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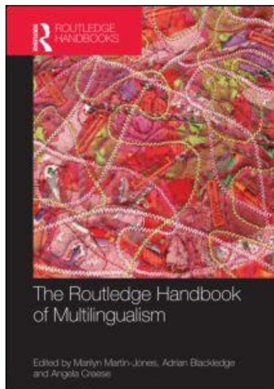

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Multilingualism and popular culture

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Multilingualism and popular culture

Mela Sarkar and Bronwen Low

Multilingualism and popular culture: what's the link?

A research area in search of itself

From our current standpoint, it may appear normal and inevitable that peoples and cultures have been mixing and mingling as they have for well over half a century. To many people in the English-speaking world, being multilingual no longer seems rare and exotic; to many people elsewhere, it never did. University-age readers of a comprehensive handbook on multilingualism published around 2011 will not remember an era when most people stayed in the place where they were born, and when languages seemed tied down to specific nations and locations. Indeed, their *parents* are almost certainly too young to themselves remember the pre-Second World War (1939–45) years when the boundaries of Europe seemed indissoluble, and the colonized non-white peoples of Africa and Asia had not yet moved to take their political futures back into their own hands (see Canagarajah and Liyanage this volume; Ramanathan this volume; May 2001). Around this time – during the decades just before and after the Second World War years – British and European thinkers began to explore the idea that 'mass' or 'popular' culture, as distinct from either the 'High Culture' of the educated elite or the 'Folk Culture' collected by nineteenth-century scholars such as the Brothers Grimm, might actually be theoretically interesting, rather than deplorable (Strinati 2000). The idea that popular culture is a phenomenon deserving of study in its own right is therefore no longer new, as we shall see in more detail below.

In the past ten years or so, the field of multilingualism as a separate area within language studies generally has also started to come into its own. This is in contrast to the field of *bilingualism*, under which multilingualism has, until recently, been subsumed (typically, through the offhand use of the phrase 'bi- and/or multilingualism'). The publication of a handbook dedicated specifically to a broad spectrum of issues around multilingualism is itself evidence that the field has achieved a certain level of maturity and recognition.

It seems natural, therefore, to ask 'What about the study of multilingualism and popular culture together? What do we know about how multilingual popular culture is – or since when, where, why, and to what effect is it multilingual? How might looking at popular culture open

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up new ways to understand multilingually mixed populations?' Surprisingly, though, there is very little real research on this seemingly obvious topic. From the 1930s onwards, the study of popular culture and its importance in modern life has developed within a complex set of intersecting theoretical frameworks. Depending on the scholarly 'lens', for instance, it gets examined as semiotic 'text', as lived experience, and, alternately, as a site of 'mass culture' oppression or of resistance by 'the people'. As is the pattern in academia, its study has produced specialized conferences, journals, books, university syllabi and programmes. Popular culture has even been admitted to the classroom, considered a legitimate route to pedagogical innovation by progressive educators (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994; Giroux and Simon 1989). Until very recently, however, none of this work has taken much notice of the prevalence of different languages in popular culture, and of even *bi*lingual – let alone multilingual – language mixing. Work such as that of Ofelia García on multiple discursive or 'translanguaging' practices in multilingual classrooms (García 2009; this volume) offers one potentially very fruitful way forward. Educators who are progressive enough to bring popular culture into the classroom will, it is to be hoped, soon take the additional step of considering specifically multilingual forms of popular culture as interesting in their own right, in the same way that García proposes for other multilingual practices in classrooms.

Change is therefore fast arriving, having already won recognition for one form of popular culture – hip-hop – a phenomenon so important to late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century youth that it is fair to call it a cultural movement in its own right (Kitwana 2002; KRS-One 2000; Rose 1994). Perhaps because hip-hop's rise as an international youth movement is so recent and coincides with a scholarly awareness of the significance of the movement and mixing of people and languages across borders, there has been a groundswell of academic interest in language mixing by hip-hop-identified youth. Since roughly the year 2000, a number of published studies of mixed language in hip-hop lyrics have appeared (Androutsopoulos 2007, 2009; Higgins 2009; Lin 2009).

This body of work was jump-started, as it were, by an edited volume on international forms of hip-hop by Australian/New Zealand ethnomusicologist and popular studies scholar Tony Mitchell (Mitchell 2001), which did not focus specifically on language. Mitchell's *Global Noise* appeared a few years after a groundbreaking American study of hip-hop, Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994), and 'sampled' or signified on the title of the earlier work in classic hip-hop style. In the field of language studies, special sessions at international conferences, themed journal issues and edited volumes devoted solely to mixed-language in hip-hop (Alim *et al.* 2009; Terkourati, 2010) have begun to appear. The work of Alastair Pennycook (Pennycook 2003, 2004, 2007) has been particularly important in this context, as his pioneering research on the ways in which the global spread of English has interacted with the global spread of hip-hop has provided theoretical underpinnings for scholars in other linguistic contexts.

The authors of this chapter situate themselves within the current of this new stream of study (Low *et al.* 2009; Sarkar 2009; Sarkar *et al.* 2007). We devote the central section of this chapter to a discussion of recent work on multilingualism in hip-hop culture as the area of study that most extensively combines scholarship on multilingualism with popular culture. We focus on mixed-language use in rap lyrics, using our work on Montreal hip-hop as our main example. To set the stage, however, we first map out some concepts and debates in popular culture studies, a specialized field readers of this *Handbook* may be less familiar with than applied and educational linguistics. This includes making some brief connections to the related field of cultural studies. We also speculate on reasons why research on multilingualism within the field of popular culture has, with the exception of hip-hop research, been so conspicuous by its absence. After an extended look at multilingual hip-hop research, we conclude

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the chapter by discussing what we consider to be some key issues in this emerging field, and outlining directions for future research.

A working definition of popular culture

Any principled definition of 'popular culture' must of necessity have packaged up in it an implicit or explicit definition of 'culture' itself. But 'culture', one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (Williams 1976), is notoriously difficult to define. The *Oxford Online Dictionary* lists seven meanings of culture, of which the one closest to what we want here, 'the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period', is the seventh (the first has to do with the original Latin meaning of 'cultivating, tilling the soil'). Nearly 60 years ago, two influential American anthropologists, in a then-state-of-the-art review of concepts and definitions related to 'culture', came up with 164 definitions of the word (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). Since then, in sheer number, academic viewpoints on 'culture' have continued to proliferate, and to become, if anything, far more nuanced than post-war theorists could have imagined.

In this chapter, we work with an anthropological definition of culture as a whole way of life. This includes everything about the way a particular group of people live, except things pre-determined by biology (genetically encoded, so impossible to change). But with humans, so few things are genetically encoded in any kind of unchangeable way that for all practical purposes culture encompasses most things. (For instance, the ways we eat, reproduce the species – and speak – are all considered part of our genetic endowment, yet vary so much across human groups that they can be studied as part of 'culture'.) Why such a broad definition of culture in this introduction to popular culture from the standpoint of studies on multilingualism (and vice versa)? Because it helps to explain the ways that multilingual language use can enter into every aspect of the way people live.

When 'popular culture' began to be defined as an area of study within literary, sociological or anthropological studies more generally, it had first – as we saw briefly above – to be set off from 'High Culture' in the sense famously defined by British cultural critic Matthew Arnold (1822–88) as 'the best that has been thought and said' (Arnold 1869). By this Arnold most emphatically did *not* mean, for example, popular songs or literature of his own, Victorian era, nor British broadsheet advertising of the previous (eighteenth) century in working-class London. But scholars of popular culture study all those and many other such historical phenomena (Hoggart 1957), providing a wealth of information on how people have made and continue to make meaning. Arnold had in mind, for example, the plays of Shakespeare; the poetry of Milton (but not necessarily the novels of Dickens, extremely *popular* at that time); the music of Mozart or Beethoven (but not of Gilbert and Sullivan). From a twenty-first-century perspective the differences often seem negligible. For instance, is the 1996 Hollywood movie version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by film-maker Baz Luhrmann 'High Culture', popular culture or both?

In the other, 'low' direction, popular culture was formerly often distinguished from *folk* culture. The 'household tales' of a peasant society, such as those collected by the Brothers Grimm, the songs and sayings of such societies – agrarian, conservative, slow to change – from this perspective are of a piece with folk art forms such as quilting, basket weaving or country dancing. Many of these forms of culture, including, unfortunately, many formerly flourishing manifestations of traditional Indigenous cultures, are now known to be endangered. 'Folk culture' can in fact gain new life by teaming up with popular culture, and is constantly doing so, as in, for example, dance hall and bhangra cultures and music, both connected with 'folk' traditions in Jamaica and the Punjab where they originated.

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Popular culture studies vs 'cultural studies'

One of the most influential academic movements to take popular culture seriously as an object of study is Cultural Studies, established as a field and method of inquiry with the founding of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies in 1964 in Britain. Its founding figures include teachers working in adult education such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart who recognized that the official curriculum, with its static and elitist notions of culture, was largely disconnected from the lives of their mostly working-class students. They began exploring culture as lived experience, linking everyday life to questions of power, ideology and social difference, particularly class, drawing on and reconstructing Marxist theories of historical materialism.

The methods and purposes for studying popular culture are varied and contested. Those working in the traditions of Cultural Studies (which in turn can be broken down into subcategories such as British, American and 'Black') contrast their project with the less critical, less theoretically informed and largely celebratory work of some pop culture scholars, often associated with the Popular Culture Association (see, for instance, the critiques of Kellner 1995 and Fiske 1990). Cultural Studies scholars also distinguish their work from that of Frankfurt School scholars who drew rigid distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture, and could see no possible value in the standardized and homogenous 'mass culture' produced by the 'culture industries'. Also debated is the use of the term 'popular', often used to describe the art and culture created by working-class and other marginalized peoples, or culture 'of, by, and for the people' (Kellner 1995: 33), but which now also gets used to reference mass-media culture. In response, Kellner (1995) rejects the 'popular' in favour of the term 'media culture', which signals the primacy of the media (including communications technologies and industries) in the production, distribution and dissemination of culture, and which does not collapse more grass-roots cultural forms with those primarily produced by the mass media. These distinctions between the critical and the celebratory (Dolby 2003) and the mass and the popular are by no means fixed, but may serve as useful heuristics for thinking about popular culture and multilingualism.

It is fair to say that the internationally based work on multilingual language use in hip-hop communities referred to above tends to align itself with critical (rather than purely celebratory) approaches to the analysis of language in society. As scholars, they (and we) tend to identify as critical theorists of language and/or ethnicity and/or education (across a spread of disciplines). That is to say, we assume an underlying concern with exposing and redressing imbalances of power at any and all levels of people's lives as they interact with, are influenced by, and/or help to create, debate and indeed often celebrate, popular/media culture.

Why bring in multilingualism? Why was it not brought in before?

Because popular culture crosses political and cultural borders with such ease, it lends itself to multilingual language mixing particularly well. The most obvious example is the globalizing force of American culture, which in the minds of many readers may be more or less equated with popular culture. Where Hollywood, pop music and hamburgers have gone, American (including African American) English has followed. What this has meant in many places is a *bi*lingual layer of popular culture, if only at the level of lexical borrowing. The international prestige of knowing English, which in symbolic-capital terms (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) is 'like the [American] dollar' (Niño-Murcia 2003), has meant that English words and slang expressions may be liberally scattered over any number of discourse domains that would once

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have been monolingual in another language (see, for example, a Japanese version of this phenomenon at www.engrish.com).

This bilingual burgeoning has received a certain amount of scholarly attention for its own sake. What has hitherto not received special attention is the underlying complexity in places that are already bilingual or multilingual. The taxi driver in Lima, Peru, who asserted to the researcher that English was 'like the dollar' was in a place where by far the most common form of bilingualism is Quechua/Spanish, not Spanish/English. In Mexico, many rural speakers of another widespread Indigenous language, Nahuatl, are trying to graft English onto their Nahuatl/Spanish bilingualism as fast as they can. There are numerous other examples of places where Indigenous peoples and their languages are confronted with not one but two or more colonial languages (see Patrick this volume, for an Inuktitut/English/French example from Canada). And in very densely populated parts of the world, such as the South Asian subcontinent, the Southeast Asian/Oceania archipelagoes, or many countries in Africa, local bilingualism or multilingualism long predated the arrival of white European (or other) colonizers. In Mumbai, Kuala Lumpur or Nairobi, popular culture has long expressed itself through a mixture of local languages and English (or other colonizing languages) without attracting any particular notice; multilingualism in such places is a way of life.

We will take the position here that everywhere outside a restricted but influential cultural zone – roughly, the 'Anglo-American' part of the world that has had such a disproportionate share of the global economic, political and cultural markets up to now – popular culture is likely to have a strong multilingual flavour. If this has not hitherto been noticed or studied, it is because multilingualism as a field of study separate from bilingualism has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention. In fact, the notion of multilingualism as something unusual is badly in need of deconstruction (see Makoni and Pennycook this volume). It should probably be taken as the norm, with *mono*lingualism as an unfortunate and handicapping aberration for a (disproportionately influential) few. From that perspective, giving multilingualism and popular culture a chapter all its own is just a post hoc recognition of (and belated scholarly decision to start investigating) something that has been there all along.

Theorizing around multilingualism and popular culture: multilingual hip-hop studies

An international hip-hop Cypha of theory and hiphopography

If we have chosen to focus on studies of multilingual hip-hop as our only extended example of a currently active area of research on multilingualism and popular culture, it is because to the best of our knowledge, at the moment there *is* no other active area we can use as an example. Scholars of culture in places where popular culture is very actively studied (the USA is the best example) tend to be less aware of multilingualism, and are often monolingual. Although there are exceptions (Manuelito 2006; Soto 2006), the focus in such work, theoretically complex as it may be, is not on language diversity. It would typically be, rather, on issues of identity and belonging in a complex cultural matrix where language, if it is mentioned at all, is seen as an adjunct to culture.

On the flip side, scholars of language in places where multilingualism is the norm and scholarship on multilingual issues is active (India is the best example) tend to be less aware of popular culture as a possible object of investigation (Pattanayak 1990); their research energy has often, and understandably, been directed more at issues of access to education and language planning for a linguistically diverse, largely disenfranchised population. Popular films

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and songs in such places are being scrutinized intensively, and cultural studies territory is being seriously and critically mapped out (Mukhopadhyay 2006) but not from the standpoint of multilingual language use.

One of the reasons that hip-hop has lent itself so well to investigation by language scholars is that rap lyrics *demand* wordiness. Although in pop music, rhythm and lyrics often play second fiddle to melody, in rap, melody all but disappears and the lyrics and the beats take centre stage. Rap's lyrics are foregrounded over an underlying musical soundscape. The average rap's lyrics consists of several rapid-fire, language-packed verses, often by a number of different rap artists (MCs), separated by repetitions of a refrain. Rap is text-heavy and requires great verbal skill and unceasing inventiveness on the part of its creators. There is a built-in requirement for rap lyrics (like other forms of poetry – rap unquestionably qualifies as poetry) to contain a lot of near-cognate rhymes in highly constrained metric patterns (Costello and Foster Wallace 1990). This poetic device acts as a productive constraint on rap's language, forcing 'the extra linguistic creativity', including 'stretches' and 'improbable vocab', that 'makes a good rap a great rap' (ibid.). As we have affirmed above, there are many contexts in the world where the use of several languages in ordinary speech is common and unremarkable – for example, the Montreal youth communities where our sociolinguistic work is situated, or similarly multi-ethnic youth communities in other Western urban contexts such as London (Rampton this volume), not to mention examples from Africa (Higgins 2009; Omoniyi 2009) or Asia (Lin this volume; Pennycook 2003). It is natural and inevitable that rap artists in those contexts will draw on all the linguistic resources available to them in order to increase the pool of potential rhymes. And they do. Multilingual mixing in rap lyrics thus becomes a stylistic device, quite apart from the many uses it may have for creating new kinds of meaning with critical, analytical and sociopolitical purposes. Our team has remarked on this 'poetic' function of multilingual codeswitching in Montreal hip-hop (Sarkar and Winer 2006); Omoniyi (2009) and Lin (2009) discuss similar poetic uses in rap lyrics in Nigeria and Hong Kong, respectively.

Current scholarship in this field includes examinations of hip-hop multilingualism from the perspective of performativity theory in language, within which one produces, rather than reflects, identity through language work (Pennycook 2004). In contexts such as francophone Ontario schools, for example, African immigrant students, who speak French but have other first languages, quickly gravitate to BESL, or 'Black English as a second language' (Ibrahim 2003) as a tool of belonging. Our own work speaks to the phenomenon of multilingual codeswitching in Montreal hip-hop lyrics as a way of performing multilingual identity (see below, next section). In Alim *et al.* (2009), rap lyrics in a wide range of hip-hop communities across the globe are examined, including those found in Europe (Androutsopoulos 2009), Tanzania (Higgins 2009), Hong Kong (Lin 2009), Nigeria (Omoniyi 2009) and Australia (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009), drawing upon and developing theories of discourse, styling, crossing, codeswitching and post-colonial performance (see Lin, Omoniyi, Makoni and Pennycook this volume, for other examples of some current work). For the most part, this scholarship documents multilingual hip-hop practices in places where multilingualism is the norm (see also Auzanneau 2001; Auzanneau *et al*. 2003); this work may or may not be explicitly linked to popular culture studies, as the focus is often more purely sociolinguistic or sociological. What it is safe to say is that this is territory that has barely begun to be explored. The study of multilingual hip-hop practices alone, in itself a tiny fraction of what popular culture studies could potentially offer to scholars of multilingualism, is a subfield of applied linguistics that has already caused such dynamic cross-fertilization and innovative theorizing that no one can say which disciplines within language and/or culture

studies (and the once inviolable disciplinary boundaries between them) may not eventually be affected.

We turn now to a discussion of multilingual mixing in Montreal hip-hop lyrics, using examples from ongoing work by our research team at McGill University.

Applying theory to a specific example: Montreal hip-hop

We began looking at Montreal hip-hop in 2002, gradually expanding the focus of analysis from the sociolinguistic to the sociological and cultural. To analyses of a corpus of about 30 songs released between 1999 and 2004, we added subsequent interviews with MCs and youth informants. All this material has borne out our initial hypothesis about the importance of multilingualism to much of the Montreal rap scene.

Why is it so important? It happened that the generation of young Québécois that has grown up with French as their common public language came to maturity in the 1990s at the same time as the Quebec hip-hop scene. A constant flow of family back and forth between the large Anglo-Caribbean (Jamaican, Trinidadian) and Franco-Caribbean (Haitian) expatriate communities of New York City and their Montreal contacts and counterparts meant that New York-based hip-hop cultural products became known in Montreal from the 1970s onwards (N. Indongo, personal communication, May 2008). However, the location of Quebec at a cultural crossroads between America and Europe also ensured the popularity of European French rappers such as MC Solaar and the Marseilles group IAM. The French that is the base language of Quebec rap, and of talk about rap and hip-hop, is a distinct and rapidly evolving French. Because of hip-hop's strong ties to African American culture, forms of AAVE (African American Vernacular English) shape Quebec hip-hop vernaculars. Standard and non-standard Quebec and European varieties of French, standard North American English, AAVE and hip-hop slang, Haitian French Creole, Jamaican English Creole, Spanish and Arabic are mixed creatively in the lyrics and speech of hip-hop performers and many audience members (Sarkar *et al*. 2005). This is a new way of using language that subtly undermines the original intentions of the Quebec language planners responsible for the legislation that created this multi-ethnic French-speaking youth population (through obligatory schooling in French) in the first place. Although by no means all Quebec rap lyrics are linguistically mixed, in lyrics and in the street it is taken for granted that mixing is acceptable on a wide scale. Multilingualism is positioned 'as a natural and desirable condition, whether or not everything is then comprehensible to everyone' (Sarkar and Winer 2006: 189).

When Montreal MCs first came out with raps in which several languages were freely mixed over a Quebec French base, the language of the lyrics reflected the language of the multi-ethnic Montreal neighbourhoods in which the lyrics were grounded:

> J'**check** Rob: '*What up dog*?'
> —'*What up yo*! **Shit**, les rues sont *fucked up*!'
> *Enough talk*. **Check** le reste du *squad*.
> On *set* un *get* ce soir. *Peace. Hang up the phone.*
> J'*step* dehors. Dès que j'sors, des nègs *blast* des *teck*, percent mon corps.
> J'saigne, *fuck up*, à l'hôpital, presque mort.
> *Help me y'all*!
>
> (Impossible of Muzion, *666 thème, Mentalité moune morne*, 1999)

This lyric, representing a stylized telephone conversation between Imposs and his interlocutor Rob, is a typical example of the language this generation of young Montrealers has evolved.

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When we started analysing lyrics, certain coding decisions imposed themselves on the data. In order to indicate the origin of lexical items, we wound up using a coding scheme with nine categories under four superordinate-level headings, as follows:

FRENCH
Standard Quebec French (unmarked)
Non-standard Quebec French (bolded)
European French (bolded and underlined)

ENGLISH
Standard North American English (underlined)
African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (italicized)
Hip-Hop Keywords (italicized and underlined)

CARIBBEAN CREOLES
Haitian Creole (bolded and italicized)
Jamaican Creole (bolded, italicized and underlined)

OTHER LANGUAGES
Spanish (outlined)

Of these nine categories, five are relevant for the 'J'check Rob' lyric, which lasts 16 seconds. Quebec youth who participate in the hip-hop community would have no difficulty in understanding it; it is typical of the way many of them talk themselves.

Imposs introduces the simulated phone conversation with the non-standard Quebec French verb **checker**, from English 'to check', used by Quebec Francophones to mean 'to observe'. Here it means 'I call up Rob'. Imposs continues with the standard AAVE greeting '*What up dog?'* Rob's voice on the line answers with the equally conventional '*What up yo!'* then continues with **Shit** [non-standard Quebec French], les rues sont *fucked up*! [standard English]. The entire exchange is taking place in a Quebec French context; our decision to code 'shit' as French and 'fucked up' as English was subjective, based on our understanding that older monolingual French speakers normally have the first, but not the second, integrated into their French.

In the next two lines Imposs first answers Rob, then speaks as narrator: '*Enough talk* [English]. **Check** le reste du [the rest of the] *squad* [hip-hop word, coded as such because Imposs is speaking in the context of his crew meeting later on]. On [we] *set* [AAVE, 'set up'] un *get* [AAVE, 'get-together'] ce soir [this evening]. *Peace* [coded here as a hip-hop keyword because it is Imposs's conventional farewell to Rob]. *Hang up the phone* [straight English].

Imposs then '*step* dehors [outside]. Dès que je sors [as soon as I go out], des nègs ['niggas'; the French version has the same negative force as the English in normal language (Low 2007) and has been reclaimed in a similar way for French by young Black members of the hip-hop community] *blast* des *teck* ['Tech-1' semi-automatic weapons]. Gunshots 'percent mon corps [put holes in my body]. J'saigne [I bleed], *fuck up*, à l'hôpital, presque mort [at the hospital, almost dead]'. An ambulance siren sounds. The verse ends '*Help me y'all*!' The rapid-fire codeswitching we observe here can be further analysed in terms of the functions it serves in the composition of raps, which are highly scripted forms of language that differ in important ways from normal conversational speech.

It is likely that language like this can only be understood by young Quebec French speakers who are also very familiar with English, both standard North American and AAVE, particularly

as it is used by Black American rap artists. Furthermore, speakers of this generation, whatever their ethnic background, have also integrated a number of words from both Haitian (French-based) and Jamaican (English-based) Creole into their everyday language and their raps. Some examples of these are ***popo*** ['police'], ***patnai*** ['good friend' (from English 'partner')], ***kob*** ['cash'], ***ti-moun*** ['little kid, kid' (from French 'petit monde'), ***kget*** (a swearword), all Haitian Creole; ***ganja*** ['marijuana', one of a long series of words with this meaning], ***spliff*** ['marijuana cigarette', also represented by a long series of words], ***skettel*** ['girl, loose woman'], ***rude bwoy*** ['aggressive youth'], all Jamaican Creole.

Recent sociological and sociolinguistic work on Montreal's new *francophonie* makes clear that the dynamic codeshifting we have been chronicling is part of a larger generational shift in attitudes towards multilingualism (Meintel 1992). Lamarre *et al.* (2002) describe the 'appreciable linguistic adaptability of many young Montrealers and their extremely varied language practices', which include, for instance, 'trilingual codeswitching, not so much for negotiating language use, but rather to express plural identities and ties to many social networks', as well as 'changing attitudes toward the maintenance of a minority language among young Allophones related to transnationalism and globalization'. The language of Montreal hip-hop's rap lyrics thus reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity found in schools and the young adult community as well as local rappers' sense that they are part of a self-defined, border-crossing 'Hip-Hop Nation' (Alim 2002; Mitchell 2001; Krims 2000).

Our interviews with six rappers active in the Montreal hip-hop community in 2004 (through commercially available CDs and live shows) made it clear that their multilingual codeswitching reflects some of the ways in which language is lived in contemporary Montreal. As rap group Muzion member J-Kyll puts it, 'en général, on chante, on rap comme on parle' ('in general, we sing, we rap like we speak'). SolValdez and 2Sai, of Dominican descent, born and brought up in Montreal, identify strongly with Dominican culture, especially its musical traditions, and with Spanish, but also with multilingual, multicultural Montreal. Of their codeswitching SolValdez commented, 'we might wind up saying a whole sentence in three languages … And the sad part of it is that we don't even notice that we switched the languages, we just yo, and blah, blah, blah in Spanish and then switch to French'. Rapper Sans Pression, whose family has roots in the Congo but who has lived his whole life in North America, first in New York state and then in Montreal, describes the way his raps switch between French and English as 'that's how we talk' and 'putting both musics, both languages, is like, it just comes naturally'. As with Sol's not noticing the switching, Sans Pression says of lyrical codeshifting, 'I don't even think about it when I write it. It's crazy'. The idea that this language blending comes naturally and is somehow instinctive, not requiring reflection, suggests that it might indeed be a community norm as in the work of Lamarre *et al*. (2002). That said, Muzion member Dramatik describes the hybrid language of Montreal rap as a more conscious political choice from 'des artistes qui se décident à mettre la langue du peuple dans les textes' ('artists who decide to put the people's language into their texts'). Through their multilingual lyrics, the rappers work to create what they describe as the distinct Montreal style that deliberately draws on and so reflects available local cultural and linguistic resources. The rappers identify the codeswitching that happens in multilingual Montreal as, in Sans Pression's words, 'what's good about here'. What's good about here can be a source of surprise to others, as 2Sai remarks about the Puerto Rican artists who come to Montreal and see 'Latinos speaking French, English and Spanish'.

Codeswitching in the Montreal hip-hop scene enacts a model of multicultural community that is both local and international. Always shaped to a certain extent by one's audience, it may sometimes be intended for an in-group only, in which case learning to understand the

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codeswitching is an essential part of becoming a fully fledged member of that speech community. Examples of this phenomenon can of course be found elsewhere, in hip-hop communities in Africa (Higgins 2009) and Asia (Lin 2009; this volume; Pennycook 2003, 2007) as well as in other kinds of youth communities worldwide – for example, the online communities described for young Finns in the work of Leppänen (2007; this volume) and her colleagues (Leppänen *et al.* 2009), in which multilingualism is so clearly part of the overall message, and hip-hop only one of the forms of popular culture explored. The rappers we spoke to describe the multilingual hybridity of their rap as an *asset,* as an opening up to the world. As Sol says of the codeshifting, 'Some people might see it as a limitation, you know, that's one side of it. But if you look at it on the other side, it's more of an expansion'. The practitioners of Montreal hip-hop examined here celebrate multilingualism, in part because 'it's the way we talk' in a culturally diverse community and in part because it honours the diversity of this community.

Indeed, the public and performative use of wider linguistic codes – 'translanguaging', in García's (2009) sense – is implicitly rebellious, as multilingualism, like multiculturalism, is expressly *not* an official government policy. At the same time, most Montreal rappers draw on French as a powerful resource that connects them to hip-hop and other expressive traditions of the *Francophonie,* including France and countries like Senegal, Haiti and Algeria.

Preliminary analyses of the current phase of our research, which compares multilingual rap in Montreal and Toronto, suggest that although there is codeswitching in the work of some rappers in English Canada – e.g. the presence of bits of various Caribbean Creoles, particularly Jamaican Patwa, and hip-hop English along with Standard Canadian English in the work of Toronto rappers like Kardinall Offishall (Low 2001) – it does not compare to the much greater integration of such multilingualism in a good deal of the independent Montreal rap scene. To date it seems that the multilingual mixing in Montreal rap lyrics is the most extravagant in North America.

Popular culture in the [applied linguistics] academy

Asked to sum up the main issues related to the study of multilingualism and popular culture at this point, our answer is twofold. The first issue is: why isn't there more research on this? With the groundswell of academic interest in popular culture over the past few decades, combined with intense new research interest in multilingualism as opposed to bilingualism, how did this seemingly obvious area of overlap get overlooked? Our quick look at the recent, tightly delimited, but theoretically and empirically rich body of work on multilingual hip-hop culture makes it clear that complex and interesting scholarship is certainly possible in this field.

The second issue is to do with the challenge of making multilingually oriented research on popular culture (or popular culture-oriented research on multilingualism) into an 'unmarked' domain of study. Because of the monolingual mindset that has tended to characterize Anglo-American research on language issues, *bi*lingualism, not to mention multilingualism, may seem exotic to 'Western' researchers. We maintain, however, that there is nothing exotic or unusual about being multilingual, either for an individual or a community. There is, therefore, nothing exotic about creating culture, including popular culture, multilingually. At this point, the hybrid, multilingually mixed nature of much popular culture just *is*, even if it has not been much remarked on for its multilingual features. It is a fact neither to celebrate nor to deplore, but something to observe and examine with interest like anything else. This 'ordinariness' has been brought out by Pennycook in his discussion of 'socioblinguistics':[1]

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> To work socioblinguistically, then, I intend to take seriously the politics of language and the ordinariness of diversity. … Difference and diversity, multilingualism and hybridity are not rare and exotic conditions to be sought out and celebrated but the quotidian ordinariness of everyday life.
>
> *(2007: 95)*

There is a good case for arguing, furthermore, that the ordinariness we have been underlining for multilingualism in popular culture could be extended to different ways of looking at kinds of popular culture that have not usually been thought of as being bi- or multilingual. The extensive American literature on popular culture does not typically forefront the presence of diverse dialect use as an interesting phenomenon in itself (for example, the frequent juxtaposing of Standard American English with AAVE or other non-Standard varieties), taking it rather for granted as part of the sociocultural backdrop for theorizing. If more attention were paid to the presence in expressions of American (and other) popular culture of many different kinds of English alone, a significant step would be made in consciousness-raising about the role of language in this area. The coding decisions we made in our own hip-hop research work show one way in which this could be done; under each separate larger language category ('Kinds of English; Kinds of French; Kinds of Caribbean Creole'), we found that in order to do the data justice, we needed to subcategorize two or three different ways. If this were more commonly done in Anglo-American popular culture research, we anticipate that the field would open up considerably, in a way that would make connections to international language research not just likely, but inevitable. Making research links across sociopolitical and disciplinary borders in this way is long overdue.

The newness of looking at popular culture research this way supplies part of the answer to our first question above: why isn't this out there yet? It may just be too soon. Another part of the answer is perhaps that the subfield of multilingualism within applied linguistics is also very young. Looking at multilingualism as ordinary – deconstructing the exoticness of it all (Makoni and Pennycook this volume) is even younger.

We consider that in everything we have said thus far about multilingualism and popular culture as an independent area of study, we have been referring to one coin with two sides that are not usually looked at as being part of an integrated whole. What we have at this point are not answers, but questions about how best to proceed. From the perspective of work in language studies, how can we understand multilingualism better by including a focus on popular culture as one of many ways people express themselves multilingually? Conversely, how can incorporating the insights from work on multilingualism into the study of popular culture enrich popular culture/cultural studies as a field? Is the object of scrutiny multilingualism, with theorizing about popular culture as the 'lens'? Or is popular culture/cultural studies the object of study, with multilingual approaches to studying human language forming the interpretive frame?

The answer, of course, is that there is no need for the answer to be either/or. By agreeing that it is in the interests of scholars both of language and of popular culture to start thinking in multilingual terms about how to combine both, we can start to move several fields forward simultaneously. We anticipate that doing this will require one or more paradigm shifts on the part of those of us who have been accustomed to thinking of non-monolingual language use as in any way unusual. But, as one well-known scholar working in a multilingual context has said, it is rather the opposite point of view we should be taking as the norm: 'Any restriction on language use is intolerable. Two or three languages are barely tolerable and one language is absurd' (Pattanayak 2000).

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Carrying popular culture forward multilingually: new research directions

As we have said, the study of multilingualism and popular culture as a single, multifaceted area of inquiry is in its infancy. The task of making this an 'ordinary', non-exotic field is a new research direction in itself, one that can be linked to ongoing work by Makoni and Pennycook (this volume; Makoni and Pennycook 2007) on the 'deconstructing' of the idea of separate, rigidly demarcated languages. Such a notion is rooted in a long tradition of Eurocentric scholarship that is showing signs of a few cracks in the foundations (Harris 2002). The need to fence oneself off from the Other may not be one we can afford to indulge much longer, in linguistics and language study any more than in other fields of human endeavour.

A related direction that could profitably be taken by workers in this area is a similar breaking away from Anglo-American conceptions of popular culture, which tend all too often to be monolingual. In Europe, popular culture has become more and more multilingual as European borders have become more porous (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003). In the countries of Africa and the South Asian subcontinent, it has been multilingual for decades. A Western visitor to any large city in India cannot fail to be impressed by the sheer multiplicity of languages and cultures that jostle for place on Bollywood billboards, TV screens and radio stations. As in so many other places, the post-colonial mixing of English with the local language(s) is only one example. Local languages have long mixed with each other.

Indigenous contexts are another site where the study of multilingual language use and popular culture at the local level would, we believe, repay careful investigation. A start has been made in this direction, such as Pennycook and Mitchell's (2009) work with Australian 'Abo-digital' rapper Wire MC, or Mitchell's many other publications (which do not, however, focus specifically on language) in which he discusses Indigenous popular music produced by Samoan, Fijian and Maori artists. In the Canadian context, we are aware of several Indigenous rappers who use their traditional languages mixed in with the local colonial language (the mixed-language work of Algonkian/Québécois rappers Samian and Shauit can be heard online at, for example, www.samian.ca/ and www.myspace.com/shauit). Indigenous communities worldwide are obliged somehow to come to terms with the pressures that are being put on them by surrounding White society. Not all of them manage to retain their Indigenous language as the main medium of community use, but the possibilities of incorporating traditional words, phrases and concepts into forms of culture that are likely to become widely known, i.e. local forms of popular culture, may be one way of keeping awareness levels high and youth interested in pursuing linguistic leads back to older identities.

This brings us to a more general point about the word-work of youth cultures as part of the study of multilingualism and its effects. Marginalized youth everywhere have seized on the possibilities of hip-hop as a text-loaded way of delivering their messages about their experience of oppression; as we have seen, in places where youth communities are multi-ethnic, those messages are often multilingual. In some instances, the active mixing of languages can produce new languages, as in Blommaert's (2005) research on the *Wahuni* hip-hop community in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which revealed that they were actively creating a new 'antilanguage', *Kihuni*, which they were committed to formalizing and codifying through practices such as transcription. In contrast, the language practices of the Montreal hip-hop scene are less about inventing a new language and more about celebrating an attitude towards language, which is also an attitude toward community and diversity.

But popular culture takes many forms other than hip-hop, as we see in the work of Higgins (2004, 2007, 2009), who applies Blommaert's (2005; Blommaert *et al.* 2005) work on orders of indexicality in language to the study of several linked manifestations of popular culture in

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Dar es Salaam. Higgins shows that youth communities in Dar es Salaam are using language mixing to actively create new relationships between varieties and levels of English, Swahili and other local languages in domains from rap lyrics to bus advertisements to popular anti-AIDS campaigns. Popular culture delivers powerful messages; multilingualism as the medium of those messages makes multilingualism itself a large part of the message.

This multilingual experimentation has some important implications for education; if schools are to remain relevant to the youth they serve, educational policy makers must acknowledge and engage multilingual and multivarietal popular formulations of language. This might mean, for instance, in Quebec, the need for a multidialectical approach to the teaching of French in school. Also promising are critical language awareness (Fairclough 1992) pedagogies, which teach young people about sociolinguistics and critical literacy and help them become ethnographers of the language practices, and their politics, of their own multilingual communities (see, for instance, Alim's (2004) *Hiphopographical* work in Black American contexts, which could and should be paralleled internationally and multilingually). Popular culture, often thought of as somehow belonging more to the young, is in any case a logical, inevitable and wholly fascinating place for up-and-coming scholars to concentrate their multilingual research energies. Together with established researchers in the field – such as Alim (2002, 2004), Androutsopoulos (2007, 2009), Higgins (2009), Lin (2009), Omoniyi (2009) and Pennycook (2003, 2007), who have produced outstanding scholarship across five continents – it is to be hoped that younger scholars will not hesitate to mark, by *un*marking, new multilingual territory across a wide range of popular culture forms.

Related topics

Crossing; codeswitching; heteroglossia; multilingualism on the Internet.

Note

1 Pennycook (2007) coined this term along with H. S. Alim and Awad Ibrahim (the co-edited book that gave rise to the discussion is Alim *et al.* 2009). 'Bling' is a term well known in the hip-hop community, as well as being on record in online urban dictionaries and elsewhere. It refers to 'expensive, ostentatious clothing and jewelry, or the wearing of them'. Socioblinguistics would thus be the sociolinguistics of urban 'linguistic bling' (extravagant multilingual display as NORMAL, in this context).

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