



**HAL**  
open science

## Codeswitching and artistic performance among multilingual minorities in Flanders

Mena B Lafkioui

► **To cite this version:**

Mena B Lafkioui. Codeswitching and artistic performance among multilingual minorities in Flanders. Belgian Journal of Linguistics, 2021, 35 (1), pp.34-50. 10.1075/bjl.00063.laf . hal-03711560

**HAL Id: hal-03711560**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03711560>**

Submitted on 1 Jul 2022

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

REFERENCE: Lafkioui Mena B., 2021. Codeswitching and artistic performance among multilingual minorities in Flanders. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 35, Special Issue “Current Perspectives on Codeswitching”, Emma Vanden Wyngaerd, Renata Enghels, Mena B. Lafkioui, and Marie Steffens (eds.), 34-50. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bjl.00063.laf>

## **Codeswitching and artistic performance among multilingual minorities in Flanders**

**Mena B. Lafkioui**

*École des hautes études en sciences sociales  
CNRS-LIER-FYT*

### **Abstract**

Viewed from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective, this research addresses multilingual codeswitching practices of youngsters with North African roots from the super-diverse Flemish city of Ghent. Particular attention is paid here to their artistic – mainly interethnic – performances, as these play a vital role in constructing ethnic and social belonging by voicing “glocal” identities. In so doing, the study provides evidence of the importance of multilingualism and codeswitching in the accommodation, socialization, and emancipation of these youngsters.

Keywords: multilingual codeswitching, artistry, improvised theatre, interethnicity, glocality

## **1. Addressing interethnic multilingual interactions**

The present study investigates the different formal and functional connections between language use and representation in codeswitched multilingual interactions of young people with a North African – mainly Amazigh-speaking – heritage background living in the Flemish metropole of Ghent. This Belgian city is characterized by both official Dutch monolingualism, as from 1963, and (non-official) multilingualism pertaining to its super-diversity (Lafkioui 2019).

The study accounts for the importance of heteroglossic practices – i.e., multilingual interactions relating to diverse intersubjective voices construed from diverse sociocultural interactional positions – and hence of codeswitching in the accommodation, socialisation, and emancipation of multilingual speakers, particularly in minority and migration contexts (for more about heteroglossia, see Bakhtine 1981; Ivanov 2001). Accordingly, it provides evidence of how multilingual codeswitching fulfils various and varying pragmatic functions, which pertain to both the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts in which the selected languages are used. It also demonstrates to what extent the different languages – imagined or practiced – contribute to the construction and consolidation of collective “minority” identities of these youngsters, by analysing their multilingual practices in mainly informal and semi-informal contexts (e.g., families, associations, public spaces including shopping malls).

Codeswitching is understood here in its broad sense and includes alternational switches between whole utterances in different languages (generally at clause boundaries), insertional switches of words or multi-words into morphosyntactic configurations of a base language, as well as a combination of the two switch types or even a combination of

grammatical configurations from different languages leading into a new hybrid configuration.

A special focus in the study is put on interethnic artistic performances, and in particular on improvised theatre, which often form oppositional vernacular discourses that relate to hybrid urban cultures. Much like hip hop performances, improvised theatre constitutes critical interpretations of society, questioning everything that is inadequate with its structures and organizations considered legitimate. These artistic performances engage interactions based on vehicular and vernacular forms of several languages, such as Dutch, Tamazight (aka Berber), French, English, Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, German, and Serbo-Croatian. They reveal not only the varying multilingual competencies and skilfulness of these adolescents but also their remarkable metadiscursive awareness, playing on all that intertextuality and multimodality (conversation, song, dance) has to offer. The performances investigated are highly heteroglossic and dynamic in nature, but at the same time they are also conventionalized to some extent in that their polyphony is managed jointly, as will be shown in the following sections.

Because globalisation processes and effects take a central place in the study, especially when anchored in multilingual and multicultural local contexts such as those of the city of Ghent, the interactional sociolinguistic approach is adopted here, as it allows to thoroughly understand the complex relationship between language, identity, and power (Goffman 1974; Goffman 1981; Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Lafkioui 2019; Rampton 1995; among others). Moreover, in this approach, concepts such as identity and ethnicity are considered to be dynamic and hence continually constructed and reconstructed during the interactions. A central position is attributed to the ‘interactants’, rather than to disembodied language, who jointly construct and reconstruct

meaning, and produce and reproduce cultural values, such as identities and ethnicities. Consequently, interaction is the point where the ‘Social’ and the ‘Subject’ meet, their only and unique place of mutual formation.

With regard to the multiplicity (age, class, gender, ethnicity, geopolitical setting, social status, sexual orientation, religion...) and the hybridity of identity and ethnicity, the interactional perspective permits in-depth analyses of an unlimited scale of variables by correlating social variables with linguistic variables in a multidimensional frame.

Accordingly, equal importance is given to linguistic aspects of the interactions as to their extralinguistic aspects, such as the historical, social, cultural, and political context in which they occur and to which they contribute.

The approach is augmented by using notions from the linguistic ethnographical and anthropological perspective. Most notably the focus on the factor power (especially political power) is crucial for this study, in the sense that speech as a social process can be a source of gaining and exercising power, and thus is fundamental for the (re)construction of identities by minorized or oppressed groups and individuals (Blommaert 2010; Bourdieu 1982; Bourdieu 1991; Gal 2006; Lafkioui 2013; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2002).

The study is based on a vast multimodal corpus built following qualitative and ethnographical approaches, which have proved to be adequate for in-depth and socially situated research into multilingual practices. These practices are particularly challenging not only as to their study but also as to how to collect them, since they require increased and improved methodological reflexivity, flexibility, and cooperativeness on behalf of the researcher during the fieldwork investigation (Bradley 2016; Costley and Reilly 2021; Gumperz 1972, 1982; Holmes et al. 2016; Hymes 1996; Lafkioui 2015; Rampton,

Maybin, and Roberts 2014). The Ghent corpus is part of this multimodal corpus; special attention is paid here to young people, due to the dynamics attested in their relationships between code choice and switching, identity construction, and sociocultural inscriptions (Hewitt 1986; Lafkioui 2006, 2008, 2013, 2019; Rampton 1995).

In what follows, the Ghent's youngsters with North African roots – henceforth GYNAR – and their socioeconomic and ethnocultural background will be addressed, along with their language practices and representations, including their artistic performances and in particular those pertaining to improvised theatre. Evidence will be given of the importance of codeswitching in constructing ethnic and social belonging by voicing glocal identities.

## **2. Ghent's Youngsters with North African Roots (GYNAR)**

North African immigration towards Flanders, and hence towards Ghent, began in the 1950s, the majority of which is Amazigh-speaking and mainly stems from the Rif area (North, Northeast, and Northwest Morocco). Tamazight is a language family which forms a branch of the Afroasiatic phylum and counts about forty languages, which cover entire North Africa, including the Sahara and the northern and western Sahel (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso) and the Canary Islands where Amazigh inscriptions (i.e., Libyco-Berber inscriptions) are found that go back to ancient times (Lafkioui 2018).

When the first North Africans arrived in Ghent in the 1950s, their social profile was essentially that of the working class. Nowadays, they form a quite heterogeneous group, with an upcoming middle class, thanks to a second generation which is relatively better educated in Dutch, although problems relating to academic success persist and still

prevent the social mobility of a significant number of youngsters with North African roots. The numerous North African stores and restaurants – especially Moroccan ones – created in the working-class neighbourhoods where they generally live not only contribute to the formation of this specific middle class but also to the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic networks that they make up. Intra-ethnic networks were formed fairly quickly upon their arrival in Ghent (cafes, mosques, grocery stores) and allowed to meet their ethnocultural needs and keep a bond with their ancestral culture. Interethnic networks, on the other hand, are much more recent, largely because of the lack of interest on the part of local and national authorities in ethnocultural diversity and its relation to social inequality. Some of these middle class North African families also participate in what is called in Dutch *de witte vlucht* ‘the white fugue’ when they move to more affluent neighbourhoods and try to avoid sending their children at what are called “black schools”. These latter schools, also commonly called *concentratiescholen* ‘concentration school’ in Dutch, generally stand for those schools with a high percentage of pupils with an ethnocultural non-Western minority background.

An example of an intra-ethnic network is the association “Tilelli” (Association Culturelle N’Imazighen asbl / Kulturele Vereniging N’Imazighen vzw), which was founded in 1995 by a small group of Amazigh and French-speaking Kabyles (Amazigh group of North Algeria). It suffices to have an interest in the Amazigh languages and cultures to be able to join this association, which serves for socialization through both Amazigh and intercultural values, as is expressed by its president Amar Sadat and his daughter Luna Sadat in their interview “L’association Tilelli comme exemple de politique d’intégration à Gand. La participation des immigrants à la politique d’intégration”, conducted by Stéphane Bienvenue (2002).

On the other hand, in interethnic associations, generally subsidized by the city of Ghent or the province of East Flanders, Dutch is used as the vehicular language and as a means of intercultural socialization, although practices of codeswitching with other languages are commonplace. In the following sections, I will present some key results of my surveys with the association federation vzw JONG and its two associations “Meisjeswerking - Het Meisjeshuis” (for girls) and “Jeugdhuis Kaarderij” (for boys and girls), which I have been investigating between 2005 and 2019. These two associations are located in the “globalized” district of Rooigem-Brugse Poort in Ghent (see Figure 1 below; western part of Ghent). The association federation vzw JONG is of special interest for this study, because of the socializing efforts it makes, while paying attention to diversity and inequality (<https://www.vzwjong.be/over-ons/waarden>).

It is worth mentioning that the GYNAR attend more or less assiduously to local Koranic schools, often under parental constraint; the main motivation being learning Standard Arabic – although they are generally Amazigh-speaking – and instruction in the doctrine and practices of Islam.



**Figure 1. vzw JONG’s associations in Ghent**



### 3. GYNAR's language and cultural repertoire

The multilingual language repertoire of Ghent's citizens of North African descent generally comprises vehicular and vernacular varieties of Dutch, Tamazight (mostly Tarifit, i.e., the Amazigh language of the Rif area; North, Northeast, and Northwest Morocco), French, Arabic (mostly colloquial varieties), English, and sometimes also Spanish and German, according to the sociohistorical situation and the migratory trajectory of the families concerned. French plays a significant role in the repertoire of these "Gantois", because it remains an interactive resource with a high sociocultural status, a "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1982), which promotes both social ascent and "trans-nationalization" of local roots; in other words, it allows to create specific global localities (Lafkioui 2019). French is mostly spoken among family members and friends, where it contributes to the reproduction of the multilingual intimate framework. Offline, French is regularly encountered in networks with an open language and socioeconomic profile and often settled in the area of residence, such as for instance in the youth associations cited above.

The multilingual practices of the GYNAR also function as powerful vectors in creating and promoting specific group identities. As such, great linguistic creativity is attested among them who, for social and/or ethnic reasons, feel the need to construct and express their "Self" in relation to the "Other" ("othering") and in opposition to hegemonic local (e.g., Ghent, Flemish) or trans-local (e.g., Belgian, Western) forces. This is reflected in particular in artistic creativity, wherein hip-hop culture is an important component.

GYNAR rap, such as the rap performed by Fatih from Ghent, as well as the rap performances of other Belgian rappers and hip-hoppers with North African roots, such as

the well-known Flemish performers SLM and Soufiane Eddyani, are marked by their heterogeneous style and make use of various languages like Dutch, French – especially French of young people and of suburbanites of Brussels and France – English, especially in its vernacular forms, as well as Tamazight and North African Arabic, and sometimes also Spanish. For some of these youngsters, young Brussels residents with North African roots represent not only the language norm, as regards vernacular French anyway, but also the socio-cultural norm. The latter norm is manifested for example in cultural modes, such as fashion, having a dog (of the intimidating type), or having a sports motorcycle. So, these youngsters adopt and contribute to a set of hybrid and hierarchical cultural and language norms, where Dutch predominates as an interactive means (instrumental function), while French, Tamazight, and Arabic serve rather as a marker of social and (sub-)cultural belonging allowing the expression of alternative voices and identities (symbolic function). These indexicalities are primarily reflected as such in the data of my corpus, of which some examples are given here below and in next section. This does not mean, however, that no symbolic functions are ascribed to Dutch or that the other languages do not fulfil instrumental functions. In fact, when it comes to codeswitching, the choice of language is often motivated by several linguistic and extralinguistic factors concurrently (see e.g., example 2 below).

Most of the codeswitches in the hip-hop/rap performances of these youngsters happen in sentence initial or final position and may be of both the insertional and alternational type. The switches serve various purposes, pertaining to the semantics, pragmatics, and poetics of the texts. For instance, codeswitching is often used for content structuring, which may be instantiated by means of rhyme, line division, and refrain, as well as for content foregrounding, which may be done through repetition, parallelism, and contrast, as is

shown in example 1 below (similar mechanisms are found, for example, in Moroccan Arabic rai music, see e.g., Davies and Bentahila 2008, and in Canadian rap, see e.g., Sarkar and Winer 2006). These mechanisms are skilfully chosen and always have the discursive coherence and dynamics of the text in mind, which is quite a complex endeavour when combining different languages in a “glocal” context.

Sentence-initial switches are regularly used as vocatives, which is the case exemplified in (1), presenting the refrain from SLM’s song *Pech* ‘bad luck’. The Moroccan Arabic vocative *ya l’habiba* (\**ya l-ħbibba*) ‘oh darling’ introduces the first line and is followed by the vernacular English “I got ya back”, from which is switched into Dutch in the second line, where the English word “shine” is inserted. The third line continues in Dutch but ends in Moroccan Arabic *rani mhak* (\**ra-ni m3a-k*), from which is switched back to Dutch in line four. Lines five and six are both introduced by the common English vocative “baby baby”, which is followed by a text in Dutch, wherein the word *pech*, as in the title, is repeated several times.

- (1) **Ya l’habiba** I got ya back  
 VOC DEF.darling.FS 1SG have.PART POSS.2SG back  
 ‘Oh, darling I’ve got your back’

*Je moet niet kijken naar de shine, dat hoort erbij*  
 2SG have.PRES.2SG NEG look.INF to DEF shine DEM.DIST belong.PRES.3SG  
 it.by  
 ‘You shouldn’t look at the shine, that’s part of it’

*Gij weet gij weet rani mhak*  
 2SG know.PRES.2SG 2SG know.PRES.2SG DEM.1SG with.2SG  
 ‘You know you know I am with you’

*Je hebt voor mij gekozen, ik blijf plakken aan je zij*  
 2SG have.2SG for 1SG choose.PART 1SG stay.PRES.1SG stick.INF to POSS.2SG  
 side  
 ‘You chose me, I’ll stick by your side’

*Baby baby gij hebt pech pech pech pech pech pech*  
 baby baby you have.2SG bad luck bad luck bad luck bad luck bad luck bad luck  
 ‘Baby baby, you’re out of luck bad luck bad luck bad luck bad luck’

*Baby baby gij hebt pech pech pech*  
 baby baby you have.2SG bad luck bad luck bad luck  
 ‘Baby baby, you’re out of luck bad luck bad luck’

Although the base language of this song is Dutch, its refrain contains some interesting switches, which may cast some doubt on the base language of certain lines of the song. For instance, the sentence of the first line may be drawn on an English morphosyntactic template, although Dutch would also do fine here and may be regarded as the calquing source for the English sentence. The code choice and switching of the first line allow to clearly set off the refrain from the rest of the text, which is mostly in Dutch. At the same time, the linguistic divergence of the expressions of the refrain permits to introduce the addressee (*ya l’habiba*) and the theme of the song (*I got ya back*). With the last word of the first line, the English “back”, rhymes *mhak* from Moroccan Arabic in line three, which is part of the insertional switch *rani mhak*. This latter switch is interesting because it completes as object complement the sentence started in Dutch with the duplicated verb phrase *gij weet gij weet* ‘you know you know’. It is difficult to distinguish in this line which of the two languages, Dutch or Moroccan Arabic, serves as the base language, since the grammar of both works fine here, even though they are genealogically (Germanic versus Semitic) and typologically (SVO versus VSO) unrelated. The Moroccan Arabic component which ends the line repeats the theme of the song, expressed

in English in the first line, i.e., ‘I’ve got your back’, which is reformulated in the subsequent line in Dutch, *ik blijf plakken aan je zij* ‘I’ll stick by your side’ (again at the end of the line), and even in the following lines five and six by means of *gij hebt pech* ‘you’re out of luck’, framed here ironically.

Dutch-based hip-hop culture is very popular and productive among youngster with North African roots in Flanders, and even more in the Netherlands, where rappers such as the well-established Ali B. and the much fresher Riffi are very successful. Riffi has also songs wherein Tamazight (Tarifit) is the principal language, such as in the song “Playa”, which indexes the summer holidays at the beaches of the Rif.

Apart from the commercialised performances, most hip-hop expressions are generated during spontaneous and playful interactions. Indeed, it is while having fun and being creative that young people generally (re)negotiate the relationship between the languages that make up their multilingual repertoire and the sociocultural groups to which they adhere (Hewitt 1986, Lafkioui 1998, 2008, 2019, Rampton 1995). That is why these youngsters often voice their group identities in non-explicit ways, by means of all sorts of interactive markers, such as those pertaining to style, gender, and accent, but also those relating to the type of activity in which they participate, whether online or offline.

As a matter of fact, even during football sessions, for instance, codeswitching practices are part of their interactive routines and serve to signify specific contents and values. Example (2) accounts for this and stems from one of the many football sessions that I have recorded at Jeugdhuis Kaarderij.

(2) **wa 3ayyeqti**, *die bal, die bal, daar moete zijn*, **wa HANDICAP 3ayyeqti zijde** *gij teddayred of zo jong*

INTJ exaggerate.PFV.2SG, DIST ball, DIST ball, DIST must.AUX.PRES.2SG be, INTJ handicap exaggerate.PFV.2SG be.PRES.2SG 2SG be.blind.PFV.2SG or what young ‘Come on, that ball, that ball, there you should be, oh you nitwit come on, are you blind or what, man.’

The utterance starts with the common Moroccan Arabic expression *wa 3ayyeqti* ‘you exaggerate > come on’, which is repeated in the hybrid switch *wa HANDICAP 3ayyeqti* ‘oh you nitwit come on’, where it is broken up by the insertion of the Dutch noun *handicap*, which is prosodically emphasised. Interestingly, in the GYNAR’s informal verbal interactions (especially of the male youngsters), the noun *handicap* is frequently employed as a frozen interjection with all sorts of discursive values, mostly pertaining to the expression of emotion; it has high indexical value. Consequently, the noun *handicap* has been grammatically reanalysed as a discursive marker, which endows it with much more leeway for both syntactic and pragmatic flexibility, at least when occurring in codeswitched text. The insertion of *handicap* in preverbal position does not accord well with Moroccan Arabic’s word order, which would give preference to *wa 3ayyeqti a handicap* (preceded by the vocative *a*), if one would use *handicap* as a vocative interjection here. As a matter of fact, it would not be a felicitous configuration in Dutch (e.g., Flemish of Ghent) either, but it would be in Tarifit, which may hint to the latter language as the base language of the hybrid switch. Note that the interjection *handicap* has not yet developed into a discursive filler (see Poplack 1980), as it is not entirely independent of the syntax of the codeswitched configurations wherein it occurs.

More grammatical hybridity is witnessed in the subsequent switch *zijde gij teddayred of zo jong*, wherein the conjugated verb phrase in Tarifit *teddayred* ‘you are blind’ is used

in a morphosyntactic configuration of vernacular Dutch, which usually takes an adverb in this position, such as *blind*, for instance. It is worth mentioning that the switches containing Moroccan Arabic and Tarifit function here as a means for channelling and expressing intense emotions, such as excitement and frustration.

Codeswitching cases like in (2) are regularly recorded in my corpus. They are remarkable in that they engage structurally incongruent languages and hence challenge the validity of the concept of congruent lexicalization (Muysken 2014), wherein switching would preferably occur between genetically or typologically congruent languages. My findings rather indicate intense codeswitching within specific conventionalised multilingual formats (called “conventionalised heteroglossia” in Lafkioui 2019) as significant for enabling codeswitching of the type exemplified in (2). This latter type implies of course a certain fluency in the languages involved, which is in line with the findings presented in Hofweber et al (2020), as well as in Backus and Demirçay’s contribution in this volume.

While for the GYNAR their multilingualism and their heteroglossia index symbolic capital (internationalization, emancipation, agency), this is not necessarily the case for all Ghent residents. I was able to observe during my fieldwork investigations that these alternative language practices are also perceived, especially by “outsiders”, as forms of non-assimilation to the official Dutch-speaking standard, and therefore as an index of refusal of integration into Flemish society. Nevertheless, some recent efforts of opening up by the official Belgian media towards more diverse and inclusive language use is recorded. For instance, the expression *ewa derrerrie* ‘come on guys’ (< \**iwa d-drari*, VOC DEF-boys.PL; Moroccan Arabic) has been chosen as the Children’s Word of the Year

2020 on Ketnet, a youth channel of the national broadcasting radio and television network VRT (Vlaamse Radio en Televisie), whose language advisor (Ruud Hendrickx) says the following about the expression:

*“De keuze voor “ewa drerrie” laat zien dat kinderen één grote diverse en inclusieve groep vormen. ... Kinderen pikken woorden en uitdrukkingen van elkaar op en breiden zo de Nederlandse omgangstaal uit met taalelementen uit de hele wereld.”*

‘The choice for “ewa drerrie” shows that children form one large diverse and inclusive group. Children pick up words and expressions from each other and thus expand colloquial Dutch with language elements from all over the world.’

(Source: Kinderen kiezen ‘Ewa drerrie’ als woord van het jaar, 14/12/2020 om 16:52 door wle, Bron: BELGA; [https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201214\\_95719610](https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201214_95719610))

The rap group SLM (see also example 1) and their song “Drarrieville” has certainly had a hand in this state of affairs. This song title is a bilingual compound based on the American English “X-ville”, like e.g., in Nashville, wherein the first part (X) is filled in by the Moroccan Arabic “Drarrie” (\**drari*), which means ‘guys’. This rap group also had a huge success with their previous song “Ewa ja” (the North African vocative interjection ‘oh yeah’), whose title was chosen as the favourite expression by Ketnet in 2017.

Given the evidence discussed above and in what follows, codeswitching practices among the GYNAR contribute, in its diverse forms, to the phenomenon of “vernacular globalization” (Appadurai 1996: 10; Blommaert 2010: 75-77), that is to say – it contributes to the multiple ways in which the processes of globalization are combined with specific local contexts, such as those of the multilingual North African minorities, the majority of whom live in “globalized” neighbourhoods – the so-called “black” neighbourhoods – deeply marked by super-diversity. GYNAR’s creative codeswitching



not only echoes their everyday language use but also the particular local and trans-local ideologies the different languages in use index. Power is of great importance in the multilingual interactions of these youngsters, as these interactions point to the relevance of social, cultural, and political minorization and oppression that they experience in their daily life. Their codeswitching also invites the local and trans-local authorities to rethink society by accepting language and cultural diversity. The GYNAR take pride in the ability to blend linguistic and cultural resources, which mirrors their super-diverse identities. In so doing, they question the establishment and its traditional ideologies about language (monolingualism) and culture (monoculturalism) by calling for more symmetrical interactional power relations based on multilingualism and multiculturalism. The evidence discussed in next section accounts for this.

#### **4. Improvised interethnic theatre**

Theatre is one of the artistic performance types in which the GYNAR also regularly partake, especially in its improvised format. Improvised theatre is often offered and even encouraged in superdiverse socialisation networks, such as VZW JONG, because of its reflexive and learning quality, as well as its dynamic and inclusive approach. Improvised theatre is regarded here as a kind of interactive staged process that leads to an official performance which relates to Goffman's "platform format", corresponding to "the arrangement found universally in which an activity is set before an audience" (Goffman 1983). Improvised theatre engages specific interactive practices pertaining to the planning, rehearsal, and official presentation of the play, for which I refer to Johnstone (1981) for more details. Central to this kind of theatrical performance is to jointly create

a set of improvisation routines by means of certain interactive techniques pertaining to language choice and use, as well as to the extralinguistic context, which may engage bodily expression (e.g., mimes, music, dance), decoration, and theatre paraphernalia, for instance. In other words, by mutually exploring and learning how to improvise, the play comes into being progressively. There is always a conductor present, who gently steers the improvisation process and gives advice not only regarding the artistic and technical aspects of the play but also regarding ethical and sociocultural values and conduct.

The case presented here concerns the interethnic play *Ben ik dat nu?* ‘Is this really me?’, which is performed by a group of girls of various ethnic origins – among which the Amazigh ethnical background – attending the Meisjeshuis association in Ghent in the “globalized” district of Rooigem-Brugse Poort, that I followed up and recorded (audio and video) from the first rehearsal to the final official performance. The conductor of this play paid much attention to the individual dispositions of each of the girls and encouraged them to express themselves without holding back out of fear to be criticised or reprimanded. The whole improvisation process took place in a close setting, wherein the rehearsals consisted of a warm-up phase, followed by some performance exercises (including the joint construction of the decoration and of the outfits), and ended by an appraisal of the exercises completed in order to adjust their content and form according to what the performers thought the audience might expect.

This play is of particular interest for this study as it engages multilingual repertoires of adolescent girls with various heritage languages pertaining to their different ethnic background and migration history. The multilingual practices witnessed in this play chiefly include vehicular and vernacular forms of Dutch, French, English, Tamazight (Tarifit mainly), Moroccan Arabic, Turkish, and Serbo-Croatian. During the

improvisation performances, these girls have shown an extraordinary ability to manage their multilingual repertoire and to employ it creatively by drawing on intertextual and multimodal contents and techniques. By so doing, the girls reviewed and incorporated along different narrative threads all sorts of ethnic, social, and cultural stereotypes of their daily lives, of which I will present some excerpts in what follows.

The first excerpt is from the thread of “Madame Patoe”, which concerns social isolation, death, illness, and individualism, all aspects of life that the girls consider to be typical of Western society.

- (3) So: *s’ Zomers schijnt de zon in het hoekje van Sibel haar huis.*  
 ‘In summer, the sun shines in the corner of Sibel’s house.’

All but So: *Wie is Sibel?*

‘Who is Sibel?’

So: *Door het gat in het zijstraatje waar Madame Patoe woont.*

‘Through the hole in the side street where Ms. Patoe lives.’

Sa: *Wie is Mevrouw Patoe?*

‘Who is Ms. Patoe?’

So: *Ik weet niet wie Mevrouw Patoe WAS. Ik weet dat ze dood is.*

‘I don’t know who Ms. Patoe “was”. I just know she is dead.’

Si & Gu: **Bayan Patou’nun kim olduğunu bilmiyorum. O öldü.**

‘I don’t know who Mrs. Patoe was. She is dead.’

The intersentential switch to Turkish by Si and Gu at the end of this excerpt reformulates the Dutch sentence by So in order to draw attention to its content and to emphasise the

social issue of elderly people dying alone, even in the globalised neighbourhood of the girls.

The pragmatic functions of drawing attention and emphasis, instantiated through codeswitched reformulation, are also involved in the next excerpt, which stems from the thread of “Seppa” – from French *sais pas* < \**je ne sais pas* (‘not know’ < ‘I do not know’). This thread deals with marginalization, ethnicization, sexuality, and the tensions that all these sociocultural matters may generate.

(4) Yo: **Seppa? Qui est Seppa? D’où vient Seppa?**

‘Seppa? Who is Seppa? Where does Seppa come from?’

All except Yo: **Je ne sais pas**

‘I don’t know.’

Gu: *Weet ge da seppa in het Joegoeslaafs ‘ezel’ betekent?*

‘Do you know that “seppa” means “donkey” in Yugoslavian?’

So + Yo: *en seppa in het Marokkaans is hmar [...]*

‘And “seppa” in Moroccan (Arabic) is *hmar*.’

Note that by *Joegoeslaafs* ‘Yugoslav’ the girls mean Serbo-Croatian and by *Marokkaans* ‘Moroccan’ they mean Moroccan Arabic. The character of Seppa – an adolescent of Moroccan (Rif Amazigh) origin – presents a typification of the Other in its unacceptable forms, including, for example, that of *ezel*, *seppa*, *hmar* ‘donkey’. These multilingual insertional switches are metalinguistic reformulations of the concept of “being ignorant/stupid”, developed out of the French expression \**(je) sais pas* ‘I don’t know’, which perfectly matches with Serbo-Croatian *seppa* ‘donkey’ and its index, reproduced here also in Dutch (*ezel*) and in Moroccan Arabic (*hmar*). These metalinguistic insertions

occur in Dutch-based sentences, which alternate with French sentences, which introduce the new thread of “Seppa”.

Next excerpt comes from the thread *mon rêve* ‘my dream’, inspired by teenage girls’ dreams and the problems they encounter in achieving them (e.g., singing, dancing, wealth), and this in relation to certain personality traits, such as vanity, the lack of self-esteem, and materialism, which they present as both challenging and epitomised by the Western world.

(5) Sa: **Mon rêve, c’est d’avoir un laptop, un permis, une voiture, un Gsm, mm... je disais un Gsm, mais mon plus grand rêve, c’est d’avoir une belle voix. Je sais très bien chanter, regardez, *kijk maar, ik kan goed zingen*, [...]**

‘My dream is to have a laptop, a license, a car, a mobile phone, mm ... I said a mobile phone, but my biggest dream is to have a beautiful voice. I can sing very well, look, just look, I can sing well, [...]

All but Sa: Shut up!

So: I don’t wanna be a murderer [...]

In what follows, the girls sing Rihanna’s pop song Unfaithful: “story of my life, searching for the right, but it keeps avoiding me [...]

The alternational reformulation switch from French to the Dutch *kijk maar, ik kan goed zingen* ‘just look, I can sing well’ by Sa draws attention to what follows, which is literally singing. The next switch to English is used to put emphasis on the command to “Shut up!” expressed by the other girls and at the same time also to announce So’s song in English.

This interethnic play, and similar ones that I have recorded, are reflections of society and more precisely of its system of social stratification. It represents social categories of the Other who delimit what is socially legitimate, accepted. The multilingual language practices engaged in these interethnic artistic performances index intercultural interactions, but yet exist in a sociocognitive space delimited by a differentiation in ethnic groups and social classes. Because, for instance, the French of young girls like Sa would hardly be welcomed in French-speaking families of Flemish origin, if she is not part of their offline social networks, which are very closed. And conversely, the French of a French-speaking “Gantoise” with Flemish roots would hardly be considered legitimate in this interethnic theatre group if she does not live in the neighbourhood. My surveys indicate a clear separation between these two social groups, which live different lives in different neighbourhoods (see Lafkioui 2019 for a study on francophonie in Flanders). Spatial anchoring, in both its geographical and social dimensions, therefore plays a primordial role in language practices and representations. And, therefore, it is at this level that the inequalities are located and not at the level of languages, which are only a symbolic reflection of it.

The play also shows how globalized multilingual interactions and hence codeswitching participate in the deconstruction of the concept of ethnicity as a monolithic and static construction, and underline its hybrid and dynamic nature, the study of which requires multidimensional approaches taking into account the plurality of individual affiliations and groups, which is important for adequately understanding superdiversity, especially that experienced by minorities (Glick Schiller et al. 2006; Lafkioui 2008, 2013, 2019).

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how codeswitching practices in multilingual glocal interactions, and in particular those pertaining to artistry, contribute to questioning and renegotiating certain sociocultural relationships, including the relationship between languages and social and ethnocultural affiliations. In other words, creative multilingual codeswitching not only reflects everyday sociolinguistic hierarchies but also challenges them by calling for a revision of established language and cultural ideologies and policies. The study has also shown how the concept of ethnicity in the culturalist and therefore static and essentialising sense can be deconstructed through joint playful action, making it an object of artistic creativity. It therefore calls into question the perspective of “ethnic absolutism” (Gilroy 1987), which prevents us from understanding the diverse sociocultural relationships of minorities in their local and trans-local spatial anchoring. In this way, artistic performance takes into account the capacity for action (*agency*) of these young people, which is essential for any constructive socialization.

## References

- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtine, Mikhaïl. 1981. "Discourse in the novel." In *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. By Mikhaïl Bakhtine, 269–422. Austin: Texas University Press.
- Bienvenue, Stéphane. 2002. "L'association Tilelli comme exemple de politique d'intégration à Gand. La participation des immigrés à la politique d'intégration." *Intégration et cohésion sociale en Europe, Les cahiers millénaires* 3(28).
- Blackledge, Adrian and Pavlenko, Aneta. 2002. *Ideologies of Language in Multilingual Contexts*. Special issue. *Multilingua* 21 (2/3).
- Blommaert, Jan, 2010. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1982. *Ce que parler veut dire*. Paris: Fayard.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Oxford: Polity.
- Bradley, Jessica. 2016. "Liquid Methodologies: using a linguistic ethnographic approach to study multilingual phenomena." *Working Papers in Translanguaging and Translation* 18. (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/index.aspx>).
- Costley, Tracey and Reilly, Colin. 2021. "Methodological Principles for Researching Multilingually: Reflections on Linguistic Ethnography." *TESOL J.* <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3037>.
- Gal, Susan. 2006. "Minorities, migration and multilingualism: Language ideologies in Europe." In *Language Ideologies, Practices and Policies: Language and the Future of Europe*, ed. by Mar-Molinero Clare and Stevenson, Patrick, 13–27. London: Palgrave.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1987. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. London: Routledge.
- Glick Schiller, Nina, Çağlar, Ayşe & Guldbrandsen, Thaddeus C., 2006. "Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation". *American Ethnologist* 33 (4): 612–633.
- Goffman, Erving, 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Goffman, Erving. 1983. "The Interaction Order. American Sociological Association, 1982, Presidential Address." *American Sociological Review* 48(1): 1–17.
- Gumperz, John. 1972. "The communicative competence of bilinguals: Some hypotheses and suggestions for research." *Language in Society* 1(1): 143–154.
- Gumperz, John. 1982. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Gumperz, John and Hymes, Dell (eds.). 1972. *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Davies, Eirlys E. and Bentahila, Abdelali. 2008. "Code switching as a poetic device: Examples from rai lyrics" *Language and Communication* 28: 1–20.



- Hewitt, Roger. 1986. *White Talk Black Talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hofweber, Julia, Marinis, Theodoros, and Treffers-Daller, Jeanine. 2020. "How different codeswitching types modulate bilinguals' executive functions: a dual control mode perspective." *Bilingualism: Language & Cognition* 23: 909–925.
- Holmes, Prue, Fay, Richard, Andrews, Jane, and Attia, Mariam. 2016. "How to research multilingually: Possibilities and complexities." In *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide*, ed. by Hua Zhu, 88–102. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hymes, Dell, 1996. *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Towards an understanding of Voice*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Ivanov, Voloshinov, 2001. "Heteroglossia." In *Key Terms in Language and Culture*, ed. by Alessandro Duranti, 95–97. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Johnstone, Keith. 1981. *Improvisation and the Theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Lafkioui, Mena B. 1998. "Les Berbères et leur langue: le cas des immigrés berbères en Belgique." In *Attitudes, Représentations et Imaginaires en Afrique*, ed. by Cécile Canut, 119–130. Paris : L'Harmattan/Langues O'.
- Lafkioui, Mena B. 2006. "Pratiques et représentations linguistiques en contexte multilingue. Le cas des Berbères en Belgique". *Quaderni del Dipartimento di Linguistica (Unical)* 24: 73–84.
- Lafkioui, Mena B. 2008. "Identity construction through bilingual Amazigh-Dutch "digital" discourse". In *Berber in contact: linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives*, ed. by Mena B. Lafkioui and Vermondo. Brugnatelli, 217–231. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Lafkioui Mena B. 2013. "Multilingualism, Multimodality and Identity Construction on French-Based Amazigh (Berber) Websites" *Revue Française de Linguistique Appliquée* XVIII-2: 135–151.
- Lafkioui Mena B. 2015. "Méthodologie de recherche en géolinguistique" *CORPUS* 14: 139–164.
- Lafkioui Mena B. 2018. "Berber languages and linguistics". *Oxford Bibliographies*. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199772810-0219
- Lafkioui Mena B. 2019. "Le français face à la « super-diversité » dans la ville métropole de Gand" In *Les Métropoles francophones européennes*, ed. by Françoise Gadet, 185–202. Paris: Garnier,.
- Poplack, Shana. 1980. "Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español: Toward a typology of code-switching." *Linguistics* 18: 581–618.
- Rampton, Ben. 1995. *Crossing. Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents*. London/New York: Longman.
- Rampton, Ben, Maybin, Janet, Roberts, Celia. 2014. "Methodological foundations in linguistic ethnography." *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies* 125.
- Sarkar, Mela and Winer, Lise. 2006. "Multilingual Codeswitching in Quebec Rap: Poetry, Pragmatics and Performativity." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3(3): 173–192.