

## **Media Representations of Turkish-German and Hip-Hop Language as a Uniform Ethnolect**

Brenna Reinhart Byrd  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

In each local manifestation of Hip-Hop around the globe, a local vernacular language will often be associated with the Hip-Hop community. In Germany, the speech of the second- and third-generation immigrant youth in the predominantly Turkish urban ghettos has acquired an indexical relationship with Hip-Hop identity in mainstream media. The stigmatized language features used in humorous portrayals of Turkish-Germans overlap with those found in the same sort of mimicking of Hip-Hoppers. This equating of the two groups allows the Turkish-German youth to redefine their own markers of “non-German-ness” as symbols of authentic Hip Hop affiliation. This paper will show how the converging representations of Hip Hop and Turkish-German language in popular media has helped strengthen the connection between the two communities and perpetuate stereotypes about both.

### **1 Introduction**

There has been a flurry of linguistic studies in the past ten years devoted to the language contact situation in the immigrant communities formed since the 1960s in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Scholars first investigated the so-called pidgin of the first generation of immigrants, which has been followed by more recent studies of the language of second- and successive generation immigrants. While there is one speech style repeatedly used in the media to represent the language of Turkish-Germans, the largest immigrant population in Germany today, the speech within these communities is more complex than just one ethnolect.

Previous studies (Androutsopoulos, 2000, 2001, 2007; Auer, 2003; Deppermann, 2007) have traced how the Turkish-German ethnolect is stylized in the media, and how these stylizations work their way back into popular culture. This paper attempts to expand on these works by discussing how and why these ethnolectal stylizations are accepted as authentic by the mainstream media, and how stereotypes of immigrant groups, specifically of Turkish-Germans, are perpetuated through these ethnolectal stylizations. In fact, I find that the media also represents the language of the Turkish-German communities as the same language used by hip hoppers. This paper investigates how the converging representations of Hip Hop and Turkish-German language in popular media has helped to

Texas Linguistic Forum 53: 72-78

Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society – Austin

April 10-11, 2009

©Byrd 2009

strengthen the connection between the two communities and perpetuate stereotypes of both.

## 2 Language of Turks in Germany

German-born Turks, who grow up in predominantly immigrant/migrant communities, are typically associated with a speech variety that is neither the local regional dialect nor the school-German called *Hochdeutsch* or High-German. In 1995, the Turkish-German author Feridun Zaimoğlu popularized the term *Kanak Sprak* ('Kanak speech') for the language spoken by the Turkish immigrants in Germany. At around the same time, *Kanak Sprak* as an ethnolect began to be stylized in the media (Deppermann, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2001). *Kanake* is a derogatory term for immigrants with South-European or Middle-Eastern background that has been reappropriated by some immigrant groups, especially by Turkish-Germans. Within both academic discourse and the media, the language spoken by members of this community has been referred to as *Kanak Sprak*, *Türk(isch)-Deutsch* or *Türkenslang*. Some refer to it as an ethnolect, while others have thought it to be a creolized version of the German spoken by first generation migrants *Gastarbeiterdeutsch* (Guestworker-German).

Research on language use within Turkish-German communities paints a different picture. Numerous studies have shown that speakers use both German and Turkish in what some call a fluid code-mixture between the two which goes beyond typical code-switching (Eksner, 2006; Pfaff, 2005; Hinnenkamp, 2003; Dirim, 2005; Dirim/Auer, 2004; Keim, 2001, 2003). According to these studies, the German spoken in immigrant communities frequently has the following features:

- Coronalization of [ç] to [ʃ]
- Rolled /r/
- Syllable-based rather than stress-based prosody
- High usage of specific discourse markers: *weißt du* 'you know', *Alter* 'old man/dude'
- Lexicon: *krass* 'heavy, crazy', *korrekt* 'correct, good' (these are also found in youth language, see Androutsopoulos 1998a, 1998b)
- Missing prepositions: *und der is sofort nächste Haltestelle rausgestiegen* 'and he got out immediately next station' (Dirim/Auer, 2004); *ich muss Bahnhof gehen* 'I must go train station' (Kallmeyer/Keim, 2003)

All of the Turkish-German youth interviewed by Eksner in Berlin agreed that Turks in Germany usually speak with a Turkish accent (Eksner, 2006, p. 62). Although speaking without a Turkish accent is equated with speaking "good German" in the minds of the Turkish-German youth, there is also pressure to preserve the Turkish accent among friends. "As one informant phrased it: stopping to talk in this way, would appear as if they were hiding away their inner self, their core" (Eksner, 2006, p. 63).

The standard High German is not needed for everyday use, and for most inhabitants of immigrant communities, this language variety is only encountered in school or other official institutions. The amount an individual uses High German pronunciation and syntax depends on his or her attitude toward the immigrant community and the perceived opportunity for social mobility (Keim, 2007, p. 157).

### 3 Stylized Turkish German

According to Eksner, Stylized Turkish German (STG)—called “tough language” by the Turkish Berlin youths in her study—exaggerates the Turkish accent and stigmatized features, which plays on the German public’s fear of immigrants. “The efficacy of the assigned quality lies in the perception of accents as connected to ‘foreigners’ and thus to danger and threat” (Eksner, 2006, p. 63-64). The youth in her study used STG to assert authority over those members of the hegemonic society who would typically hold authority in official environments, when they are in public areas like the streets or parks, where these individuals cannot directly hold power over the Turkish-German youths (Eksner, 2006, p. 69-70). Similarly, Keim observed in her Mannheim study that “in opposition to German teachers of the higher educational institutions, the girls highlighted their ‘Turkish-ness’ by the extensive use of elaborated Turkish-German mixings as well as behavior contradicting all teacher expectations” (Keim, 2007, p. 178).

If STG is used by the Turkish youth specifically for power-struggle interactions with Germans, it is conceivable for the German society to associate aggression and deviance with this stylized language variety, as well as with its speakers. The media’s representation of a Turkish-German ethnolect is then informed by this interaction. According to Auer (2003), this is how certain linguistic features become more salient as indices of ethnolects.

Taking his lead from Androutsopoulos’ (2001) description of the path of Turkish-German “from the streets to the screens and back again”, Auer divides the process of how ethnolects become codified through media interaction into three stages:

1. **Primary ethnolect**, which is the actual speech within the immigrant community “from the streets”
2. **Secondary, media transformed ethnolect**, an exaggeration of the primary ethnolect created by the media.
3. When the secondary ethnolect makes its way into the German speech community through imitation of media representations, this is then called a **tertiary ethnolect**. (2003, p. 256-7)

This secondary ethnolect as well as the tertiary ethnolect are both used to call up images of Turkish-Germans by those who do not belong to this group. This form of linguistic style shift is called *crossing* (Rampton, 1995, 1999).

### 4 Representations of Turkish-German in the Media

Comedic representations in the media tend to depict the younger generation of Turkish Germans (i.e. second generation and on) as monolingual speakers of “incorrect” German. In these representations the Turkish accent is usually exaggerated and vocabulary is reduced to a stigmatized lexicon. Perhaps one of the most revealing instances of the stylized Turkish-German ethnolect in the media may be seen in the “Türk-Deutsch Simulator” (‘Turkish-German simulator’) sketch from the popular television program *Was guckst du?* by comedian Kaya Yanar. The simulator is a fictional contraption that transforms the wearer’s “outmoded High German” into “flawless asocial<sup>1</sup> Turkish-

---

<sup>1</sup> The German word *asozial* ‘asocial/antisocial’ has a much more negative connotation than the dictionary definition implies, and is sometimes translated as ‘trashy’, ‘tacky’ or ‘redneck’.

Texas Linguistic Forum 53: 72-78

Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Symposium About Language and Society – Austin

April 10-11, 2009

©Byrd 2009

German". The characters in this sketch are the epitome of cultural stereotypes of both Germans and Turks, with the German as awkward, overly wordy and effeminate, and the Turk as macho, aggressive and the gatekeeper to cool (both metaphorically and physically as with the Turkish-German speaking bouncer in the sketch, who denies a Standard German speaker entrance to a club). The voiceover promises the audience that the days of miscommunication between Germans and Turks are now over, thanks to this latest invention. The simulator itself is a metal ring that goes around the lips, pushing the wearer's lips together, with straps that attach behind the head to hold it in place.

Rounding the lips would result in a few phonological differences that might resemble a Turkish accent, but the humor of the sketch lies in how "complete" the transformation becomes. Suddenly the German has not only the stigmatized coronalization of [ç] to [ʃ] and overly rounded vowels, his utterances become short and syntactically reduced, he uses vocabulary associated with the media stylized ethnolect (*Alter, korrekt*). Not surprisingly, his transformation is more than just linguistic. With the newfound ability to speak "*assi*" (asocial) Turkish-German, the German's speech becomes more direct and aggressive, he is now cool enough to get into clubs, and he even tries to buy drugs. In other sketches on this show, the speech of the Turkish-German characters (i.e. those who represent the second generation and on) usually contains antagonistic macho phrases such as *Bist du Schwul, oder was?* 'Are you gay or what?' The message conveyed to the audience is that speaking Turkish-German is indexically linked to a tough, macho, criminal lifestyle. This same stylized language, along with the same associations of macho and criminal behavior, is also found in comedic impersonations of Hip Hoppers in mainstream media.

## 5 Representations of Hip-Hop-German in Comedy

The following example is an excerpt from an interview with Samy Deluxe, a popular Hamburg rapper, conducted by German talk-show host and comedian Oliver Pocher. Throughout the interview Pocher pokes fun at the clothing, posturing and language of Deluxe and other Hip-Hop artists. At one point, Pocher inserts a bit of an obviously rehearsed routine where he imitates popular Berlin rapper Sido<sup>2</sup> and his crew with exaggerated body movements and stylized language.

Pocher: Yeah, I just find it a bit weird when someone comes up with their whole group standing there and goes, "Ey, yo, Wazzup? Wazzup wazzup wazzup?" [shaking both hands with index fingers extended at the audience] or something

Deluxe: [looks down at floor, smiles]

P: and how wonderfully they show off how many years of school they've finished, huh?

[audience laughs]

D: [adjusts watch, stops smiling]

P: But, in the entire group!

D: [looking at floor, awkward half-smile]

P: *Hey, look at this, Sido: you go half a year, I go half year!*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sido, whose real name is Paul Wüldig, was born and raised in Berlin. He is not of Turkish descent, but rather half German and half Sinti (Schneider, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> "Rent-a-Pocher", Prosieben, Original Air Date: 27 October 2005, my translation (BRB).

The last utterance (*Ey, Pass auf, Sido: du gehs'n halbes Jahr, ish geh halbes Jahr!*) is an obvious switch in voice, with different pronunciation (*ish* [ɪʃ] instead of *ich* [ɪç]) and syntax (deletion of article), which becomes progressively more marked towards the end of the sentence. In his stand-up routine for the tour *It's My Life*<sup>4</sup>, Pocher uses the same mock Hip Hop sentence and this time leaves both articles out. The switch in voice, as well as the joking accusation that Sido and rappers like him did not get far in school past first grade, plays on the audience's own assumptions that Hip-Hoppers are uneducated "foreigners" who cannot speak German "correctly".

Another example comes from the previously mentioned comedy show *Was guckst du?* In the sketch called "De Gang", a group of men dressed in Hip Hop-style clothing scowl at the screen while an English-language Hip Hop song plays in the background. The names of each character are scrawled under their faces in graffiti font, and each gang member has a cool-sounding nickname, except for the last one, Reinhard, who grins good-naturedly at the camera. Already the scene is set between cool, dangerous and foreign-looking individuals and the stereotypical uncool German (a recurring theme on this show). As the sketch starts, we learn that the gang is plotting to break into the house of a "Weichei" (a weakling, lit. 'soft egg') and steal whatever they want. All of the members of the group except for Reinhard are using Stylized Turkish-German features, such as the coronalization of [ç] to [ʃ] and vocabulary words: *Alter, krass, "Was geht?"* The only one using "standard" pronunciation, Reinhard, is uncool and ignored by the rest of the group. When he tries to be helpful and correct another gang member's ungrammatical sentence, he is smacked in the head before he can finish his explanation. Yet again, the Stylized Turkish-German features are associated with coolness, criminality, aggression and now Hip Hop.

It is perhaps not surprising then, that adoption of these linguistic features will be appealing to those Hip Hop artists trying to construct a hard Gangster image. Indeed, with the recent popularity of Gangster Rap in German, rappers who grew up in poor and predominantly immigrant communities can capitalize on their ability to use Stylized Turkish German to create the appearance of an authentic gangster image.

## 6 Conclusion

Due to the prevalence of a Stylized Turkish German ethnolect in mainstream media, the linguistic features used in these stylizations have acquired what Coupland (2007, p. 22) would call an *objective indexical* relationship with Turkish-German identity in German society, i.e. the general public believes there is a natural link between the stylized features and being Turkish.<sup>5</sup> In comedy programs that consistently depict Turks speaking STG, the same linguistic features are also used to index coolness, aggression, a macho attitude, and an affiliation with Hip Hop culture. As a result, some previously stigmatized linguistic features of Turkish-German may be re-evaluated as covert prestige variants within the Hip

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Pocher (2007) *Oliver Pocher - It's My Life: Aus dem Leben eines B-Promis*. Sony Music Entertainment.

<sup>5</sup> Sociolinguistic variants have symbolic meaning, because their relationship to groups such as class, gender, race, age, etc. is arbitrary. Through the process of naturalization, these variants are treated as if they were 'real' or *objective indexes* of the groups they represent. "People come to believe that using a particular accent carries the 'objective' or 'natural' meaning of 'low social class' or 'uneducated speaker'" (Coupland, 2007, p. 22).

Hop community, albeit at the cost of reinforcing negative stereotypes of both groups. Especially with the current popularity of German Gangster Rap, the language of Hip Hop has acquired a definite Turkish influence, specifically in its phonology, and yet is not restricted to those with immigrant backgrounds. It remains to be seen what kind of affect this will have on the German youth language as a whole, and whether the linguistic features discussed in this paper will catch on in standard colloquial German.

### References

- Androutsopoulos, J. (2009). Language and the Three Spheres of Hip Hop. In H. S. Alim, A. Ibrahim, & A. Pennycook (Eds.), *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*. New York: Routledge, 43-62.
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2007). Style online: Doing hip-hop on the German-speaking Web. In P. Auer, (Ed.), *Style and social identities : alternative approaches to linguistic heterogeneity*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 279-320.
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2001). From the streets to the screens and back again: on the mediated diffusion of ethnolectal patterns in contemporary German. *LAUD Linguistic Agency* Nr. A522
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2000). Ultra korregd Alder! Zur medialen Stilisierung und Popularisierung von 'Türkendeutsch'. *Linguistik-Server Essen*, [http://www.linse.uni-essen.de/linse/publikationen/ultra\\_korregd](http://www.linse.uni-essen.de/linse/publikationen/ultra_korregd).
- Androutsopoulos, J. & Scholz, A. (2003) Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music in Europe. *Popular Music and Society* 26(4), 463-479.
- Auer, P. (2003). 'Türkenslang': Ein jugendsprachlicher Ethnolect des Deutschen und seine Transformationen. In A. Häcki-Buhofer (Ed.), *Spracherwerb und Lebensalter. Kolloquium anlässlich des 60. Geburtstags von Harald Burger*. Tübingen: Francke, 255-264.
- Coupland, N. (2007). *Style: language variation and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deppermann, A. (2007). Playing with the voice of the other: Stylized Kanakspak in conversations among German. In P. Auer, (Ed.), *Style and social identities : alternative approaches to linguistic heterogeneity*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 325-360.
- Dirim, İ. (2005). Zum Gebrauch türkischer Routinen bei Hamburger Jugendlichen nicht-türkischer Herkunft. In V. Hinnenkamp & K. Meng (Eds.), *Sprachgrenzen überspringen: Sprachliche Hybridität und polykulturelles Selbstverständnis*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 19-50.
- Dirim, İ. & Auer, P. (2004). *Türkisch sprechen nicht nur die Türken*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Eksner, H.J. (2006). *Ghetto Ideologies, Youth Identity and Stylized Turkish German. German Turks in Berlin-Kreuzberg*. Spektrum, Vol. 91. Hamburg: LIT Publishing House.
- Hinnenkamp, V. (2003). Mixed Language Varieties of Migrant Adolescents and the Discourse of Hybridity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 24 (1&2), 12-40.
- Kallmeyer, W. & Keim, I. (2003). Linguistic variation and the construction of social identity in a German-Turkish setting. In J. Androutsopoulos & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities* (pp. 29-46). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.

- Keim, I. (2007). Socio-cultural identity, communicative style, and their change over time: A case study of a group of German-Turkish girls in Mannheim/Germany. In P. Auer (Ed.), *Style and social identities : alternative approaches to linguistic heterogeneity* (pp. 155-186). New York : Mouton de Gruyter.
- Keim, I. (2003). Social style of communication and bilingual speech practices: Case study of three migrant youth groups of Turkish origin in Mannheim/ Germany. *Turkic Languages* 2003, Heft 6/2, 284-298.
- Keim, I. (2001). Die Powergirls. Aspekte des kommunikativen Stils einer Migrantinnengruppe aus Mannheim. In E. Jakobs & A. Rothkegel (Eds.), *Perspektiven auf Stil. Akten des Kolloquiums zum 60. Geburtstag von Barbara Sandig* (pp. 375-400). Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Pfaff, C. W. (2005). "Kanaken in Alemannisten": Feridun Zaimoglu's representation of migrant language. In V. Hinnenkamp & K. Meng (Eds.), *Sprachgrenzen überspringen: Sprachliche Hybridität und polykulturelles Selbstverständnis* (pp. 195-225). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Potter, R. A. (1995). *Spectacular vernaculars: hip-hop and the politics of postmodernism*. The SUNY series in postmodern culture. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Rampton, B. (1999). Sociolinguistics and Cultural Studies: New Ethnicities, Liminality and Interaction. *Social Semiotics* 9(3), 355-373.
- Rampton, B. (1995). *Crossing. Language and ethnicity among adolescents*. London: Longman.
- Schneider, M. (2006). Der Goldjunge. *Berliner Zeitung*, December 5. Retrieved August 21, 2009 from <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2006/1205/seite3/0001/>.
- Zaimoğlu, F. (1995). *Kanak Sprak. 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*. Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag.