voor elektronica heb ik vier uurtjes**

        [waˈblift ˈvoːrə vor elekˈtroːnɪka hebɪk ˈviːr yːrtʃəs]

4   **gestudeerd**

        [ɣəstyˈdeːrt]

5   Karim: | vier uurkes ja

6   Aziz: en [.] [Antwerps:] *om de kwartier nen aftrekske hé*

        [ɔm də kʋartiːr nən ˈæftrekskəⁿe]

7   Karim: [Antwerps:] *een aftrekske* [.] *en on wie dochte?*

        [ən ˈæftrekskə en ɔn ʋɪ ˈdɔxtə]

8   Aziz: hé? [.] aan Jürgen *joeng* [.] Jürgen *joeng* [.] Jürgen

9   Karim: | H-WA!? [.] JÜRGEN?

10   HEI [lacht] (   ) hé

Translation

1 Karim: and [.] how much have you been studying today? [.] how much have

2   you been studying today?

3 Aziz: **pardon? for uh for electronics I've studied for four little**

4   **hours**

5 Karim: | four little hours yes

6 Aziz: and [.] [Antwerp dialect:] *every 15 minutes a little jerk off eh*

7 Karim: [Antwerp dialect:] *a little jerk off* [.] *and who were you thinking of?*

8 Aziz: eh? [.] of Jürgen *mate* [.] Jürgen *mate* [.] Jürgen

9 Karim: | h-WHA? [.] JÜRGEN?

10   HEY [laughs] (   ) eh

Karim asks Aziz a quite schoolish and evaluative question, to which Aziz replies in the
best possible way: he supposedly has already done four hours of studying, and he says
this in SD, the variety these boys are expected to use at school. The question and answer
are inauthentic: both friends did not really excel at school, and this inauthentic image is
also destroyed in line 6, where Aziz makes a contrast in form and content: he admits to
indulge in sexual rather than intellectual pleasures, and he says this in broad Antwerp
dialect, which is of course diametrically opposed to what school rules say. In a few
seconds we can see here how explicit enthusiasm about and compliance with school
expectations is drastically brought down.

Furthermore, by being playfully explicit about his sexual desires, Aziz illustrates
to what extent this example has to do with access and ritual sensitivity. Since uttering
sexual desires and certainly performing masturbation is (in western societies)
traditionally situated in the personal sphere, Aziz seems to be transgressing expectations
about what kinds of information are usually relevant in a research such as this, by uttering

these desires in an 'official' research project he is well aware of. He's in this way allowing a much more extensive access to his personal lifeworld than what I was initially interested in as a researcher (or he confronts me with information I'm not really interested in). Aziz in addition reveals that I am the object of his (homo)sexual fantasy, which not only stigmatises me in dominant heteronormative ideology (cf. Cameron and Kulick, 2003),[16] but it also suddenly makes my person public as an observable sexual object, somewhat comparable to how I penetrate the electro-mechanics class without their permission in order to focus on Karim and Aziz as interesting sociolinguistic objects. Aziz thus reverses the direction and mode of the gaze and its evaluation, whereby this time it is the researcher who is observed and evaluated as a sexual instead of linguistic object. Hence, in this example we find an emphatic embrace of school expectations which are immediately brought down with equal virtuosity, as well as a ritual sanctioning of the one who had upped the stakes by equipping them with a microphone.

When I asked Moroccan boys to comment on examples like these, they said were 'merely being ridiculous'. And this appeared to be a label they themselves mostly used for those instances in which they were playing or when they said they were being nonsensical, loud, or absurd. But, as the ritual sensitivity of many of the occasions at which it took place foreshadows, this ridiculous behaviour could involve more than mere play, and playing with SD involved more than merely invoking media personae or images of authority and obedience, as I will try to make clear in the following paragraph.

9. *Belachelijk doen, tegenwerken*

Belachelijk doen (doing/being ridiculous) was a practice that involved play-acting in class and producing inauthenticity, affecting ignorance, simulating enthusiasm or giving confusing or inappropriate answers which sometimes considerably delayed the rhythm and fluent organisation of what they saw as 'boring' or 'serious' situations (cf. 'making out', Burawoy, 1979; Foley, 1990, p. 112ff.; Goffman, 1961, p. 157ff.; 'messing about', Gilroy and Lawrence, 1988, p. 136-137; 'having a laugh', Willis, 1977; Woods, 1976; also see 'badinage' in Dubberley, 1993 [1988]). 'Boring' or 'serious' in this case refers to the many tedious moments life at school is very often made up of, and which are effectively cheered up by *doing ridiculous*. *Doing serious*, in contrast, meant behaving, being responsible and sincere, a way of behaving that Moroccan boys saw as nerdy and useless. This is one (translated) example from my fieldnotes in which Moroccan boys *do ridiculous*:

Example 4

During geography class, on demography:

Ms Faes explains that 'demo' can also be found in 'democracy'.

Yassin: yeah, because we're being discriminated against

Ms Faes: [laughs briefly] you're right, sadly enough, in some situations

Yassin: ha! [laughing, pointing at his Flemish classmates:] but we're also
          discriminating against them!

Ms Faes: yeah I suppose that's true, I think you have to have a sharp tongue here
          [resumes explanation]

By suddenly changing the topic to unequal ethnic relations, Yassin forces the teacher to cope with a departure from the subject matter, and grants himself the pleasure to see how

she steers a way around what he knows she knows is a sensitive issue. He thus playfully challenges his teacher in her abilities to frame what's going on in the classroom as something that she's still in charge of. In addition, this example shows that Flemish classmates weren't exactly kings of cool in this class, something I will come back to later in this text.

Experimenting with linguistic resources and stylizing them was a substantial part of *doing ridiculous* (cf. Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2003, for the importance of linguistic play in youth identity construction). As already indicated at the end of section 6 this was not restricted to SD alone, but also applied to Antwerp dialect (see example 3) and 'Illegal' or foreigner Dutch. It's in this context of language play that a word such as *tegenwerken* (counteracting/sabotaging) was used. When I asked Imran why he and his friends sometimes spoke 'Illegal' Dutch on the tram, he said:

Example 5

 "When we're on the tram, and they're all racists, you see that these people are all racists, that's when you *counteract*, you see; 'cos acting normal, you see, isn't much fun for us then".

Imran is reporting here on a practice described by Rampton as 'tertiary foreigner talk': "a language practice where people with migrant or minority background strategically masquerade in the racist imagery used in dominant discourses about them" (Rampton, 2001b, p. 271). After they had triggered some whites' moral indignation, they afterwards switched back to their normal and fluent Dutch to then laugh at the surprised faces of those white Flemings who really thought their Dutch competence was so poor, and who

had unwittingly exposed themselves as people who would take offence at ethnic youth who don't speak Dutch very well. This illustrates that stylizations also seemed to occur outside the school context[17] and did not just involve the evocation of school staff nor the exclusive use of school languages. Neither was this practice specifically anti-teacher. In fact, within the school stylizations were not restricted to moments of formal instruction and also occurred in corridors, on the playground, and in interviews. Rather, it seems that teachers' (and researchers') activities were tokens of a certain type of situation that Moroccan boys resented, a type that can probably be described as a situation in which an asymmetrical participation framework comes into being, i.e., one in which Moroccan boys perceive that an authority figure, adult, or one of his or her attributes (such as a microphone) gains an increasing influence on their every movement. 'Boring' or 'serious' situations are not simply boring lessons, therefore, but this is a label that can be extended to all routine situations at school and outside of this context when Moroccan boys feel they are going to be sanctioned, evaluated, criticized, observed or stereotyped by their teachers, (white) adults outside of the school context, or by myself as a researcher.

This impending asymmetry obviously brings about a ritually sensitive situation, in which an initiator (a teacher, adult, interviewer) provides a sign which implies an act and a relationship towards a recipient (Moroccan boys), whose task it is to appreciate the sign and to affirm that the relationship the initiator of the activity implies actually exists (cf. Goffman, 1971, p. 63). Goffman usually refrains from making the link between the interactional and the structural, but basic ritual interchanges such as these, and their routine reproduction, are clearly the cogwheels of the social and hegemonic structure that

leads to their production in the first place. *Ridiculous* behaviour was not just play then, but could have micropolitical relevance for initiator and recipient, whose identities, or the (in this case) unequal relationship that helps define them, are reproduced or not. Failing to affirm this relationship, or taking offence at the one that is held up for further interaction, as Goffman explains, leads to hurt feelings, anger and moral indignation. But mostly, people are very good at avoiding such social short-circuiting by starting up remedial interchanges. Crucial in providing remedy is the fact that the "actor and those who witness him can imagine (and have some agreement regarding) one or more "worst possible readings", interpretations of the act that maximize either its offensiveness to others or defaming implications for the actor himself" (1971, p. 108). In order to know what is 'worst', one has to have a conception about what is 'best', and both kinds of awarenesses seem to be present in my data, where what frequently happens in interethnic and unequal situations is comically inflated. Thus, in the boys' stylizations, I find extremely pseudo-angry and indignant voices or quasi-hysterical criticism about what Moroccan boys have failed to comply to in Antwerp dialect, which evoke the white and often racist voices they often encounter in the street (see the end of paragraph 3) or the one authority at school Moroccan boys really feared, viz. the head of the school. But next to this there are also utterances that suggest extreme co-operation (in SD, example 3), and images of a complete incompetence in Dutch (see example 5). Similar to how Rampton has shown for the use of Stylised Asian English by British-born Pakistani youngsters, stylizations in this way suggested worst (but in my case also best) case scenarios that projected a possible outcome of sensitive situations (cf. Rampton, 1995, p. 80ff.).

Clearly, these worst or best case readings were funny in their own right and provided a release from boredom, and those who were very good at producing and inserting them at the right time gained a lot of prestige on the classroom floor. In addition, exaggerating others' words or 'say foring' (Goffman, 1974, p. 534-537; 1981, p. 150) is obviously a good way of making fun of these others and contesting their influence. And crucially, these humourous exaggerations often led to frame trouble or challenged other people's organization and perception of reality (cf. Goffman, 1974). As Dubberley writes, "humour highlights power … by its ability temporarily to distort social relations and structures and point to their absurdity. Like a Magritte painting, by altering features of 'normality', such as scale and proportion, humour shocks us out of perceptive lethargy, forcing us to re-evaluate what is around us" (1993, p. 91), and it seems to be this kind of shock-effect and re-evaluation that constituted the confusion of authority figures and that led to delays in the organisation of daily life at school. It is not irrelevant that on many occasions stylizations were inserted precisely at that moment when sanctioning or other trouble was in the air, which thus enhanced ambiguity when authority figures were trying to frame the situation (and reduce its ambiguity) (cf. Rampton, 1995). Obviously, this counteracting is a lot more enjoyable than "acting normal" (example 5) which "isn't much fun" because it implies having to accept a rather unpleasant situation without demur. In the following paragraph I will describe this practice as a case of 'linguistic sabotage', and discuss its contesting as well as legitimizing aspects.

10. Linguistic sabotage

Some of the difficulties that arise when Moroccan boys produce stylizations are illustrated in the following example:

Example 6

Participants and setting: Feedbackinterview with Imran [19], Jamal [19] and Faisal [19]. April 2001. We've just been listening to an extract from a recording that was made some months ago, in which Nordin is shouting "racists!" in the school corridor. JJ asks them why Nordin would do that. A 30-second digression between lines 10 and 32 has been left out here. Stylized SD is in bold.

1   JJ: maar eh waarom eh [.] waarom zou die dat doen [.] of gebeurt da

2   veel da gulle vindt dat er racisten rondlopen?

3   Faisal: | neenee wij slagen

4   Imran: neenee Nordin zegt (soms) van die woorden

5   Faisal: | **neenee 't gaat eigenlijk om**   **| 't gaat eigenlijk om**

               [neːˈneː tχaːt ˈɛːɣələk ɔm   tχaːt ˈɛːɣələk ɔm]

6   **het f- 't gaat eigenlijk om het femi-feminisme**

               [ɦətfː tχaːt ˈɛːɣələk ɔm ɦət feːmɪ ˈfeːmɪˈnɪsmə]

7   Jamal: [lacht]

8   Faisal: [lacht]

9   Imran: neeneenee [.] da was [.] 'k weetnie. (   )

10 Faisal: nee wij hadden zone banaal gevoel en eh [.] (   )

           […] [30.0]

32 Jamal: nee maar eh [.] soms

33   zeggen die van die dinges hé [.] ge moet da nie echt proberen te

34   ontleden en zo want- die zegt da maar

35 JJ: om ander mensen wat te provoceren of zo om om die wat ambetant=

36 Jamal: awel ja zoiet

37 JJ: =te doen voelen?

38 Faisal: **'t gaat eigenlijk om de obs- observatie** [lacht]

         [tχaːt   ˈɛːɣələk ɔm də ɔps   ɔpserˈvaːsi]

39 Jamal: [lacht]

40 Faisal: neenee [.] gewoon me-

41 Imran: | (   )

42 Faisal: | bijvoorbeeld bijvoorbeeld zie hé [.] w-wij

43   zijn soms met samen allemaal hé [.] wij zeggen ineens iets raar

44   'kweenie 'blauw' of zo [.] da's [.] gewoon

45 Imran: da heeft niks me- ons cultuur te maken of zo

Translation

1 JJ: but uh why uh [.] why would he do that [.] or does that happen often

2   that you think there are racists about?

3 Faisal: | no no we just say-

4 Imran: no no Nordin (sometimes) just says some of these words

5 Faisal | **no no it's actually about** | **it's**

6   **actually about f- it's actually about femi-feminism**

7 Jamal: [laughs]

8 Faisal: [laughs]

9 Imran: no no no [.] that was [.] dunno (   )

10 Faisal: no we had this kind of banal feeling and uh [.] (   )

         […] [30.0]

32 Jamal: no but uh [.] sometimes

33   they just say things isn't it [.] you shouldn't really try to analyse

34   that and all 'cause- he just says that-

35 JJ   to provoke other people or to make them feel=

36 Jamal: well yeah something like that

37 JJ: =annoyed?

38 Faisal: **it's actually about the obs- observation** [laughs]

39 Jamal: [laughs]

40 Faisal: no no [.] just wi-

41 Imran: | (   )

42 Faisal: | for example for example look huh [.] w-we

43   are sometimes together all of us eh [.] we're saying something

44   strange dunno 'blue' or something [.] that's [.] simply

45 Imran: it doesn't have anything to do with our culture or stuff

Pragmatically speaking, what Faisal says in lines 5-6 could be a possible answer to my question in line 1. But this possibility is clearly not taken into consideration by Imran and Jamal (lines 7-8). Imran makes this explicit in line 9, and tries to formulate something more suitable, which Faisal then also tries to do in line 10. A little later Jamal gives his explanation and tells me not to pay too much attention to other people's foolishness. The interview seems to be back on track again, but in line 38 Faisal produces another answer that is structurally identical to what he said earlier in lines 5-6: again he uses an intellectualist word that features the same stuttering repetition of its first part, and which this time is even less plausible in terms of content. Again Faisal's contribution is not taken seriously (lines 39-40), and it's Faisal himself who provides a more genuine answer in his routine Dutch in lines 42-44.

As mentioned above, interviews were felt to be new because of their different-than-usual turn allocation procedures, and therefore led to a situation of heightened ritual

sensitivity. This seems to be all the more so in this case because of the ethnic turn the interview is taking in lines 1-2, where a question about racism raises awareness around the different ethnic identities and structural positions of the participants in this interview, and the potential problems that might bring along. As in other cases, we find language play here. In lines 5-6 and 38, Faisal is styling SD: he uses careful pronunciation, no dialect-vowels, and intellectualist words, and in this way he seems to be giving a particularly impressive answer, or one that (considering my identity as a university researcher) should surely interest me. By projecting this best case behaviour, however, Faisal is attempting to parody the interview, and might even be hoping that I take his suggestions seriously. The effect of this is frame trouble. Even while he's very ready to provide a remedy by denying what he said (lines 10 and 40), Faisal is creating a situation in which all information he gives is now potentially ambiguous and insincere. The more Faisal does this (and this example was only one of the several occasions in this interview when he stylized SD, or Antwerp dialect), the more the researcher does not know which frame applies or the more he has to be suspicious about everything Faisal says. Hence, the indexical trouble Faisal is creating by using a variety that jars with the interview's informal setup (and with the interviewer's informal language use), leads to interactional trouble in that sense that it complicates the interviewer's next move. (Interrupting too quickly by the interviewer, or perhaps getting irritated, would've probably enhanced the risk of not getting any clarification for these ambiguous remarks, or it might have increased the asymmetry in this interview, with probably a smaller likelihood of easily obtaining other useful information as a result.) In sum, by using SD to present himself as different-than-usual and to project an ironical, hyper-normative identity, Faisal is, at least

temporarily, negotiating the terms of his (and of his classmates') participation and involvement in this interview – an involvement which in this case clearly is less than what is generally assumed to be appropriate.

In my fieldnotes I've evaluated this interview as a very difficult and frustrating one, because of the meagre results it at first blush appeared to generate, and because of Faisal's many interruptions that didn't seem to lead anywhere. Precisely at that moment when I was looking for 'authentic' information (on their ethnic experience, see example 6, or about their 'normal' or spontaneous linguistic behaviour, see example 3), some of these boys seemed to be shielding off my access to their personal territory and co-operation out of free will. Put differently, here and on many other occasions, Moroccan boys are *sabotaging* their immediate hegemonic surroundings. This means that they're not directly confronting the relations they are part of, but their intention is rather "to disrupt ease and order in social occasions, this to be done by means which do not have a directly continued consequence beyond the situation in which [the sabotage] occurs. After the act only the negative experience need remain" (Goffman, 1974, p. 426), whereby 'negative experience' implies that the one who is in charge of a certain situation notices that her original experience of the situation appeared to be false, and that she has been taken for a ride.[18]

This means that the sabotaging I found in my data is a form of contestation that takes place within legitimate boundaries, or that implies (at least) the (surface) legitimation of existing structures. This actually chimes in with the efforts Moroccan boys often put in to prevent matters from getting out of hand (see also lines 9 and 40 in example 6): in spite of the occurrence of some significant (but perhaps normal) pupil-

teacher conflicts, they sometimes reprimanded each other when one of them was getting into a conflict with a teacher which could have consequences for the whole class, or they provided apologies when a teacher was showing signs of serious distress and dissatisfaction. Most of the conflicts in class, in any case, seemed to be primarily related to their roles as pupils rather than to their identities as Moroccan boys. These good relations with teachers also showed up in interviews (Mourad: "We can fix up with teachers to go out! We're doing business with the teachers!"). Even though these claims are not made without a certain feel for exaggeration, they point to what are eventually quite sociable pupil-teacher relations. Such relations were in fact to a certain extent necessary, as these boys, though reluctant to be caught up in studying all too much, did want to get their degrees.[19] And not unimportantly, they had already familiarized themselves with the limits of what was acceptable at the City School, as some of them had had to agree to a personal 'contract' that stipulated what behaviour was out of bounds and what consequences one was then facing (mostly expulsion) – which illustrates that "there is a real price to be paid for being anti-hegemonic" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 167). In view of these institutional constraints, it is perhaps no surprise that *ridiculous* practice above kept itself within the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, and that counteracting mainly consisted of linguistically dragging one's feet or concentrated on the linguistic symbols with which asymmetrical hegemonic relations are constructed. In line with this, Moroccan boys themselves systematically saw *doing ridiculous* as mere play, so that stylizations could easily be explained as a (bad) joke when others saw them as offensive or out of place.

Mostly, linguistic sabotage was a temporary phenomenon that did not lead to a total breakdown of the situation. It jumbled up their rhythm somewhat, but lessons went on, as also the interview did in example 6. Those who were equipped with a microphone and minidisc did not attempt to break them, even though this was possible.[20] And in some cases, it even seemed that *doing ridiculous* could be a mutual and concerted practice for Moroccan boys and white adults alike, and that its humourous aspect could resolve part of the contradictions between school expectations and dissatisfaction about them (cf. Dubberley, 1993; Pollard, 1986, p. 73-74, 200ff.; Woods, 1976). Some teachers managed *ridiculous* behaviour quite well and took it in their stride, and said they actually enjoyed joining in with the laughter.[21] Besides its destabilising aspects, *doing ridiculous* could in other words invite authority figures to "display their competence and understanding of the frame play in progress" (Rampton, 1995, p. 80), and depending on the latters' willingness to play, this could lead to a *modus vivendi* and working consensus that both Moroccan boys as their teachers (and researcher) saw as enlivening their daily circumstances.[22] Last but not least, the way in which SD was styled reproduced its legitimate status as a language of authority and compliance. In examples 3 and 6, Faisal and Aziz produced hyper-hegemonic behaviour which did not question the role or value of SD as a variety one uses for special and formal occasions.

This is not to say, however, that linguistic sabotage, and the wider semiotic practice it was a part of, was without any effects altogether. A first thing we can notice in the examples above is how SD, as the stereotypically neutral variety, is attributed a lot of social meaning. To this extent that what we see in the examples above might perhaps be called a *reindexicalization* of the variety that is usually represented as the non-indexical

one, or a hybridization process in which the 'faceless' language is given its face back or is situated in contexts these boys find very hard to reconcile with the *ridiculous* identities they are constructing or aiming at themselves. If learning is a continuous negotiation where one tries to reconcile the usual perception of oneself with new practices and with the implications of this for how one looks at oneself and is looked at by others (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991), then the indexicality of SD as a schoolish and *serious* variety makes clear how difficult it is for these boys to look at this variety as neutral or develop a competence in it that goes beyond the playful possibilities their actual (but imperfect) competence now allows for. Furthermore, dealing with SD at school also involves dealing with the outside world, where one values SD and its teaching at school, and where SD visibly converges with specific people, styles, preferences, routines, and with the negative conception of the world Moroccan boys now tend to consider their 'own'. This means that this playful struggle and the production of linguistic caricature at school was less innocent than Moroccan boys usually suggested, and involved a local illustration of the wider social negotiation within Flemish Belgium with SD and the world it represents.

Secondly, if negotiation processes such as these have a lasting influence on the language variety participants think best suits them (cf. Kulick, 1992, p. 263), it seems to be this practical social negotiation, rather than bad or uninspired teaching or individual learning and motivational problems, that inspires Moroccan boys' routine production of a substandard or vernacular Dutch, in contrast with the almost daily advice to learn and speak SD 'for their own benefit'. Or in pedagogical terms, if refusing to learn something is about the most effective resource students have to object to a pedagogical – and thus

also hegemonic – relationship (Erickson, 1986, p. 137), we can see here how Moroccan boys are prepared to windowdress if the occasion calls for it, but are practically refusing to accept Standard Dutch as their 'own' language. The stylizations above can therefore be seen as theatrical versions of what is in general a routine, less colourful but essentially identical social-semiotic positioning that leads these boys to develop and use a routine substandard Dutch.

Thirdly, though I have not developed this notion very far theoretically, these data show some of the effects of humour, and its importance for building relationships and social life. Humour alleviated boredom and allowed Moroccan boys to make fun of the extreme kinds of co-operation they were not willing to provide as a way of coming to terms with the expectations of the here-and-now (cf. Willis, 1977; Woods, 1976). And also beyond this, humour appeared to be these adolescents' powerful weapon and sign of vitality, a tool with which they managed to outwit people around them and throw up smokescreens. And a tool, furthermore, with which they structured internal classroom relationships and tested who shared with them a willingness to play. Flemish classmates were competently and regularly taken the mickey out of, and had to learn that in this context (in contrast with ethnic relations outside the school) Moroccan boys defined what linguistic resources could be experimented with (playing with Arabic and Berber was off limits) and what circumstances were apt for this.

11. Concluding remarks

Moroccan boys in Antwerp are keenly aware of the necessity of speaking SD when they are evaluated, questioned, or find themselves in a ritually sensitive situation. Thus, even though they have many difficulties with providing Standard and academic Dutch beyond what their playful competence in it allows them to do, they've learnt quite a lot about its use and function, and in this respect, standardization incentives in Flemish Belgium have had considerable effect.[23] This is in itself also a clear indication of how integrated these boys are into Flemish society, in spite of widespread stereotypes. However, in the examples above it emerged that the use of this standard variety did not always imply compliance with school rules or general expectations, and that using SD could bring along contestation or sabotage. This was mostly when a situation underwent significant change or when power relations crystallized. By stylizing SD and projecting extremely schoolish or best case identities, Moroccan boys managed to disturb the easy transition to or smooth rhythm of situations in which they were increasingly subjected to the gaze and evaluation of teachers and researchers, and in this way negotiated the nature of their participation. This paper also shows that generally, unequal situations are not addressed with 'pure' resistance. SD's high status was reproduced throughout, and these adolescents' sabotaging efforts were not really meant to wreak havoc on their their school careers. Instead, their humourous responses invite us to be sensitive for the ways unequal contexts are made worthwhile, and how ambiguous practices can provide alleviation of institutional exigencies for both the teachers and pupils who have to comply to them, how they transform boring and oppressive routines into something enjoyable while at the same time testifying to the constraining conditions they reproduce.

Additionally, in performing stylized SD-voices, this variety was associated with unappealing asymmetrical frameworks and uncool identities, and obviously emerged as anything but a neutral variety for Moroccan boys. There is thus a profound contradiction between the explicit affiliation towards SD Moroccan boys express in interviews and the way in which they *de facto* make clear that, at least in their present peer networks, this variety is completely inauthentic for them. In fact, Moroccan boys are illustrating that learning/speaking SD means coming to terms with the participation structures and social exchanges that variety entails, and that learning (SD) is thus a social rather than invididual phenomenon. Particularly, and in contrast with how SD is generally seen as a condition for emancipation, Moroccan boys are learning and illustrating how in their lives SD can be usually equated with smaller participation and an increase of hierarchy. In other words, the modernist concern that emancipation and socio-cultural welfare can be achieved via a pure and socially neutral variety is confronted here with Moroccan boys' practical awareness that in actual life this variety brings about limited participation or reduces their 'voice' (Hymes, 1996). These data also illustrate how emphatic standardization often results precisely in what it wishes to do away with: instead of an increase in emancipation we find a higher probability with which the emancipatory variety contributes to social stratification; and instead of less linguistic diversity, Moroccan boys' playing with different varieties of Dutch shows that emphatic monovariational expectations appear to result in a colourful and abundant multivariationism (cf. Jaspers and Meeuwis, 2006). All this clearly problematizes equal opportunities discourses that reduce social knowledge and learning to individual happenings based on neutral skills. Even though the debate about multilingualism in

Flemish Belgium is as yet far from being waged in these terms, it is clear that the low popularity and inauthenticity of SD for Moroccan boys is also quite problematic in a situation where one would try to encourage its use as a lingua franca. It confronts Flemish civil society with the widely accepted purification practices and with the difficulties one has with accepting different 'impure' (social and ethnic) styles of Dutch in the public (and economic) arena (see also Blommaert, Creve and Willaert, 2005).

Finally, while the linguistic sabotage described here may not have far-reaching effects, it offers a view on a local negotiation around what is consensual or what needs to be learned, what that negotiation teaches Moroccan boys about their position and identity at school and in the community beyond, and what "their chances are at being able to acquire the forms of language that count" (Heller, 1996, p.156). These chances may be somewhat low, and their disapproving use of SD self-defeating in a wider market that only appreciates canonical uses. But their local struggle and their sense of humour reveal these Moroccan boys as competent, playful and versatile language users with a lot of practical insight into the unequal society that usually defines them and their linguistic competencies as inadequate.

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[1] Hypercorrections, notably (see Hudson, 1996; Schilling-Estes, 2002).

[2] Clearly, it might not always be easy to distinguish stylizations from acts of styling. There is a foggy area where special and new performances become more frequent and routine (cf. Coupland, 2001b; Rampton, 1995).

[3] There are pockets of French speakers on Flemish territory, mainly living close to the predominantly French-speaking Brussels capital region (which has a special statute in the Belgian political make-up). They dispose of linguistic facilities which are however regularly contested by Flemings or perceived as anachronistic.

[4] The exception is Brussels, which is a bilingual city in theory even though Dutch speakers only make up 10 percent of the entire population (and thus form a hyper-protected linguistic minority). Incidents that contradict this bilingual character (when Dutch speakers encounter monolingual French-speaking government officials or health care workers, e.g.) are easily viewed then as symptoms of a continuing French-favouring regime.

[5] Mainly in terms of spelling and grammar, but not in terms of pronunciation.

[6] See e.g. the contemporary debates in Flanders about substandard language and the role of the public broadcasting corporation in this (Jaspers and Meeuwis, 2006).

[7] 'Wog' is an approximate translation. 'Makákskes' is the diminutive and plural of 'makák', a common Antwerp dialect (and racist) term of abuse based on 'makaken', viz. Dutch for cercopithecidae (apes with long tails).

[8] Those who were wearing a personal microphone were thus also recorded by another microphone when they found themselves in the classroom, but not in the brief periods when they moved from one classroom to another or went out into the playground.

[9] It was part of the school's policy to break gender role-patterns and encourage girls to follow traditionally masculine trajectories such as electro-mechanics. This plan was not particularly successful however, as over four or five years only a couple of girls could be persuaded to enroll for this, and those who did had to face a male dominated class and the bantering and sexual innuendo this often brought along.

[10] This distinction was relevant for these boys in linguistic terms: pupils in the 'higher' general secondary education track were considered to be 'perfect' speakers of Dutch, while pupils in vocational tracks were jokingly pictured as wearing headphones in class because all instruction supposedly had to be interpreted.

[11] These different home languages also make clear that 'Moroccan' is a strategically essential identity category here (cf. Bucholtz, 2003). There was a sizeable gap between Arabic and Berber speakers. The latter tended to be mocked and stigmatised for their problematic or non-existent competence in Arabic (cf. Jaspers, 2005).

[12] This was in fact re-emphasized in the course of my research. When I started with my fieldwork, there was no paragraph on language in the school rules booklet, even though several teachers I interviewed about multilingualism did refer to a supposed passage about language use and language choice. It's unclear whether introducing a new language rule had anything to do with my remark that I couldn't find any such rule in the school rules booklet. In any case it seems that one perceived linguistic reality at school in such a way that one felt it was necessary to have rules like this, alongside other 'obvious' school rules bearing on politeness, suitable clothing, eating and drinking in class, etc.

[13] Whether or not a certain fragment counted as stylized performance was first and foremost informed by my long familiarity with these boys' usual and unusual ways of speaking and by my own knowledge of Antwerp dialect and SD as a relatively standard speaker who grew up and lives in Antwerp. Other important indicators included: an increased intensity of standard phonetic features, the use of standard (instead of dialectal) personal pronouns and standard verb conjugation, the use of standard diminutives, stereotypically formal or intellectualist lexis, and special acoustic design such as careful articulation, different voice quality, or sudden shifts in loudness and pitch level (see Rampton, 2003 for a similar approach). As Rampton indicates, "[i]f the audience (or indeed the speaker) subsequently responded by laughing, repeating the utterance, by commenting on it, or by switching into a different kind of non-normal dialect or voice, this could be another clue (Rampton, 2003, p.55).

[14] BOB or "Bijzondere OpsporingsBrigade", Dutch for the former Special Criminal Investigations Squad in Belgium.

[15] Dutch has two forms for second person address: 'jij' [you] in informal situations, 'u' [you] in formal ones (cp. *tu* and *vous* in French).

[16] Whether someone was gay or not was the continuous object of a lot of banter, on the understanding that Moroccan boys dearly wanted to avoid being identified as such.

[17] I managed to note down a couple of stylizations (of Antwerp dialect) by Moroccan boys in a city-centre supermarket, a.o.

[18] An anonymous reviewer points out that the boys might simply not have had an answer to my question about racism, and that their parodying efforts are therefore not necessarily a question of denying access. There are other instances in this interview, however, where denial of access is a relevant issue, and where racism is talked about elaborately.

[19] All minus one eventually graduated from secondary school.

[20] I concede, though, that things might have been different when the biographical relations between myself and these Moroccan boys had not been this strong or based on a long period of time (I only made recordings 5 months into my research, and interviews only after 9 months). Similarly, they themselves felt that some actions (pretending to speak poor Dutch) were difficult with teachers who knew them very well (Imran: "that's boring"). The crucial thing here seemed to be the probability with which they would have to face up and possibly apologise to those they had offended, a probability that was rather low with people that only temporarily belonged to their social worlds such as co-travellers on the tram, temporary teachers, or a researcher who would only spend a brief amount of time with them (cf. Goffman, 1967, p. 7-8). What happens in example 3 is somewhat offending, though, but Goffman indicates that "if others are prepared to overlook an affront to them and act forbearantly, or to accept apologies, then he [i.e., the offender] can rely on this as a basis for safely offending them" (1967, p. 24). Aziz seems to assume here that when I would take offence at his sexual dig I'd reveal myself as a bad sport and in this way complicate my own project of establishing friendly relations with these boys (and anyway, I'd only listen to the recording well after the actual offensive words were uttered).

[21] This propensity to play along more or less divided teachers in several groups. Those who were willing to play along were often considered nice and good to work with. Others, usually teachers that were considered too soft or simply unskilled to contribute to *doing ridiculous*, often had severe difficulties with keeping their lesson on track. The latter faced the brunt of most of these boys' banter and sabotaging strategies. Still others were found unwilling to play along, but were considered too strict to try any fooling around. Which illustrates the complexity and 'impurity' of many pupils' contesting activities at school: with some teachers you go all the way, with others you don't dare, and with a few teachers you actually enjoy being in school.

[22] This also held for me: after about a year in my fieldwork I was suddenly told that I had "changed" when I acted spontaneously. I was almost congratulated with "that's because of us, isn't it, that you're like this!?" and "you're starting to learn from us!" when I went along with *ridiculous* behaviour (e.g. putting my hand in my pocket with a deadpan expression at Faisal's request to give him 500 euros).

[23] Moreover, the routine Dutch of these boys also appeared to be characterized by general linguistic patterns of social stratification: formal contexts brought along a significantly larger amount of SD-realizations than informal or semi-formal contexts did. In other words, the linguistic habitus of these boys is, as with other Flemish Belgians, deeply characterized by the standardization context it is a part of.