Multilingual Codeswitching in Quebec Rap: Poetry, Pragmatics and Performativity

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Quebec rap lyrics stand out on the world Hip-Hop scene by virtue of the ease and rapidity with which performers in this multilingual, multiethnic youth community codeswitch, frequently among three or more languages or language varieties (usually over a French and/or English base) in the same song. We construct a framework for understanding 'artistic code-mixing' in Quebec Hip-Hop, which may involve languages rappers do not profess to speak fully and upon which they have no ethnic 'claim'. Lyrics were analysed according to their functions in respect to pragmatics (rapper signature, vocative, discourse-marking), poetics (facilitating internal rhyme), and performing multiple identities. Analysis was by origin of lexical item, type of switch (lexical, morphological, syntactic, phonological), and discourse function (getting attention, rhyming). Language choices made involve both codeswitching and the choice of languages themselves. Switching strategies perform functions of both 'globalisation' and 'localisation', and is exploited by individuals in different ways, but are fundamentally linked by a positioning of multilingualism as a natural and desirable condition. This study is the first to explore Hip-Hop codeswitching in the linguistic-sociopolitical context of post-Bill-101 Quebec. It illuminates a new way in which Québécois youth are challenging official definitions of ethnic and speech communities.

> I have always had the fancy that if a man were really free, he would talk in rhythm and even in rhyme.
> G.K. Chesterton

Introduction

Rap artists in Quebec's Hip-Hop community display not only pyrotechnical prowess when it comes to talking 'in rhythm and even in rhyme', but also skill at moving freely among different languages. Quebec rap lyrics stand out on the world Hip-Hop scene by virtue of the ease and rapidity with which performers codeswitch, frequently among three, four or more languages or language varieties in the same song. The Quebec Hip-Hop community is young, in terms of its own age – not more than a decade – and the ages of its members. Multilingual language use in Quebec's youth community is under-

going rapid and interesting changes as a result of – or perhaps also as a cause of – the increasing popularity of Hip-Hop.

Our attention was initially drawn to the frequency of multilingual codeswitching in two landmark compact discs released in 1999 (Sarkar *et al*., 2005). Since that time, the number of rap artists on the local scene has increased considerably. So has the size of the audiences in Quebec Hip-Hop venues, which attract sell-out crowds of fans, usually in the 10 to 30-year-old age range. However, language use in this multilingual, multiethnic youth community has not thus far been documented by sociolinguists.

Studies in Hip-Hop Language

Hip-Hop is a youth arts movement (Keyes, 2002) that arose out of economically and socially depressed conditions in the Black and Hispanic communities of New York's South Bronx in the 1970s.[1] Rose (1994) and Keyes (2002) have examined the origins, musicological aspects, political themes and gender issues of American Hip-Hop. The cultural forms encompassed by Hip-Hop include graffiti art, breakdancing and rap music, 'a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music' (Rose, 1994: 2). Rap music has both a purely verbal component – the rap poetry or lyrics itself – and a more strictly musical component. Rose and Keyes both situate Hip-Hop squarely in the context of Black American cultural practices; Potter (1995) adds a postmodernist framework to the analysis of what he and other American Hip-Hop scholars see as essentially an Afrodiasporic phenomenon.

However, despite a substantial body of existing work on Hip-Hop, attention to language use in American Hip-Hop has not been a primary research focus for scholars until recently, with the exception of work by Morgan (1993) and Smitherman (1997). More recently, Morgan (2001) examined the links between grammar and language ideology in Hip-Hop identity, and set up the Hip-Hop Archives at Harvard University. Another American researcher, Cutler (1999, 2003), looked at the way African American Vernacular English (AAVE) language use by white New Yorkers supports their Hip-Hop identity. Newman (2002), also working in New York, studied AAVE language use and Hip-Hop identification in a high school rap crew and Alim (2003) examined ways in which AAVE practices are adapted in specific ways by Black American Hip-Hoppers.

Applied linguistics research on American Hip-Hop has thus far focused on AAVE use by members of the Hip-Hop community, with the main interest being the ways in which AAVE is used to index and enact Hip-Hop identity by speakers and rappers who may or may not themselves be Black. This necessarily involves extensive samples of data that include codeswitching between Standard and African American English, but links to the literature on codeswitching itself were not made until the focus of research moved away from Hip-Hop as a purely American phenomenon. (To the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies on the widespread phenomenon of codeswitching in Hip-Hop between English – Standard and AAVE – and Spanish, as practised by many American rappers with Hispanic roots.)

However, with the publication of Mitchell's edited volume *Global Noise* in 2001 – the title of which refers back to (or, in Hip-Hop parlance, 'signifies on') the title of Rose's book, *Black Noise* – interest in mixed language use in rap lyrics moved beyond this Americocentric bias towards rappers' use of AAVE. The contributors to Mitchell's collection discuss rap in seven European countries, as well as in Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Recent work on language use and codeswitching in European rap was carried out by Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2002), who, in addition, point out ways in which AAVE forms are recontextualised, for example, in the use of the local-language equivalents of the verb 'represent' to express the fundamental Hip-Hop concept of 'advocating on behalf of and reinterpreting'. Even more recently, Pennycook (2003, 2004) has looked at rap lyrics from Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Pacific Rim countries with strong indigenous traditions – New Zealand, Fiji, Samoa – suggesting that codeswitching by these rappers is not 'just a scattering of English for popular effect' (Pennycook, 2003: 526) but that, on the contrary, these Asian and Pacific rappers are fashioning a new, globalised identity through their use of what he terms 'raplishes', and that 'it is in the performance that the identity is created' (p. 528). African rap, the site of frequent language mixing involving complicated mixtures of former colonial languages and local languages with varying degrees of official status, has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention.[2]

Contexts for Quebec Hip-Hop

In this exciting flurry of new international scholarship on mixed language use in Hip-Hop around the globe, Canada has had a rather low profile, and Quebec as a unique French-speaking political–cultural–linguistic entity on the otherwise English-majority Canadian scene has had no profile at all. Chamberland, the musicologist who authored the chapter on Canadian rap in Mitchell (2001), rightly stresses the 'bilingual and multicultural' character of Canadian rap, and does include a short separate section on rap in Quebec. However, Chamberland's focus is on the relationship of Quebec and Canadian rap to the music industry, rather than on the actual language(s) used by rappers. The only Quebec Hip-Hop group discussed in any detail by Chamberland is Dubmatique, the first Quebec rappers to achieve mainstream recognition; they were active between 1992 and about 2000, but no longer record. Multilingual language use in Quebec rap falls outside the scope of Chamberland's analysis. A recent paper by Low (2005: 110) includes a very suggestive discussion of 'T dot' (Toronto) rapper Kardinal Offishall's use of several different English-based Caribbean Creoles in a way that 'carves out a distinct linguistic space for the T dot hip hop scene'; Low's analysis, however, is restricted to one song. Krims (2000) devotes attention to the work of Edmonton-based Cree rapper Bannock, situating him in the English-Canadian rap scene outside Toronto; Bannock represents himself as Cree, but with very little use of any words from Cree, so the question of mixed language use is moot.

Canada has both English and French as official languages at the federal level, but French is the sole official language of the province of Quebec. A key piece of provincial language legislation, the Charter of the French Language

(popularly known as 'Bill 101'), established the predominance of French in 1977 (see Bourhis, 2001; May, 2001). Public schooling was one of the key domains targeted. French-language and English-language publicly funded school systems exist side by side in Quebec. Before 1977, all parents had been able to send their children to the English public system if they so chose. Few children not of the *vieille souche* (old French-Canadian stock) were enrolled in French schools; as a result, the majority of immigrants to Quebec (95% of whom settle in the greater Montreal area) traditionally became *de facto* members of Quebec's anglophone community. However, from 1977 on, nearly all immigrant and French-Canadian children in the public system have had to attend French schools. The process of creating a new generation of native speakers of Quebec French had begun.

The present generation of Quebec rappers, none of whom are older than 35, are all members of this 'Bill 101 generation' and, with a few exceptions, share French as their common language through schooling. The pre-1977 history of Quebec's minority ethnolinguistic communities has meant that this generation has also had access to Standard Canadian English through older speakers from the same backgrounds. Young people who become interested in Hip-Hop are also exposed to a great deal of AAVE. This is equally true whether their own ethnolinguistic background is anglophone, francophone or 'allophone' (the Quebec term for someone with neither French nor English as their mother tongue).

The population of young Montrealers is ethnolinguistically exceedingly diverse and becoming more so yearly (Sarkar, 2005). Young adults from the downtown core typically share their experience of schooling with fellow students originating from 50–100 or more different national backgrounds. The urban area of Montreal is home to large communities with origins in Haiti, the English-speaking Caribbean, South, East and Southeast Asia, the Philippines, the Spanish-speaking countries of South and Central America, and an increasing number of African countries, as well as older and more well-established communities from the countries of Europe, especially from the Mediterranean region – Italy, Greece and Portugal. Many allophone communities have roots in the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa which were under the colonial influence of France – Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. And in recent years, world events have brought refugees from other Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Iraq, and from Afghanistan, to settle in Montreal in increasing numbers. Quebec's growing Hip-Hop community reflects many of these linguistic and cultural origins.

Before the unprecedented commercial success of Dubmatique, who sold 150,000 albums in the mid-1990s, Quebec Hip-Hop was restricted to underground venues and unofficial sales outlets such as the street-based circulation of 'mix tapes'. Rap was generally perceived as an American/AAVE phenomenon until the early 1990s; however, the advent of rap stars from France such as MC Solaar, the Fonky Family, and especially the group IAM, had a galvanising effect on Quebec rap. The rappers we have interviewed speak of the transforming effect of hearing IAM's 1997 release *L'école du micro d'argent* ('School of the Silver Microphone'). In the words of Quebec rapper, Impossible, 'On sonnait tous comme Akhénaton' ('We all sounded like Akhenaton'), IAM's

lead rapper. The members of IAM come from several, often mixed, ethno-
linguistic backgrounds; Quebec's emerging community of MCs (rappers)
readily identified with IAM's free use of a variety of linguistic influences.
Although the members of Dubmatique were of European or African origin
and rapped only in Standard (continental) French, Quebec rappers after them
in no way felt constrained by this model, as we shall see.

In 1999, two compact discs exploded onto the Quebec Hip-Hop scene:
514-50 dans mon réseau by Sans Pression (two rappers, one of mixed
Congolese/African-American origin and one Haitian) and *Mentalité moune
morne* by Muzion (three rappers all with roots in Haiti). The main language of
the lyrics was French, with extensive multilingual codeswitching. We under-
took a preliminary analysis of this phenomenon in a sampling of the lyrics
from these two albums (Sarkar *et al.*, in press). Since that time, with some
notable mostly-English exceptions, French has remained the main language of
Quebec rap. It is, however, a remarkably open and fluid French, with
influences from English (Standard, AAVE and Jamaican) and the other
minority languages of Quebec – especially Haitian Creole – running through
it like swirls in a sundae. Compact disc releases, live Hip-Hop performances
and video clips all show this tendency to include a wide range of languages
and varieties mixed in with the underlying French.

In our ongoing research into the language of Quebec Hip-Hop, we use our
analysis of the mixed language of local Hip-Hop as a lens to examine what
Allen has referred to as Quebec's 'demolinguistic dilemma' (2004) – that is,
how to 'integrate' all these newcomers to Quebec into the traditional Quebec
Francophone social fabric and make them feel welcome, while still maintain-
ing the supposed integrity of the original cloth. It is a social fabric in which, as
Allen points out (2004), language use (i.e. French versus English), as a
continual 'flashpoint', is one of the fundamental ground colours, without
which Quebec would have difficulty recognising itself. We suggest that the
inevitable result in the lives and work of Quebec youth in multiethnic
communities was the development of new forms of cultural and linguistic
hybridity. A similar phenomenon involving ethnic mixing, hybridity and new
ways of conceptualising and 'crossing' the traditional boundaries between
languages and cultures has been documented for multilingual, multiethnic
groups of adolescents in Britain by Harris (2003) and Rampton (2004), building
on work exploring 'new ethnicities' by Stuart Hall and others in the British
Cultural Studies tradition. Where previous theorists tended to assume
homogeneous, essentialised ethnic categories, Rampton and Harris focus
much more on 'the ways that people, knowledge, texts and objects move
("flow") across social and geographical space, to. . . experiences of indetermi-
nacy and ambivalence'. They consider that 'with their inbuilt assumptions
about fixed identities and relatively stable boundaries, established socio-
linguistic terms like "native speaker", "non-native speaker" and "speech
community" just couldn't do justice to. . . adolescents renegotiating their
ethnolinguistic affiliations' (Rampton, 2004: n.p.)

Thanks in part to the multilingual wordsmithing of local rappers and their
growing influence on an emerging generation, the linguistic and cultural warp
and weft of Quebec society may be changing faster than sociolinguists and

'anthropolitical linguists' (Zentella, 2003) can easily keep up with. Harris (2003: n.p.) points out that since Hall's work opened up 'possibilities for the loosening and destabilizing of ethnicity', we have been able to investigate the 'performativity and not [the] ascription' of these 'new ethnicities'. We show in this paper that Quebec rappers, because of the way they have chosen to enact new, multiple, ethnolinguistically hybrid identities through their lyrics, are taking this performativity onto the public stage and raising it to the level of art.

Multilingual Codeswitching in Quebec Rap Lyrics

We situate this preliminary report on three functions of multilingual codeswitching in Quebec rap in the context of a more broadly based series of studies now in progress. Three underlying research questions motivate this larger inquiry: (1) What is the nature and function of codeswitching, or 'artistic codemixing', in Quebec Hip-Hop? (2) how does codeswitching in Hip-Hop contribute to the creation of a new community among young Québécois? and (3) within the Quebec Hip-Hop community, what does language use tell us about identity construction? The first question is the one we began with, though the three are intimately and dynamically related. In this report, we address only the first, providing a base-line, empirical framework for the other focal points in further studies. Our second and third research questions address issues of Quebec Hip-Hop community creation and identity construction, respectively, particularly as these relate to multilingual language use. A preliminary discussion of some initial findings will be found in Sarkar and Allen (in press).

Our definition of 'codeswitching' is intentionally very broad, as indeed a 'fuzzy-edged construct' (Gardner-Chloros, 1995: 72). We include in this definition not only intra-line/sentential codeswitching, but also switches from one line to the next and switches between verses in the same song. In contrast to the large body of theoretical and empirical work that exists on the phenomenon of codeswitching in spontaneous conversation, the study of codeswitching in song lyrics is relatively new and not well developed. Bentahila and Davies (2002), in one recent study, take a detailed look at Arabic–French switching in the lyrics of Algerian *rai* music. They point out that codeswitching in song lyrics is a very different phenomenon from codeswitching in conversation, as it is neither spontaneous nor intimate (that is, it is not addressed to one interlocutor, nor to a small group, all of whom are known personally to the speaker). When codeswitching moves into the arena of public discourse, discourse intended for large audiences of strangers – and carefully scripted at that – it requires a different kind of analysis. In a review paper covering several decades of American popular song, Picone coined the term 'artistic codemixing' to refer to this overall phenomenon; he considers that one function of artistic codemixing is often 'to create multiple messages for multiple audiences, based on relative levels of linguistic competence' (Picone, 2002: 201). Whether or not Quebec rap artists codeswitch with this specific, conscious intent is something we have just begun to explore through interviews.

This research is based on the view that bilingualism and multilingualism are normal situations in which 'the linguistic behaviour which results from bilingualism [cannot] be dismissed as arbitrary or aberrant'; codeswitching should be 'considered as a much broader, blanket term for a range of interlingual phenomena within which strict alternation between two discrete systems is the exception rather than the rule' (Gardner-Chloros, 1995: 68). In a critique of 'assumptions about identities and indexicality made in early code-switching research and, in particular, in Myers-Scotton's markedness theory', Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) point out that 'identity cannot and should not be used as an explanatory concept in the study of linguistic practices, as it is itself in need of explanation'. Extending Rampton's work on language 'crossing', the authors criticise the tendency of sociopsychological approaches to the analysis of codeswitching and language mixing to essentialise languages and the groups to which they do not straightforwardly belong (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004: 9). This is a phenomenon that we will show to be an important aspect of the performativity of multiple and/or hybrid individual identities in Quebec rap lyrics (an extended discussion can be found in Sarkar & Allen, in press).

An examination of codeswitching as it is premeditatedly and artfully employed by poets and songwriters can also yield insights into the ways in which two or more languages may interact to index and enact a particular speech community's collective linguistic and cultural identity. Our purpose in this paper is to restrict ourselves to codeswitching in the language of published lyrics,[3] looking at a small body of data and making some connections to notions of community and identity construction in a fairly exploratory way. We therefore use the term 'rap' here, referring only to the lyrics of Hip-Hop's musical productions, rather than to Hip-Hop as a whole, which encompasses a range of complex cultural phenomena.

Some of the examples presented below also appear in Sarkar *et al.* (2005), which was restricted to a preliminary analysis of the two 1999 CDs mentioned above. Our sources of data have also expanded, and now include a wider, updated selection of commercial CDs (see Discography) as well as promotional material and interviews with rappers and other industry insiders. We will focus here on published lyrics from nine CDs that we consider to be representative of the output of Quebec rappers to date.[4]

Coding: Relevant Languages for This Study

Several languages and language varieties are commonly used and mixed by Quebec rap artists working in French as a base language. The selection of lyrics we looked at for this early stage of the inquiry required nine categories for an adequate analysis. (At a later stage we anticipate that the creation of further categories may become necessary, as new groups working with other languages emerge on the Quebec Hip-Hop scene.)

Varieties of French

(1) Standard Quebec French. This is the base language for the greater part of the lyrics analysed. It differs from standard international or Parisian French

mainly in the use of distinctively Quebec phonological features, such as the assibilation of /t/ and /d/ before a high front vowel.

(2) Nonstandard Quebec French. The social and regional dialects of Quebec are each distinct, but are generally characterised by a large number of lexical items that are not normally comprehensible to speakers of standard international French, such as *dépanneur* 'convenience store', *gougounes* 'flip-flops' (rubber sandals) and *garrocher* 'to throw, hurl'. Local swear words, such as *tabarnac* 'tabernacle' and *hostie* 'host', tend to be derived from Catholic sacred terms, idiosyncratic to the Quebec context. Nonstandard Quebec French also contains many assimilated borrowings from English that are fully integrated into French phonologically and morphosyntactically. Thus, the English verbs 'to watch' and 'to shine' have become the nonstandard Quebec French verbs *watcher* and *shiner*. Nouns such as *joke*, *fun*, *luck* and *tank* (sometimes spelled *tinque*) are considered French and are commonly used by monolingual Quebec French speakers.

(3) European French. Many lexical items typical of European French, and in particular of street slang, are known in Quebec. Words such as *nana* 'girl, chick' or *bagnole* 'car', may be used by any Quebec French speaker, but remain marked.

Varieties of English

(4) Standard North American English. Many switches into English occur in the texts analysed. Such switches are clearly not assimilated into the underlying French base, e.g. phonologically or morphologically, in the way that nonstandard Quebec lexical items that originated as English loanwords are.

(5) African-American Vernacular English. Initial identification of items as AAVE terms was confirmed on the basis of academic sources such as Smitherman (1998) and Morgan (2001), as well as on-line resources such as *The Rap Dictionary* and *The Ultimate Rap Dictionary*. These include both lexical items and phrases, as well as some morphology.

(6) Hip-Hop 'keywords'. For our purposes here we consider that Hip-Hop keywords constitute a subset of AAVE terms; they have been noted (e.g. by Morgan, 2001; Newman, 2002; Smitherman, 1997) as being particularly characteristic of Hip-Hop and therefore a useful way for performers to establish their identity in the 'Hip-Hop nation'. Alim (2003) points out that in recent years a specific, deliberate and self-conscious use of AAVE has emerged as a way for members of the American Hip-Hop community to establish their identity. Alim's discussion focuses on copula variation; we restrict ourselves here to lexical items. Words such as *rap*, *MC*, *underground* and *crew* serve to ground the text in Hip-Hop culture.

Caribbean Creoles

(7) Haitian Creole. This is the only other language to be used as a base in the lyrics analysed, reflecting the cultural origins of the rap artists studied. Within sequences of Haitian Creole, switches into other languages and varieties are common, exactly as for the more common base language, Quebec French. Haitian Creole, a language in its own right (e.g. Valdman, 1988), has French as its primary lexifier language.

(8) Jamaican Creole. Sometimes called Jamaican Creole English or Jamaican nation language, this creole has English as its primary lexifier language and also qualifies as a language in its own right (e.g. Cassidy & Le Page, 1967). Reggae music commonly is based in Jamaican Creole and is closely associated with this idiom. Lexical items such as *rudeboy*, *spliff* and *ganja* are instantly identifiable as Jamaican Creole. (Phonological criteria are also used, e.g. to distinguish Jamaican /bwai/ from AAVE /boi/ 'boy'.)

Other languages

(9) Spanish. Words such as *loco* 'crazy', *puto* 'whore [m.]' and *amigo* 'friend', have come into the common Hip-Hop lexicon through American rap written by bilingual speakers of English and Spanish in whose spontaneous speech mixing is common. This phenomenon has been widely observed on both East and West coasts, e.g. New York, with its Puerto Rican influence, and in the American South-West, where the influence is Mexican (Zentella, 2003). Our corpus also includes lyrics by rappers for whom Spanish is a primary language of creation.

Coding language switches in the lyrics selected for analysis was a relatively straightforward process at first, as we usually agreed about the status of a phrase or lexical item between ourselves (both authors have lived in Quebec for a long time, and work primarily with multiethnic, multilingual populations; English is our primary language). However, when we began to run reliability checks with coders from a younger generation whose primary language is French and who are also members of Quebec's Hip-Hop community (as teenaged audience members and junior rappers), we found that discussion was often necessary before a consensus could be reached. Younger speakers frequently identified a word as a nonstandard Quebec French lexical item, where older speakers saw a nonassimilated loanword from English. This reflects a gradual process in Quebec French, whereby words come in from other languages – mainly English – and eventually lose their non-French phonology, in some cases undergoing shift in meaning or pragmatic function.[5] We observed that this process is also under way with a number of words originating in AAVE (many of them Hip-Hop keywords) and in Caribbean creoles. Among themselves, Quebec teenagers who identify as members of the Hip-Hop community now frequently use such words as *chill*, *[to be] down* (AAVE); *a'ight*, *peace* (AAVE/Hip-Hop); *patnai*, *popo* (Haitian Creole); and *rudeboy, spliff* (Jamaican Creole) in their everyday exchanges in French. We decided to code such instances as switches, as Quebec Francophone speakers older than 30 do not accept them as French; we do, however, acknowledge our age-ist bias and note that down the road such usages may no longer be coded as switches.[6]

When the coding was complete, available formatting resources were used to code every word in one of the nine categories listed, using combinations as follows:

French
    (1) Standard Quebec French (unmarked)
    (2) **Nonstandard Quebec French** (bolded)
    (3) **European French** (bolded and underlined)
English
    (4) Standard North American English (underlined)
    (5) *African–American Vernacular English (AAVE)* (italicised)
    (6) *Hip-Hop Keywords* (italicised and underlined)
Caribbean creoles
    (7) ***Haitian Creole*** (bolded and italicised)
    (8) ***Jamaican Creole*** (bolded, italicised and underlined)
Other languages
    (9) Spanish (outlined)

Functions of Lexical/Phrasal Codeswitching

In this section, we present the analysis of lyrics in the corpus in response to the first research question stated above. The functions we consider most important here are categorised as pragmatic, poetic and performative.

Pragmatic function: Discourse or cohesion marker in utterance-initial or final position

Codeswitching in Quebec rap lyrics frequently occurs in the equivalent of utterance-initial or final position with a discourse or cohesive function. In the scripted lyrics of commercially available rap, this is usually at the line or half-line initial or final position.

Rapper signature

Rap lyrics everywhere commonly contain references to the rapper as author of the work, or 'rapper signature'. In her early study of American rap, Rose (1994: 95) emphasises the 'importance of authorship and individuality in rap music'. In Quebec rap lyrics, rapper signature often takes the form of a descriptive tag, as an add-on or an alternative to the rapper's name, which stands out from the surrounding text by virtue of being a language switch. Thus, in Example 1,

    (1) The rhyme specialist qui s'bat contre une plaie
         'The rhyme specialist who fights against a wound'

rapper Impossible from the group Muzion inserts this English reference to himself as a 'rhyme specialist' in an otherwise French verse. The context makes it clear that the 'wound' he declares himself to be fighting against can be interpreted metaphorically in the sense of a festering sore plaguing society, in this case urban poverty.

In Examples 2 and 3, rappers Ruffneck and Buzzy Bwoy each sign off a verse by naming themselves explicitly and adding a tag in English; both rappers are francophones who work mainly in French with lots of switching into English.

(2) Ruffneck, <u>the MTL slang</u> *slaya* ['slayer']
(3) Buzzy Bwoy, <u>a.k.a. Blunthead</u>

Vocative function

Using codeswitching to overtly identify the addressee and ostensibly attract his attention, which we consider to be a straightforward case of 'calling' or vocative function, also frequently occurs in Quebec rap lyrics. In American rap lyrics, as well as in rap from other linguistic contexts, there is a strong tradition of making references to the addressee of a song – commonly a rival rapper – often in a disparaging or *dissing* fashion. Keyes (2002), among others, situates this practice in the African-American oral tradition of 'the dozens', which has a long history as a local form of verbally enacted symbolic aggression. Such practices are important outlets for the disempowered.

In Example 4, rapper Chub-E uses a switch into AAVE (coded thus because of the pronunciation of 'member' as 'memba') to refer to his rival as a fraud:

(4) *Fake Wu-Tang memba*, <u>method</u>, même pas
     '*Fake Wu-Tang memba*, <u>method</u>, not even'

Wu-Tang is one of the most well known American Hip-Hop groups; one of their members is Methodman, so the word 'method' here can be read as Chub-E asserting that his rival is an unsuccessful Wu-Tang imitator. (We note also that the use of AAVE 'memba' at the end of the half-line enables a rhyme with line-final 'même pas' in French. A fuller discussion of the poetic function of codeswitching in Quebec rap will be found in the next section.)

Example 5 switches to two common phrases in Jamaican Creole to single out and insult the rapper's addressee in line-initial position. A *rudeboy* is an assertive, even aggressive, young man, one not to be trifled with. The expression *lick one shot* literally refers to rapid-fire gunshot, but may also have a sexual connotation. The text, by female rapper J. Kyll of Muzion, allows either interpretation.

(5) ***<u>Rudeboy, lick one shot</u>*** et si tu sais ce que je veux dire
     '***<u>Rudeboy, lick one shot</u>*** and if you know what I mean'

In Examples 6 and 7, also by J. Kyll, the appellations ***boy*** and *blackman* in sentence-final position provide closure to utterances that can be seen in context to function as warnings to the addressee. (Phonological considerations motivated the decision to code ***boy***, here pronounced /bwai/, as Jamaican Creole rather than as AAVE.)

(6) Tu cherches la faille, ***<u>boy</u>***
     'You're looking for trouble, ***<u>boy</u>***'

(7) Et toi, *blackman*
     'And you, *blackman*'

Discourse-marking function

Many instances of codeswitched language use in Quebec rap lyrics function unambiguously as discourse markers. The common AAVE discourse marker *nomsayin'* ('you know what I'm saying, you hear me') occurs frequently in the lyrics we analysed – as in Example 8, where it adds emphasis at the outset of an utterance that then continues in French. Example 9 shows this discourse marker in line-final position. Both examples are from the work of rapper Sans Pression.

  (8) *Nomsayin'* – on t'attend, on t'oublie pas
      '*Nomsayin'* – we'll wait for you, we won't forget you'

  (9) Condamné à l'agressivité, la répression, *nomsayin'*
      'Condemned to aggression, repression, *nomsayin''*

In Example 10, we see another common AAVE discourse marker, *yo* (here expanded to *hey yo*), used by Dominican-origin rappers BlackSunz at the beginning of a line that continues in Spanish and ends in Standard North American English. The two members of BlackSunz grew up in Montreal and rap in Spanish, French and English; this song is mainly in English with frequent Spanish switches.

  (10) *Hey yo* mi estilo de la vida <u>I keep it grimy like that</u>
      '*Hey yo* my lifestyle <u>I keep it grimy like that</u>'

Poetic function

The usefulness of polylingual resources for various poetic functions has been noted by several researchers (e.g. Hinnenkamp, 2003; Picone, 2002; Winer, 1986). In this paper, we focus on the poetic function – rhyming – that is not only most striking in the corpus lyrics, but is the most accessible and appreciable even to those listeners who do not understand all the words.

Facilitating internal rhyme

As Keyes (2002: 140) points out in her discussion of the technical production of rap, in this musical genre 'time is technically complex'. The text must follow the beat – 'flow' – in order to qualify as good rap. The use of rhyme in rap lyrics – both line-final and line-internal – is crucial to the success of any rap number. A powerful use of rhyme can be very effective in ensuring that the lyrics adhere to and enhance the beat; internal and final rhyme structures are often sophisticated, paralleling the complex layering of rhythms that underlies the chanted text.

In Quebec Hip-Hop, the possibilities for creating the rhymes that are basic to the structure of rap are multiplied by the availability of so many languages and language varieties. Rappers draw on all possible linguistic sources in their rhyming. The end product is dense in its use of rhyme, making extensive use of codeswitching to achieve this effect. In Example 11, by MC Dramatik of the group Muzion, the rhyming syllable is /o/. It occurs six times in four words,

none of them French, although the utterance matrix is French. In this line, each switch adds to the internal rhyme scheme.

(11) Et <u>blow</u> *yo*, quand le système est `loco` t'entends les sirènes des ***popos***
     'And <u>blow</u> *yo*, when the system's `crazy` you hear the ***cops'*** sirens'

The rhyming syllable in Example 12, from rapper Sans Pression, is /e/, occurring in 'switché', 'obligé', 'dealer' and 'every day'.

(12) Ç'a vite **switché**: dix-sept ans, deux <u>kids</u>, obligé de **dealer** un **shit** <u>every day</u>
     'Fast **switch**: 17 years, 2 <u>kids</u>, had to **deal** some **shit** <u>every day</u>'

In Example 13, by Dramatik, two switches into English permit the use of /in/ as the rhyming syllable.

(13) Un Al Capone <u>clean</u> d'un *cypha* trop <u>mean</u>
     'A <u>clean</u> Al Capone from a real <u>mean</u> *cypher*'

The line in Example 14 is interesting in that it contains no French words at all, although it is embedded in a song for which the base language is indisputably French. The rhyming syllable, /e/, occurs four times, in <u>away</u>, *lave*, *pafume* and <u>way</u>. Phrases in English urging the addressee to leave the singer (female rapper J. Kyll) alone are used to frame the Haitian Creole message of contempt for his personal habits.

(14) <u>Go away</u>, ***neg pa lave, pafume***, <u>no way</u>!
     '<u>Go away</u>, ***black who'd rather wear perfume than wash***, <u>no way</u>!'

Example 15 consists of the first few lines of a song by Muzion, and allows us to see how codeswitching is used to sustain the rhyming syllable /o/ through a longer sequence. This is an example of the 'boasting' genre, in which the rapper, Impossible, extols his proficiency and that of his crew (the other members of Muzion are Dramatik, i.e. 'D', and J. Kyll, i.e. 'J. Ko') while denigrating the rivals who only know how to 'steal his style'. In real time this sequence is ten seconds long. The syllable /o/ occurs 13 times, in *yo*, `uno`, `puto`, <u>flow</u>, **boulot**, sumo, mots, couteau, nouveau, J. Ko, égo, écho and `steelo`. Six of these are in codeswitched words. 'J. Ko' is an abbreviation of J. Kyll that deliberately changes the usual sound pattern of the name to create an additional rhyme. The words in which /o/ occurs are also stressed, i.e. drawn out or compressed rhythmically. This is rhyming of a high order of sophistication.

(15) <u>Hey</u>, *yo*, `uno`. Teste moi pas, `puto`. <u>Flow</u>, c'est mon **boulot**. *Phat* comme un sumo, mes mots tranchent comme un couteau. Nouveau standard, j'emmène avec D et J. Ko. Pas d'égo que des échos: Les *mc's* <u>bite</u> mon `steelo`.
     '<u>Hey</u>, *yo*, `first`. Don't test me, `whore m `. <u>To flow</u>, it's my **job**. *Phat* like a sumo, my words cut like a knife. New standard, I'm bringing it with D and J. Ko. No ego except echoes: the *mc's* <u>steal</u> my `style`.

Rapper Impossible is known on the local Hip-Hop scene for his dexterity in inventing double and triple rhymes. Example 16 is typical: the rhyming line-final three-vowel sequence /o i a/, repeated four times, depends for its effectiveness on two switches into English.

(16) Ton âme c'est ton égo qui l'a
Allez, joue pas les gros <u>killas</u>
Le vrai, vrai, vrai négro qui est là
On veut m'injecter des maladies comme un <u>gorilla</u>
'It's your ego that possesses your soul/Go on, don't play the big <u>killers</u>/The real, real, real negro who's there/ They want to shoot me full of disease like a <u>gorilla</u>.'

As we see from these examples, and as in rap generally, rhythm is paramount. The words are fitted to the metre, chosen for their rhyming potential (with codeswitching freely and skilfully used) as well as for their semantic content. The multilingual pool of words available to Montreal rappers greatly facilitates this process and (to use Hip-Hop terminology) lifts the rhyming to the 'next level' of virtuosity.

Performing multilingual identities

The use of several different languages and varieties in the same body of work by Quebec rappers often has links to the rappers' own ethnolinguistic backgrounds, as in the Haitian Creole verses and switches commonly inserted by the members of Muzion. However, a one-to-one association between 'languages used by rappers' and 'rappers' ethnocultural identification' would be an overly simplistic interpretation of this material. Quebec rap, as an evolving art form, privileges what we see as the performing of *multilingual* identities by rappers. Performers take pride and pleasure in their ability to seamlessly weave into their French base switches into AAVE or standard English, to which all rappers have access (from recordings, concerts, television, community and family sources), and other languages which they may or may not themselves claim to actually speak. In Example 17, rapper Sans Pression (SP) switches in and out of English in a way that reinforces the rhyming structure while also confounding the listener's linguistic expectations. These lines are the opening of the first number on his first CD, *514-50 dans mon réseau* (1999), and in some measure set the standard for the album, as well as providing a model for other rappers. SP spent his early years in upstate New York before moving to Quebec with his family; he is a fluent speaker of AAVE as well as of Standard and Nonstandard Quebec French.

(17) Trop de <u>*beef*</u> dans le <u>game</u> (Qui ça?) <u>I still maintain </u>ma mentalité <u>remains the same</u>! Au jour le jour, espérant de voir demain, le mal, on le fait bien pis on fait de notre mieux pour pas **fuck le chien**.

'Too much <u>*bitching*</u> in the <u>game</u>. (Who's that?) <u>I still maintain</u> my mentality <u>remains the same</u>! From day to day, hoping to see tomorrow, evil, we do it well and we do our best not to **waste our time**.'

In Example 18, from SP's 2003 second CD *Réplique aux offusqués*, words from Haitian Creole and Jamaican Creole are inserted. In an interview, SP explained that he had 'picked up' quite a bit of Haitian Creole through often being mistaken for a member of that community by other black Montrealers, by being a guest in Haitian Creole-speaking homes, and so forth, but that he did not consider that he really spoke the language. The song, nonetheless, has a Haitian Creole title, ***Ti Moun*** ('Little Kid'). The word *skett* for 'slut' (an abbreviation of ***sketelle***, from the Jamaican Creole *skettel*) is now used by Montreal-based Haitian Creole speakers as well.[7]

(18) Les ***ti mouns*** veulent <u>represent</u> / Les garçons autant que les filles car <u>guess</u> qui est enceinte / <u>That's right</u> ta petite princesse / Celle qui s'habillait comme une ***skett*** mais vous vous en foutiez de ça.
'The ***kids*** wanna *<u>represent</u>* / The boys as well as the girls 'cause <u>guess</u> who's pregnant / <u>That's right</u>, your little princess / The one who dressed like a ***<u>slut</u>*** but you didn't give a shit.'

In Example 19, the two rappers of Dominican Republic origin who make up BlackSunz switch from Standard French into Spanish at the half-line point; these switches underlie the rhyming. BlackSunz also use words from Nonstandard French and from AAVE. Although they identify strongly with their Dominican heritage, the rappers informed us that they feel equally comfortable in standard and nonstandard varieties of both French and English, and switch among all of them constantly in their family and social contexts. (The question of to what extent rappers' lyrical speech reflects their 'naturally occurring speech' will be investigated in future interviews.)

(19) Au Québec on marche les rues `es un estado militante` / Parce que les *Five-Oh* y **checkent** mettent une `presión en un instante`.
'In Quebec we walk the streets, `it's a military state` / Because the *cops* are **checkin**g, they'll put on `pressure in a sec`.'

Discussion

Because a key element of Hip-Hop is personal ownership of lyrics – you 'rap your own shit' – the choice of language for lyrics is an individual's, but there is no doubt that getting the rap's message across to the audience is crucial. The language choices made by rappers in Montreal Hip-Hop involve both codeswitching and the choice of languages themselves. Of particular interest is the frequent use of languages/varieties that the rapper doesn't claim to speak fluently. In his analysis of youth groups in urban Britain, Rampton (2004: n.p.) points out that 'in multi-ethnic adolescent peer groups, knowledge of other people's ethnic languages could be an important symbol of local neighbourhood community belonging'. In contemporary Quebec Hip-Hop we

see this phenomenon extending well beyond the local neighbourhood and the adolescent peer group. Picone (2002: 206) has noted a similar phenomenon at work in popular American song, and makes links to speech act theory: 'artistic codemixing, like conversational codemixing, is "performative" in nature rather than "constative"... ethnic identity is constructed by virtue of uttering mixed codes... If there is no mixed utterance, there is no mixed identity'. In a long-standing Hip-Hop tradition, in much the same way as Pennycook (2003), we signify on this notion of performativity. Our data show that Montreal rappers privilege multilingual codeswitching as a way to perform their multilingual identities.

The Quebec/Montreal Hip-Hop context reflects the process theorised by Bentahila and Davies (2002), who consider that the use of French switches in Arabic rai lyrics, and indeed the use of Arabic inserts in otherwise French texts (as rai moves across national boundaries to become a French as well as an Algerian form of cultural expression), performs the two important functions of 'globalisation' and 'localisation' at the same time. The local language is combined with a global sound; that is, the performers demonstrate their links with a global culture outside the local context, while simultaneously serving to ground the increasingly internationally recognised rai phenomenon in local, Arabic-speaking Algerian culture, even as rai moves away from its geographical place of origin. Bentahila and Davies (2002: 206) point out that 'The expansion of international communication and global media seems to be making it easier for a group to assert their own, local identity and at the same time offer a universal message to the rest of the planet.'

The ways in which Hip-Hop rappers perform these emerging new, hybrid identities thus goes beyond even the 'crossing' phenomenon described by Rampton. Speaking of members of minority groups in England, Leung *et al.* (1997: 547) (following Gilroy and Hall) suggest that they are 'not simple inheritors of fixed identities, ethnicities, cultures, and languages but are instead engaged in a continual collective and individual process of making, remaking, and negotiating these elements, thereby constantly constructing dynamic new ethnicities'. In our work on Quebec Hip-Hop, language use and identity formation, we show this to be the case for majority and minority group members alike. The development of such identities from this perspective is the focal point of Sarkar and Allen (in press), as well as a continuing informant of this study. Future work will also involve the poststructuralist emphasis on unequal power relations mapped out for multilingual settings by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), as well as an analysis of content in 'rapping for resistance'.

Although the language patterns found in Quebec Hip-Hop are to some extent the result of migration, as Hinnenkamp (2003: 12) points out for migrant adolescents in Germany, the 'use of hybrid language is no longer the object of the migratory discourse as defined by majority society but constitutes an autonomous and exclusive form of (counter-)discourse in its own right'.[8] Hinnenkamp (2003: 36) rejects the '*bricolage*' argument to claim that 'the mixed language functions like a mirror of the historical, social, cultural and linguistic conditions under which these adolescents grow up'.

It is perhaps ironic that while the establishment of the 'predominance' of French has been, at least in popular perception, at the top of the political agenda for decades, the French-schooled, French-fluent youth of Quebec are finding ways of expressing criticism of the social status quo and subverting language prescriptivism through their own use of language strategies such as multilingual codeswitching. These strategies are exploited by individuals in different ways, but are fundamentally linked by a positioning of multilingualism as a natural and desirable condition, whether or not everything is then comprehensible to everyone.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Although most research has concentrated on the Black American locus of development of rap and Hip-Hop, perhaps the most important influence on this genre was the work of Caribbean, mostly Jamaican, dub poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson and rappers such as M-Kool, Nas, Rakim, Jay Z and Heru Ptah. The most direct link was the involvement of Jamaican immigrants to New York; their influence is noticeable in artists such as The Fugees. The history and nature of this social, linguistic and musico-poetic link is yet to be fully explored.
2. The country of Senegal probably has more rap and Hip-Hop artists per capita than any other worldwide. An especially fertile field of study would be rappers in South Africa, who frequently use multilingual codeswitching (Daniel Feist, personal communication, July 2003).
3. 'Published' here refers to lyrics of recorded songs that were written down, usually by the artists themselves, and included either in the CD liner notes, or posted on Hip-Hop websites. All these written versions were checked against the recorded versions for accuracy and 'corrected', although an analysis of orthographic strategies uncovered by this process is also worth attention.
4. Our ongoing analyses of interview data and promotional material are exploited more fully in Sarkar and Allen (in press), which is in a sense a companion piece to the present report.
5. For example, the notorious English f-word has been assimilated into Quebec French as *foque*, *foquer*, without the serious implications of its use in English. Phonological similarities have been used by Quebec youth for a long time as a means of challenging or responding to school authorities. During the 1960s, it was common in at least one Montreal English school for some students to insist that what teachers heard as swearing was really just practising the French word for 'seal' (*phoque*) (Winer, personal reminiscence).
6. As Gardner-Chloros (1995: 69) points out, 'Any mixture sooner or later is associated with a new identity. The emergence of new linguistic forms, as of

new cultural practices, is usually a matter of time... From the point of view of any individual born into that community, what others call a mixture is the given, the starting-point.'

7. Because both Jamaican Creole and French tend towards syllable-timing rather than stress-timing, the Jamaican *skettel* is easily interpreted phonologically into French as *sketelle*. It would be interesting to see the use of this word in English-based lyrics, where it might be pronounced with stress on the first syllable, or abbreviated as 'skett'.

8. Hinnenkamp posits two crucial points about the 'mixed speech' of Turkish–German adolescents: that it is given an autonomous name by its speakers, and that it is always characterised as a verbal activity, rather than by an identifying noun.

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