

Chapter 13

‘Playing with Words as if it was a Rap Game’: Hip-Hop Street Language in Oslo

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The vernacular, I would argue, [...] is not a monolithic battering ram (and indeed, who would one batter) but a guerrilla incursion; it steals language, steals sounds, steals the media spotlight, then slips away, regrouping at another unpredictable cultural site.
Potter (1995: 76).

The vernacular thus stands in the place(s) of difference, articulates difference, and, indeed, actually produces difference.
Potter (1995: 63)

Introduction

The flow of hip-hop culture and rap music outside the United States and the indigenized result of this in countless ‘glocal’ cultures throughout the world, points to a trend toward the creation of urban slang, characterized by a blend of influences and rich linguistic dexterity. In Scandinavian urban settings, what may start out as the incorporation of selected words from minority languages alongside expressions from English-language hip-hop vocabulary has proven to develop over time into particular, culturally embedded language varieties, or what in recent Scandinavian studies have been labeled multiethnolects (Quist, 2000; Svendsen & Røynealand, 2008). The primary objective of this chapter is to explore connections between hip-hop music culture and the development of a local language variety in central Oslo, Norway. This is done from two different, but complementary perspectives. First, from a sociolinguistic perspective, innovation and experimentation is linked to some of the core values and discourses of hip-hop. This is exemplified by looking at the social construction of a stylized language variety as the trademark of a hip-hop crew. Second, drawing upon musicological perspectives, a close reading

of selected rap lyrics points to possible connections between multiethnolectal language features and the stylistic and rhythmic requirements of rap music.

The chapter presents results from a study carried out in 2005–2007 as part of the interdisciplinary CULCOM (Cultural Complexity) research program at the Oslo University. It is based on field observations, interviews and recordings by *Minoritet1*, a multiethnic hip-hop crew in central Oslo. The language examples discussed are mainly lyrics selected from a total of 36 'underground' CD recordings supplied by members of the group. They are produced in various locations; in amateur home studios, in an art school studio, and at the X-ray youth center in central Oslo. This kind of music production is characterized by a great deal of spontaneity and collective improvisation in the studio as well as lively, and sometimes heated discussions (cf. Knudsen, 2008). Apart from incomplete sketches and ideas, lyrics are rarely written down in advance, hence all examples discussed are transcriptions by the author based on sound recordings.

The Hip-Hop Vernacular

In his exploration of the 'hip-hop vernacular' in the USA, Potter (1995: 64) suggests that linguistics can provide a model for the tactics and effectiveness of hip-hop's cultural resistance movement. In view of the spread of hip-hop culture to multilingual environments outside the Anglophone countries, it might be relevant to raise the question whether it could not be conceptualized the other way around: That the codes and constructing principles underlying hip-hop style and rap music can serve as a model for the 'tactics' of linguistic development. Central features characterizing rap music have close parallels in the practice and development of the multiethnolectal language varieties often linked to this music: Sampling and mixing, re-appropriation, transformation and improvisation. Parallel to the practice of 'borrowing' music samples and beats from recordings by other artists, a hallmark of hip-hop lyrics is the rap artist's ability to pick up the phrases and rhymes of other performers; re-appropriating them; twisting, turning or subverting phrases through inventive poetic and linguistic variation. In hip-hop style and rap music there has always been a deep commitment to pushing, bending and breaking the limits. Hip-hop is a culture of resistance, its language a 'resistance vernacular' which 'deploys variance and improvisation in order to deform and reposition the rules of "intelligibility" set up by the dominant language' (Potter, 1995: 68). In this vocal expression of defiance and protest, language use is strategic. Rap lyrics connote defiance, and to emphasize this performers apparently set out to bend and break standard language rules in much the same way they challenge rules of society and established principles of making music.

In accordance with the terminology developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 111–122), hip-hop jargon can be regarded a ‘minor language’. While culturally dominant ‘major languages’ base their power on constants of vocabulary and grammar, the value of a minor language is based on linguistic dexterity, variance and flexibility (Potter, 1995: 68). A principal feature of a minor language is the construction, manifestation and celebration of difference versus a major language. Minor languages tend to have an ‘overload of variation’, an abundance of parallel forms and flexible linguistic norms (Potter: 66).

The creative use of language involves verbal strategies, which in hip-hop research have been explored in view of various ‘black’ American oral language practices that can be collectively characterized by the term Signifyin(g), notably following Gates’ (1989) elaborations on the term with reference to African and African-American literature and oral culture. The particular orthography – capitalization and a bracketed final ‘g’ is used by Gates to discern the black vernacular concept Signifyin(g) from its standard English homonym, ‘signifying’ (Gates, 1989: 46). The act of Signifyin(g) is a rhetorical device featuring intertextuality, re-appropriation, implication, metaphorical association, double-voicing, irony, parody, puns and plays on words. It involves repetition and difference, combining words and meanings to create or associate new ones. A speaker can ‘Signify upon’ another person by exposing the subject to a verbal trick or double-voiced mockery, or ‘Signify upon’ words and expressions by repeating with a difference; appropriating them in ways that imply ironic or paradoxical connotations. Although Signifyin(g) is a trope developed in ‘black’ language culture, the global spread of hip-hop has led to the emergence of Signifyin(g) practices in local vernaculars worldwide (Mitchell, 2001, 2004).

Minoritet1

To illustrate some possible influences on the shaping and development of a local language variety this chapter focuses on the practices of a young hip-hop crew in the center of Oslo: Minoritet1. This pan-ethnic music collective, also known as M1, consists of around 15 young men and one woman. Apart from one Norwegian member they all have an immigrant family background: From Iraq, Morocco, Somalia, Bosnia, Pakistan, Lithuania, Uganda and Kurdistan. Their time in Norway varies from three years to their entire lives. In late 2007 the group was featured in a six-episode television documentary on the state television channel NRK, receiving considerable media attention. In early 2008 three key members left Minoritet1 to form their own group Forente Minoriteter (United Minorities), which released its first CD album, ‘99% ærlig’ (99% honest) in September 2008.

Minoritet1 cultivated an ‘underground’ imagery. Their own posting on NRK’s Internet page ‘Urørt’ (Untouched) – where young bands can

promote their music – locates the underground to Grünerløkka in central Oslo: 'Undergrunn rap fra kjernen i byen Grunerløkka' [*sic*] (Underground rap form the core of the city Grünerløkka). The key metaphor 'underground'¹ sums up various sides of the members' self-image, norms, aesthetics, attitudes and cultural knowledge – their 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1995). An important aspect is that their music is created and distributed within an 'underground' network, independently of the commercial music market. In consequence, this implies a distancing toward commercial performers, especially what they call 'wacke-rap' – rap performed in English by Norwegians – which they describe as a sell-out: Unoriginal and unconvincing. The anticommercial aspect is linked to images of authenticity and honesty; an underground rapper 'keeps it real' by basing lyrics on his own life experience without bothering much about commercial success. Furthermore, 'underground' has to do with musical and poetical style. For Minoritet1, style is based on models in American gangster rap, and the underground codes of a 'gangster discourse' linked to violence, illegal drugs and sexuality (Sandberg, 2009; Sandberg & Pedersen, 2006: 238). At the same time their music is also deeply rooted in their own Norwegian street environment: 'the core of the city'. Both the key metaphor 'underground' and the group's name – Minoritet1 – connote marginalization, suggesting that there exists a contradicting 'other': An 'overground' and a 'majority', respectively. Both terms signalize opposition and resistance toward the wider Norwegian society. A striking parallel in choice of name is the Danish hip-hop group Outlandish, which also consists of young immigrants from various countries.

Street Language

Cultural and linguistic hybridity is a pervasive trait in the social interaction Minoritet1 is involved in: Music production and stage performances, lyrics and language. The local music scene in central Oslo where these young performers play a key role, affords a space for experimentation and creativity, and may arguably be regarded the primary arena for linguistic innovation in this urban setting.

The 'underground' environment Minoritet1 belongs to is characterized not only by the music they produce and perform, but also by other stylistic practices: Dress codes, body language and, of course, spoken language. Their lyrics contain excellent examples of the emerging urban language variety sometimes referred to as 'kebabnorsk' (Kebab-Norwegian), which is spoken in varying degrees among adolescents in multiethnic areas in central Oslo and the eastern suburbs (Aasheim, 1995; Østby, 2005; Svendsen & Røyneland, 2008). Since the group's start in 2001, Minoritet1 has been closely linked to the development of this novel speech style, which can be regarded as a manifestation of a hybridized identity in the

field of tension between immigrant cultures, popular youth culture and 'Norwegian-ness'. Several Minoritet1 members were key informants for the noteworthy 'Kebab-Norwegian dictionary' (Østby, 2005), which includes excerpts from their lyrics used as language examples. This collaboration with a Norwegian author has apparently strengthened their image of being language innovators besides their position as role as models of localized hip-hop culture.

It could be argued that the labelling of a speech mode may have an essentialising effect and may even be regarded as stigmatizing. The term 'kebabnorsk' is by and large not appreciated by the users themselves, and may even be regarded as a pejorative (Svendsen & Røyneland, 2008: 68, 70). The young performers of Minoritet1 refer to the obvious fact that the term was launched by a Norwegian outsider, and propose their own alternative 'emic' designations such as 'asfaltspåk' and 'gatespåk' (asphalt language, street language); concepts that unmistakably evoke the 'underground' imagery of the urban hip-hop culture they are part of. However, since 'kebabnorsk' has established itself as the generally prevailing term – a fact Minoritet1 undoubtedly have contributed to themselves through their contributions to Østby's dictionary – they rarely oppose it when confronted by the media, who seem to have a particular liking for it. Despite their apparent distaste for the term, Minoritet1 have appropriated and taken advantage of it in their music, even using 'kebabnorsk' to entitle a song packed with as many of the most characteristic terms as absolutely possible.

Minoritet1 and most of the other multiethnic hip-hop groups in the Oslo area make no attempt at downplaying or hiding non-Norwegian accent and 'alternative' grammar. While the first Norwegian rappers in the early 1990s worked hard to sound like their American rap idols, Minoritet1 performers take pride in promoting their own 'street language', marking themselves as different and positioning themselves locally. Thus, they shape a stylized performance language which underscores and puts into play their identity as young immigrant rappers, emphasizing and producing the position of the ethnically defined 'other'. Through music performance, language style becomes a trademark for the hip-hop crew by affirming and celebrating ethnic otherness as well as images of social marginality.

It could almost seem natural that the majority language is unsuitable for spreading the message of the minority – Minoritet1. Through their 'street language' they create links to a particular local environment, and challenge linguistic norms, established language culture and norms for acceptable language use. Minoritet1 use their hybrid language variety as part of their own socially critical project, challenging everything from the parent generation to public authorities to prevailing attitudes in society. 'Street language' works as a cultural and social act of resistance.

Signifyin(g) in the Hip-Hop Vernacular

Besides 'kebabnorsk', another language designation that Minoritet1 pick up and Signify upon is 'Norsk 2' (Norwegian 2). This is the term used in the Norwegian school system for classes in 'Norwegian as a second language', which several Minoritet1 members report having attended with disgust, describing it as inferior to the regular Norwegian classes attended by their native Norwegian schoolmates. In the following example from their lyrics the term 'Norsk 2' is reappropriated: Inverted ironically into an alternative label for their own 'street language'.

<i>jeg er gutten som chiller'n og alltid tar det med ro</i>	I am the boy that chills out and always takes it easy
<i>viser en finger og sier 'fuck you'</i>	show one finger and say 'fuck you'
<i>driter rett opp på norsken,</i>	shit straight on Norwegian,
<i>jeg rapper på Norsk 2</i>	I rap in 'Norsk 2'
<i>så sett deg ned og chill, kebab shit</i>	so sit down and chill [out], kebab shit
<i>det er jeg som får det til</i>	I'm the one that makes it
<i>leker med ord som om det var et rapspill</i>	playing with words as if it was a rap game
	From 'Vi lever en gang' (We live once).

By 'playing with words as if it was a rap game', the performer is here promoting the minor language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) through the construction of difference against the major: Norsk 2/'street language' versus standard Norwegian. This kind of Signifyin(g) by repetition and difference, upon terms originally used in the dominant culture to oppress minorities – or in the case of Norsk 2 at least perceived as oppressive – is found in several other Minoritet1 songs. 'Svarting' (black person, literally 'nigger'), 'pakkis' (pejorative for Pakistani), 'svartskalle' (blackskull), 'utlendingjævel' (foreigner devil/bastard) and 'flyktingejævel' (refugee devil/bastard), are all originally insulting terms for non-western immigrants that Minoritet1 reappropriate and style themselves with through their lyrics. These terms can also regularly be heard in conversation within the group, with varying degrees of paradoxical irony and sarcasm; an irony which depends on, but also challenges connotations of inferiority. As in their song titled 'Velkommen til svartskalle borettslag' (Welcome to blackskull community) these terms have a double connotation, serving both as an announcement of 'this is how people of the majority label us' and as an ironical self-designation, which also includes a proclamation of the subaltern position. It must also be noted that when hip-hop performers in Scandinavia engage with 'blackness' in their lyrics and language

games, it should be understood more as a key metaphor of marginalization and oppression than a category relating to their own skin color or ethnic background (cf. Cutler, 2008).

Difference and Ambiguity

As argued in research on the music of immigrant groups in Scandinavia (Hammarlund, 1990; Knudsen, 2006, 2004; Lundberg *et al.*, 2003) one of the primary functions of group specific music culture among minorities is the production of difference. This tendency toward articulating, maintaining and celebrating cultural practices that mark the particularity of the immigrant community in relation to majority culture, is often overlooked in official 'multicultural' policies, which tend to cling to images of music as a universal language with the capacity to break down cultural barriers and serve as a tool to stimulate integration.

The Signifyin(g) play of similarity and difference is a core principle of hip-hop's verbal practices. Rapping and singing in a 'different' novel language is a marker of community as well as boundaries – social belonging as well as social distancing. Using 'street language' on stage is a public expression of the group's difference and particularity. Outsiders who invariably have to struggle hard to understand just the basic vocabulary employed will often take 'street language' as a manifestation implying something like 'we have something in common that we don't share with others'. Thus, the cultural practices of Minoritet1 are, on the one hand, imbued with powerful notions of social distancing versus majority culture, but on the other hand, loudly affirm and celebrate their own hybrid community through the creative development of a cross-cultural mode of expression.

The discursive play of Signifyin(g) is a verbal performance mode confronting the listener with uncertainty and disorder. Minoritet1 lyrics reflect some of the almost genre-defining characteristics of hip-hop language: Irony, sarcasm and ambiguity; enhancing the impression of a subculture: Secretive and 'underground'. It is not supposed to be easy for outsiders to grasp all the different layers of meaning. The lyrics are loaded with ambiguity, comprising explicit warnings against drugs and crime alongside narratives of enjoying getting stoned and powerful expressions of resistance toward the police and public authorities. This can be understood in view of the different social discourses the group is involved in and the images of themselves they want to present to their audiences. On the one hand, they position themselves within the frames of a 'gangster discourse': Tough, fearless and smart; powerfully opposing law and order (Sandberg, 2009; Sandberg & Pedersen, 2006: 238). On the other hand, they operate within a conventional 'positive youth discourse': They produce their music in a studio at a public youth center where they depend

on behaving reliably and responsibly, and may even play the role of ambassadors of the local community when performing at public events arranged by youth organisations. In these circumstances they will generally be understood as examples of successful integration and positive youth work. Still, performing at such events does not stop them from encouraging their young audiences to join them in the aggressive chanting of: 'fuck baosh, fuck baosh' ('baosh': 'police', from Berber), for example at a youth event arranged by the Red Cross (01.11.2005). It must also be added that as the group has developed professionally and become more exposed by the mainstream media, they have somewhat moderated their 'gangster image' by downplaying the most explicit references to illegal activities.

The elusive and ambiguous character of the lyrics will often leave both outsiders and the more initiated fans with questions regarding how seriously or literally they are to be taken. It would be a mistake to take Minoritet1 lyrics – or most any rap lyrics for that matter – entirely at face value. But still, if we were to dismiss them as only figural speech based on an indiscriminate appropriation of expressions from role models in American gangster rap, we would miss the underlying connotations of the resistance vernacular. For many Minoritet1 members their engagement in a culture of resistance is rooted in personal experiences of exclusion or harassment in school and employment situations, often with racist undertones. Ultimately, their version of hip-hop should be understood as a serious political expression of resistance promoted through a playful mode of performance with multiple layers of meaning, an 'unserious seriousness' (cf. Potter, 1995: 84).

It should be noted that although a close identification with the gangster discourse of hip-hop exerts a major influence on personal and cultural identification, the members of Minoritet1 also cultivate connections to other arenas where different social and cultural codes are valid. For example, during Ramadan two of the rappers turned up late for a scheduled recording session explaining that this was because they had attended 'iftar', the ritual evening meal ending the daily fast, with their family. The composition of the various cultural orientations of each member provides an image of cultural hybridity based on complex narratives of the self continuously negotiated in social interaction. A key part of each performer's cultural competence consists of relating in relevant ways to the diverse – sometimes seemingly contradictory – social discourses they are connected to: In musical recordings and stage performances, in lyrics and language, and in the common social interaction of daily life.

Taking part in different social settings evidently has a strong influence on the use of language varieties. Minoritet1 members practice extensive code-switching – using different levels of 'street language' according to different social situations. The impression that emerges from observations,

interviews and recordings is that there is a low concentration of characteristic 'street language' features in conversations with adult outsiders (such as the inquisitive researcher), an intermediate concentration in in-group conversations, and without doubt, the highest occurrence is found in the stylized language of their lyrics. This testifies to the central position of rap performance as an arena for promoting language as the trademark of the social group.

Street Language Features in Lyrics

As Androutsopoulos (2001: 4) argues, rap lyrics developed in multilingual settings employ stylized versions of the hip-hop vernacular, characterized by the exaggeration of typical linguistic features. Minoritet1 lyrics employ and accentuate the whole gamut of characteristic lexical, grammatical and phonetic variables of the urban multiethnolectal language varieties that are described elsewhere (Aasheim, 1995; Drange, 2002; Opsahl & Nistov, this volume). Moreover, rap lyrics characteristically contain a great variety of terms related to sex, drugs and crime. Various less respectful terms for females are 'larki' (Punjabi), 'kæbe' (Berber), 'puta' (Spanish), 'morta' (Punjabi) and 'bitch' (English). Hashish and marihuana may be called 'tjall' (Norwegian slang), 'kif' (Berber and Arabic), 'sortah' (Urdu), 'shit' (English), 'joint' (English) or 'pito' (Spanish). 'Baosh' (Berber) is the prevailing term for police.

There is a frequent occurrence of key terms affirming the imagery of an 'underground' urban culture, such as 'gate' (street, Norwegian), 'kempo' (neighborhood, Berber) and 'ghetto' (English). These are often used in an innovative way, as adjectives or adverbs: 'han snakker gate' (he speaks street), 'slutt å lek gate' (stop acting street), 'det låter helt ghetto' (it sounds really ghetto). Minoritet1 lyrics also contain a range of concepts from the international language of hip-hop: Battling, scratching, DJs, freestyling and dissing. Some typical rap terms appear in translated versions: 'å spytte rim' (to spit rhymes) or 'jeg spiser dere' (I'll eat you up – a common hip-hop expression for beating someone in MC-battling: the duel of rap music performance).

A common grammatical deviation in Minoritet1 lyrics is the simplification of genus (cf. Opsahl & Nistov, this volume). Typically the neuter tends to be substituted by the masculine form: 'mitt liv', 'mitt rim' (my life, my rhymes) becomes 'min liv', 'min rim', – or occasionally vice versa: 'min ære', 'min flokk' (my honor, my flock/gang) becomes 'mitt ære', 'mitt flokk'. This deviation, may even be used inconsistently within a single phrase, as in the following example, which starts out by Signifyin(g) upon the first lines of the Norwegian national anthem,² followed by claiming the right to stay in Norway. Here the definite article first appears correctly in the neuter ('dette', this) and just after in the grammatically deviant masculine ('den', it).

<i>ja, vi elsker dette landet</i>	yes, we love this country
<i>som den stiger frem</i>	as it rises forth
<i>denne går til alle i landet</i>	this goes to everyone in the country
<i>med de tusen hjem</i>	with the thousand homes
<i>for det er [en] ny tid nå</i>	for it's [a] new time now
<i>så prøv å forstå</i>	so try to understand
<i>vi er kommet for å bli</i>	we have come to stay
<i>vi kan'ke gå</i>	we cannot leave
	From 'Ny tid nå' (New time now)

Connections between Language and Music

The remainder of this chapter explores the use of various 'street language' features in rap lyrics in view of the stylistic requirements of hip-hop style and the overall purpose of creating powerful rap performances. The intriguing question this raises is whether the development of multiethnolectal language varieties can be linked to the rhymes and rhythms of rap and the mediation of this stylized performance speech. As argued by Androutsopoulos (2001: 21) stylized ethnolectal speech presented through the media influences and actually induces language crossing in daily speech.

Scandinavian performers of rap music have a high awareness of how language functions as a performative expression of style. A number of ethnic Norwegian rappers report that their mother tongue is unsuitable as a rap language. They experience Norwegian language as halting, jagged and difficult to adapt to the flow of the beat (Opsahl, 2000: 197–198). Likewise, several Minoritet1 members maintain in interviews that rapping in Norwegian can be problematic: 'It's difficult because there are so many words ending with "e"... It's hard to make powerful line endings' (author's translation). When they nevertheless have chosen to use Norwegian – or at least a kind of Norwegian – as their medium, it seems that their most obvious strategy for coping with the problems they experience is to adjust performance language in accordance with their own conceptions of the rhythmic, poetic and stylistic ideals of rap.

Certain alterations in prosody, which also appear in daily speech (cf. Svendsen & Røyneland, 2008) are apparently exploited consciously in order to create a 'flow' that successfully meets the requirements of the genre. One of the most salient features is the violation of the prevailing trochaic pronunciation of two-syllable words in Norwegian, a norm which implies that the second-last syllable is followed by a final unstressed syllable, often an 'e'. In Minoritet1 lyrics – especially at line

endings – this is substituted by a jambic pronunciation featuring a stressed final syllable with a prolonged vowel (cf. Kotsinas & Doggelito, 2004: 145). Examples include ‘mørket’ (the darkness), ‘fengsel’ (prison) ‘elven’ (the river) and ‘solskinn’ (sunshine). A similar prosodic change is found in multi-syllable words. Dactylic pronunciation becomes anapaestic: ‘himmelen’ (heaven) becomes ‘himmelen’ and ‘nabolag’ (neighborhood) becomes ‘nabolag’. In some cases this deviation is consistently employed – apparently with a parodic undertone. The following excerpt from a Minoritet1 recording – an ironic/self-ironic rendition of a young man’s dream of showing off in an expensive flashy car – demonstrates how the requirements of rhyming in rap are accomplished by altering standard South-East Norwegian prosody. Words that do not rhyme in standard pronunciation are ‘forced’ to do so by stressing and prolonging the final syllable, thereby producing more ‘powerful line endings’. It can even be noticed, in line 15, that an extra stressed ‘eh’ with no obvious semantic meaning is added in order to accomplish this effect. (Stressed syllables violating standard trochaic/dactylic pronunciation are indicated with **bold**).

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 1. | <i>en BMW cabriolet</i> | a BMW cabriolet |
| 2. | <i>sjof for en pakkis der, 7 serie</i> | look [‘sjof’ from Berber] at the ‘pakkis’ there, |
| 3. | | 7 series ³ |
| 4. | <i>sjekk de 21 tommer felgene</i> | check those 21 inch rims |
| 5. | <i>2,5 og 16V</i> | 2,5 and 16V ⁴ |
| 6. | <i>M1 styla og senka ned</i> | M1-styled and lowered |
| 7. | <i>så alle kan se oss komme rullende</i> | so everyone can see us come rolling |
| 8. | <i>men jeg har sota alle rutene</i> | but I have tinted all the windows |
| 9. | <i>så ingen kan se oss trekke sortah ned</i> | so no-one can see us inhale the marihuana [‘sortah’, from Urdu] |
| 10. | <i>ikke nok med det,</i> | and there is more, |
| 11. | <i>bare et lite anlegg med GPS</i> | just a little system with GPS |
| 12. | <i>og DVD</i> | and DVD |
| 13. | <i>og alle setene</i> | and all the seats |
| 14. | <i>har MTV</i> | have MTV |
| 15. | <i>så det er bare å lene seg tilbake</i> | so all we’ve got to do is lean back |
| 16. | <i>og bare slapp’ av, eh</i> | and just relax, eh |
| 17. | <i>puff puff, og pass den videre</i> | puff, puff and pass it on
From ‘Hva skjer’ a?’ (What’s up?) |

From the perspective of music analysis, the logical rationale for these violations of standard pronunciation can be linked to the typical rhythmic basis of most hip-hop beats. A defining characteristic of rock music and the many popular music styles that derive from it, is the backbeat, a sharp rhythmic accent on the second and fourth beats of a measure in 4/4 time typically marked by the snare drum.: 1–2–3–4. This rhythmic phrasing implies a strong tendency to match the rhythm by placing a stressed syllable at line endings, consequently favoring iambic and anapaestic pronunciation at line endings. In the example above, this rhythmic delivery is crucial to obtaining the desired ironic/self-ironic effect – Signifyin(g) upon young immigrants' dreams and ambitions.

Another feature which can be linked to the poetic and musical structures of rap is the tendency to concentrate the verbal message using an abbreviated 'telegram style'. Most of the music beats used by Minoritet1 favor short poetic lines with end rhymes. This encourages the tendency to pack as much essential information as possible into every line so that each line efficiently communicates a coherent statement or 'punch line'. As described in other forms of stylized ethnolectal speech (Androutsopoulos, 2001: 6) prepositions, articles and implicitly understood verbs are left out. As the following example indicates, a more conventional South-East Norwegian rendition would lose much of the desired 'flow' and rhythmic punch. Words 'left out' are placed in brackets [...].

<i>og vis dem [at] vi kan gjøre</i>	and show them [that] we can do
<i>[det] bedre vi [som kommer]</i>	[it] better, we [who come]
<i>fra [et] fremmed land</i>	from [a] foreign country
<i>for Inshallah, en dag alt blir bedre, mann.</i>	for Inshallah ⁵ , some day everything will be better, man.
	From 'Fuck det man' (Fuck it man)

The final phrase here also includes a breach with the conventional syntax of standard Norwegian which, like other Scandinavian and most Germanic languages, follows the V2 word order rule implying that the second constituent in declarative main clauses is always a verb, giving a XVS word order, where 'X' is a topicalized element, 'V' the finite verb and 'S' the subject (cf. Ganuza; Opsahl & Nistov, this volume). Thus the standard Norwegian word order would be 'en dag **blir alt** bedre' instead of 'en dag **alt blir** bedre' (some day everything will be better). In the following example, the violation of this word order rule is apparently legitimized by the need to meet the demand for end rhymes in rap style. A South-East Norwegian word order in the last part of the first phrase would be 'nå **glemte jeg** det', which would not rhyme well with the last two words of the next phrase ('hun glemte den').

<i>jeg skrev det ned mann, men nå jeg glemte det</i>	I wrote it down, man, but now I forgot it
<i>mora mi fant rimeboka og hun gjemte den</i>	my mother found the book of rhymes and she hid it
	From 'Tæsha unger' (Beaten kids)

A third example, in which the lyrics evoke childhood memories of the family fleeing from war in the Balkans, emphasises this point. The standard Norwegian word order 'hva Jernbanetorget var' ('what Jernbanetorget⁶ was') would not rhyme with the preceding phrase.

<i>husker lenge før, før Oslo og Norge,</i>	remember long before, before Oslo and Norway
<i>lenge før jeg visste hva var Jernbanetorget</i>	long before I knew what was Jernbanetorget
<i>da du kom inn på rommet, sa pakk alt med [det] samma</i>	when you came into the room, said pack everything at once
<i>gjorde alt du kunne for å få oss ut av landet</i>	did all you could to get us out of the country
	From 'Sønn' (Son)

The Mistake Becomes a 'Take'

All the variations described so far violate standard norms of grammar and pronunciation. Accordingly, they may easily be understood as language mistakes based on lack of knowledge or training in the 'major language'. When observing a language variety with connections to hip-hop culture and rap lyrics we should pay close attention to the social and performative role of 'the mistake', and the process of incorporating 'mistakes' into spoken language. As shown in various Scandinavian studies, deviations from standard language do not necessarily mean that the speakers don't know better (Quist, 2008: 44–45; Svendsen & Røyneland, 2008: 65–66). 'Errors' that initially are committed due to lack of language proficiency may become fashionable in a language community; gradually stabilized and established as characterizing language features. This process is apparently boosted by the inclusion and exploitation of 'mistakes' in lyrics performed from a stage or mediated otherwise (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2001). For many young people with an immigrant background, the hip-hop performers of Oslo's inner east suburbs are local role models and idols; admired and looked up to. Their puns and punch-lines uttered from stage and distributed on 'underground' recordings are seen as valid interpretations of the life world of urban youth. Consequently, many of their rhymes and phrases are copied, remembered and included in the daily

speech of audiences and fans. In this way, over time, mediated utterances serve to establish, maintain and celebrate 'mistakes', not only as new language indicators, but as signs of protest, opposition and resistance. As in the earlier quoted paraphrasing of the national anthem where the 'mistaken' genus supplies an additional level of ironic meaning, deviation from standard spoken language becomes a strategic move in its own right. Thus, the 'mistake' becomes a 'take': A Signifyin(g) take on the major language.

The variations, deviations and 'mistakes' discussed in this chapter suggest a reciprocal correspondence between the local multiethnolectal speech style and the rhythms and poetics of urban rap music. For the producers and performers of this music, the multifaceted linguistic setting they live in provides a much richer basis for experimentation and innovative variation than a less diverse cultural environment would. When the standard Norwegian expressions do not match their intentions – poetically, rhythmically or stylistically – there is a wide palette of alternatives within their reach. Just as the distribution of mediated music through the Internet opens up for picking and choosing beats and music samples from all over the world and using them in local music production, a multiethnic and multilingual environment affords a vast variety to choose from, appropriate, Signify upon and develop. Since hip-hop in itself is basically an art of improvisation, requiring spontaneity and reinvention from moment to moment, the performance and production of rap music must be regarded as an important empowering force in language development, stimulating the linguistic creativity of the emerging urban multiethnolectal speech styles of Scandinavia.

Notes

1. See Solomon (2005) for a discussion of the 'underground' metaphor in rap music.
2. Original version: 'Ja, vi elsker dette landet, som det stiger frem, furet, værbit over vannet, med de tusen hjem'. English translation: 'Yes, we love this country, as it rises forth, rocky, weathered, above the sea, with those thousand homes'.
3. BMW top series.
4. BMW motor specifications.
5. Inshallah: If Allah wills; usually said when referring to a situation in the future.
6. Jernbanetorget: Square in central Oslo, part of a major drug-dealing area.