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This is a contribution from *Multilingualism and Language Diversity in Urban Areas. Acquisition, identities, space, education.*

Edited by Peter Siemund, Ingrid Gogolin, Monika Edith Schulz, and Julia Davydova.

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Selfing and othering through categories of race, place, and language among minority youths in Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

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This is the first study of processes of selfing and othering by speakers of a non-standard variety of Dutch. The group studied consists of young men in the Dutch city of Rotterdam who self-identify as Surinamese while having only very limited proficiency in what is considered their heritage language, Sranan. Applying a synthesis of principles and concepts from various semiotic approaches to the study of identification processes (Baumann 2004, Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Gal & Irvine 1995), it is shown that the youngsters in this study interweave categories of language, race, and place in assembling constantly changing multi-leveled identities that help to construct self and other. We will analyze the indexical workings of these interwoven categories and show how the constantly re-defined segmenting of these categories enables speakers to authenticate or denaturalize groups and individuals in changing discursive contexts.

Keywords: identity formation, othering, place, race, ethnicity, youth language, styling, indexicality

1. Introduction

While work on processes of identification through language among adolescents has been thriving in the UK as well as in mainland Europe (see e.g Auer & Dirim 2003, Doran 2004, Hewitt 1986, Jaspers 2005, Rampton 2005 [1995]), similar

* We thank Peter Auer for his insightful comments on this paper.

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studies on Dutch youths have remained conspicuously absent. This study is a first attempt to amend this state of affairs as it looks at how a group of young men in the Dutch city of Rotterdam identify self and other through language mixing and through defining the meanings of ethno-racial and linguistic categories. The young men in this study self-identify as Surinamese.²

The self-identification as Surinamese makes the identity work of the young men in this study of particular interest for several reasons. First, Surinamese Dutch young men were stereotyped as aggressive and criminal throughout the 1980s until the early 1990s when quite suddenly the object of this negative ethnic stereotyping shifted from Surinamese Dutch to Antillean Dutch and Moroccan Dutch youths (Geschiere 2009: 139). In the dominant binary categorization of inhabitants of the Netherlands into *autochthonen* 'autochthons', people whose parents were both born in the Netherlands, and *allochthonen* 'allochthons', people born outside the Netherlands or having a father or mother born outside the Netherlands, the prototypical allochthon is no longer Surinamese but Muslim, or Moroccan instead. The binary opposition between autochthon (= white) Dutch versus allochthon (= Muslim = Moroccan) has become so all-pervasive in Dutch society that persons and groups who do not fit the categories (white) Dutch, Muslim and Moroccan have become all but invisible in the media and in public debate. This is the case for Surinamese Dutch, most of whom are non-white Dutch nationals and thus destabilize the autochthon/white versus allochthon/non-white binarism. One could say they have been erased (cf. Gal & Irvine 1995) from the dominant classification scheme in the Netherlands. For those who identify as Surinamese, the decreasing importance of the category Surinamese in the dominant scheme has created a new situation, which offers them more flexibility in redefining their Surinamese identity in processes of selfing and othering.

The main question we try to answer below is, given these problematic conditions, which social and linguistic categories do these young men rely on in processes of selfing and othering and how do they (re)produce these categories (cf. Baumann 2004, Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Gal & Irvine 1995)? In our analysis, we will show how the creative application of social and linguistic categories relies on the semiotic processes of iconicity, recursivity, and erasure as introduced by Gal and Irvine (1995). Although we only selectively use concepts from Bucholtz and Hall's

2. Surinam was a Dutch colony (1667–1954) and later an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, before gaining full independence in 1975. Before independence, small numbers of Surinamese emigrants came to the Netherlands to pursue higher studies that were not offered at the national Anton de Kom University. This situation radically changed shortly before Surinam's independence when considerable numbers of unskilled or low-skilled Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands.

(2005) approach to identity and interaction, it should be clear that in line with their thinking we view identity as an emergent, relational, and situated phenomenon. In order to interpret what is going on in the interactions we study, we focus on the following indexical processes identified by Bucholtz and Hall:

[...] (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and pre-suppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups.

(Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 594)

Most of our analytical attention will be devoted to the processes listed under a, b, and d since these are most readily identifiable in transcribed recordings of interactions. The phenomena we will be looking at here are language mixing, the use of labels for ethno-racial categories and languages (or language varieties), and evaluative comments on these labels.

1.1 Identity work and problematic linguistic capital

The identity work of the young men in this study is especially interesting since their first language is Dutch and not Sranan which is generally regarded as the heritage language of black Surinamese in Surinam, generally known in Surinam and the Netherlands as Creoles. Among Creole Surinamese Dutch, however, proficiency in Sranan is dwindling (Van den Avoird, Broeder & Extra 2001: 228–231). The speakers in this study are no exception to this trend as their Sranan proficiency is limited to high-frequency lexical items and the production of short sentences. Inserting Sranan words and phrases in their Dutch offers an easy and also quite effective manner of foregrounding their Creole Surinamese identity. However, in contacts with family in Surinam and with Surinamese Dutch who speak Sranan fluently, they may feel they have lost something that is essential to their Creole identity. The youngsters in this study use standard Dutch with insertion of lexical elements from Sranan: predicative adjectives, main verbs (but always combined with Dutch auxiliaries), nouns (without determiners or combined with Dutch determiners), quantifiers, and adverbs. However, all functional elements (determiners, attributive adjectives, auxiliaries, and inflectional elements) are Dutch (Cornips 2004).

According to Muysken (2000: 9), this type of code-switching, e.g. lexical insertion, is a frequent bilingual pattern in colonial settings and recent migrant communities where there is considerable asymmetry in speakers' proficiencies of the two languages. This bilingual strategy reflects the restricted knowledge of Sranan in contrast to Dutch.

Apart from Sranan lexical insertions, the youngsters' language use is characterized by other features that are well documented in youth varieties worldwide. There are truncations such as *Suri* for 'Surinamese' or the infinitive *balli* from *voetballen* ('to play soccer') in which the Dutch infinitival ending *-en* has been substituted by the Sranan ending *-i*. We also find manipulation of syllables as in *Jaxie* 'Ajax' and *Spikrie* as the name for the town Spijkenisse. In addition, English verbs are inflected with Dutch suffixes *ge-X-ed* for past participles as in *ge-flash-ed* 'to be joked on' and/or Dutch *-en* for infinitives as in *chill-en*.

The following examples (1–7) contain nearly all instances of irrefutable Sranan influence in the three hours of recording. In (1) we see insertions of Sranan nouns:

- (1) a. hij is een goeie *mati* van mij
 he is a good *friend* of mine
 b. ze denkt dat ik morgen naar *scoro* moet
 she thinks that I tomorrow to *school* must
 'she thinks I have to go to school tomorrow'

Noun insertion with Dutch plural inflection (suffix *-s*):

- (1) c. ga je andere *pata-s* kopen?
 go you new *shoes* buy
 'will you buy new shoes?'

Noun insertion with Dutch diminutive suffix (suffix *-tje*)

- (1) d. dan krijgt hij geen *sma-tje-s* aan de lijn
 then gets he no *girls* on the phone
 'then he won't get any girls on the phone'

There are some insertions of Sranan predicative adjectives (see also *lusu* in Fragment XX). It is remarkable that Sranan adjectives never appear attributively:

- (2) a. dat je *bun* met je meisje gaat blijven
 that you *good* with your girl goes remain
 'that you always keep a good relationship with your girl'
 b. het is *switi* vriend
 it is *tasty* friend

Insertion of Sranan adverbs occur:

- (3) hij had vroeger *onmin* veel trobis
 he had earlier *very* much troubles
 'he had lots of troubles in the past'

Sranan verbs only appear as infinitives without inflection but never as auxiliaries:

- (4) a. en een killtje zou haar toch voor me *naki*
 and a boy would her anyway for me *beat_{inf}*
 ‘and a boy would beat her for me anyway’
 b. dan kan je niet zo *waka* man zo
 then can you not like-this *walk_{inf}* men like-this
 ‘then you cannot walk in this manner, man’

There are hardly any instances of functional elements. A rare example is the *wh*-elements *fa* ‘how’ from Sranan:

- (5) dan *fa* je belazert mij
 then *how* you fool me

There are also some larger Sranan constituents to be found in the data: i.e. *no span* as a complement of the Dutch verb *denken* ‘think’ and *mi na lusu* as a consequence clause:

- (6) a. ik dacht *no span*
 I thought *no worry*
 b. en als er fitty aankomt *mi na lusu*
 and if there a fight arrives *I am gone*

We also find the use of bare nouns typical of Surinamese Dutch (cf. de Kleine 1999):

- (7) je wilt toch *picie* maar eh
 you want surely *little piece* but eh
 ‘you surely want a little piece’

The use of the common definite and/or demonstrative determiner *de/die* ‘the/this’ with neuter nouns, is not specific for these youngsters but can be found in all repertoires of more or less bilingual speakers (cf. Cornips 2008):

- (8) hij had *de* juiste merk aan
 he had *the_{common}* right brand_{neuter} on
 ‘he was wearing the right brand’

Overgeneralization of common gender also shows up in adjective inflection with indefinite, neuter nouns (cf. Cornips 2008):

- (9) het is (...) een beetje zelfgemaakte Engels
 it is a somewhat self-made_{common} English_{neuter}

Moreover, the Dutch of these Surinamese men also displays other substandard features that are common among other speakers in the so-called Randstad area. First, their Dutch shows the use of the object form *hun* as subject [nom]/ [3pl] instead of standard *zij/ze* ‘they’:

- (10) a. *hun* zijn nog kinderachtig
 they are still childish
 b. *hun* snappen het leven nog niet
 they understand the life not yet
 ‘*they* don’t understand life yet’

The use of the substandard reflexive pronoun *je eigen* instead of standard reflexive *jezelf*:

- (10) c. vertel jij iets over *je eigen*
 tell [you] something about *yourself*

In addition, the auxiliary *gaan* ‘go’ can be used non-intentionally as in Example (11) where standard Dutch would prefer a sentence without auxiliary *gaan*:

- (11) In de Oranjeboomstraat *ga* je het niet *horen*
 in the Oranjeboomstreet *go* you it never *hear*
 ‘you will never encounter it in the Oranjeboomstreet’

What is very interesting is that some verbs like *denken* ‘think’, *weten* ‘know’, *horen* ‘hear’ may select an embedded clause in which (i) the complementizer is absent and (ii) the word order is SVO instead of standard Dutch SOV. There is no pause or comma interpretation:

- (12) a. hij *denkt* \emptyset hij is in Moskou met zijn dikke kleding
 he thinks he is in Moskou with his thick clothing
 b. hij *denkt* \emptyset hij is echt zakelijk met zijn piercing
 he thinks he is real businesslike with his piercing

The linguistic capital of the young men in this study seems quite limited: to native speakers of Sranan, their Sranan is deficient and to speakers of Standard Dutch, their Dutch is substandard. The limited capital they do have is also under threat as outsiders who wish to project a cool, urban identity are constantly appropriating words and expressions from their non-standard variety of Dutch (de Rooij 2005). A typical example of this, taken from transcribed field recordings by Jan-Dirk de Jong, is the use of Sranan *sma* ‘girl’ with Dutch diminutive *-tje*. Here, Mohamed, a Moroccan youngster from Amsterdam-West, integrates Sranan lexical material in his Dutch while Sranan is not considered his heritage language:

Mohamed: Die gozer die kwam vast te zitten en dat *smatje*
That guy, he was stuck and that girl. (de Jong 1999:6)

Precisely because of outsider positive evaluation and appropriation of their Surinamese variety of Dutch, Surinamese Dutch youngsters can no longer unproblematically construct a Surinamese identity by their way of speaking.

1.2 Methodology

The data for this paper were collected by Merlien Hardenberg during fieldwork in the Rotterdam Feijenoord neighborhood in October 2002 and January 2003 (Hardenberg 2003).³ The composition of Feijenoord neighbourhood population is (group labels as used by Municipality of Rotterdam): 34% Turks, 22% Dutch, 18% Surinamese, 15% Moroccans, 5% Antilleans/Arubans, 4% Capeverdeans on a total of 7,047 inhabitants.⁴ Hardenberg is from Surinamese, Creole origin.⁵ Through friends she made contact with several youngsters who allowed her to interview them and to hang out with them and their group of friends for four months. This resulted in a sample of sixteen subjects, involving ten boys of Surinamese descent, and six girls, two of them of Surinamese, one of Croatian, and three of Capeverdean descent. These subjects were 14 to 18 years old. She also made recordings of these youngsters.

The first group of youngsters, which is the core group, consisted of four male adolescents of Surinamese, Creole descent: Ronald, Vincent, Romano, and Gerard.⁶ After spending time with them, she turned from an interviewer into a friend, as shown in Fragment (I), to hang out with and participate in leisure activities.

(I)

Vincent: kijk je moet hier vaker komen.

Ronald: ja en dat meen ik echt, niet voor je project of zo gewoon ja met ons chillen.

Vincent: *see, you have to come here more often.*

Ronald: *yes and I really mean it, not for your project or such but just, well to chill (relax) with us.*

3. Merlien Hardenberg was Cornips' trainee at the Meertens Institute.

4. Source: Centre for Research and Statistics, <http://Rotterdam.buurtmonitor.nl/>.

5. In Surinam, as well as in the Netherlands, *Creole* is the common term that refers to the part of the population descending from African slaves.

6. All names in this article are pseudonyms.

At the time of fieldwork, Ronald and Vincent were 16 years old. They have Dutch nationality and were born in Surinam. They migrated to The Netherlands at the ages of 4 and 10, respectively. Ronald worked as an administrative clerk. The two other youngsters were 18 and 15, and were born and raised in The Netherlands after their parents' migration from Surinam to Holland. Gerard, 18 years old, worked as a security clerk and Romano and Vincent followed preparatory vocational education (VMBO), and intermediate vocational education (MBO) respectively. These school types train students in lower to middle echelon trade, service, and technical professions. In the beginning, it was Ronald who did most of the talking but as time went by, the others began to contribute more to the conversations. Gerard, the oldest, was the group "leader" in the sense that the others always asked him about his thoughts when trying to formulate a specific point of view and it is clear that for them, it was important to be accepted by him. This group of friends had their base in Rotterdam's Feijenoord neighborhood where they had also grown up. The fieldworker saw them once a week at around 6 pm in front of Ronald's or Gerard's house. They usually sat there talking and engaging in other activities like playing soccer until 10 pm. She also accompanied them several times to the local shopping center on Friday evenings. Every time when the fieldworker sat down with these four youngsters, she came in contact with other individuals. Other youngsters, all from Surinamese descent, aged between 16 and 18 years, who occasionally came along such as Ritchie, Winslow, Martin, and Eduard were also included in the research. From the hours spent with these youngsters, the fieldworker recorded about two hours. These recordings were subsequently transcribed.

In addition, the fieldworker met twice with a group of girls (ranging between 14 and 15 years old) after school. These girls – Zara (15 years, Capeverdean), Sylvie (15 years, Capeverdean), and Lilian (14 years, Surinamese descent) – were interviewed in the school cafeteria, which resulted in recorded interviews of one hour. This group of ethnically mixed friends had known each other for about two years, they were all in the same class and they spent time together during the school breaks and after school. The parts of the recorded interviews dealing with the presentation of the self and others were transcribed orthographically.

1.3 The processes of selfing and othering

One aspect of the interviews was to question the youngsters about demographic information such as age, country of birth, education, and origin of parents for the interviewer's record. As Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 412) point out "interviewees take the opportunity presented by these requests to position themselves in relation to

broader social categories, particularly ethnicity [...]”. The interviewer/fieldworker’s question in Fragment (II) below whether Romano is Surinamese, shows that Romano and Ronald produce different self-classification labels. Romano addresses the question “are you Surinamese” with an affirmative “yes” but Ronald produces “Suri” in order to describe him. “Surinamese” is produced by Romano to refer to people from Surinamese descent generally, including youngsters, who live in the same street as him/them but are not considered as part of his group. The utterances by Ronald and Romano in Fragment (II) illustrate that self-classification becomes subject to negotiation and contestation in the interview context. The self-classificatory label Suri in response to the fieldworkers’ label Surinamese may be taken as a sign of actively resisting outsiders’ labeling:

(II) [October 1, 2002 in front of Ronald’s house in Feijenoord, Rotterdam, between 7 and 10 pm]

fieldworker: ben je Surinaams?

Romano: ja.

Ronald: nee hij is Suri.

Romano: alleen alleen in deze straat wonen alleen maar Surinamers.

fieldworker: are you Surinamese?

Romano: yes.

Ronald: no he is Suri.

Romano: only only Surinamese live in this street.

The situation these young men find themselves in is characterized by flexibility because the category Surinamese has been “freed” from stereotypical usage, yet at the same time the challenge facing them is to construct a Surinamese self, using a limited and problematic linguistic capital.

In separate sections below, we will show how these young men in Rotterdam interweave and constantly segment categories of language, race, and place and redefine them in expressing multi-leveled identities. We will analyze how the indexical workings of these interwoven categories enable speakers to authenticate or denaturalize groups and individuals. We will show how social and linguistic categories are deployed in selfing and othering through discussing *straattaal* (street language), and several racial and ethnic labels. Apart from social and linguistic categories, these youngsters give place, more precisely belonging to a particular locality, a prominent role in their identity work.

2. Selfing and othering through discussing the use of ‘*straattaal*’ (street language)

This section looks at how the friends identify self and other in discussing the use of lexical items from Sranan in their Dutch. This type of mixing is often referred to as *straattaal* (lit. ‘street language’, cf. Appel 1999), and is considered an urban mixed youth variety of Dutch. The term ‘*straattaal*’ is widely used, in and outside academia (Muysken 2010: 13), to refer to various urban youth varieties of Dutch characterized by moderate to heavy lexical, phonological, and grammatical influence from migrant languages and popular (American) English. It is problematic to label different youth vernaculars using one label such as *straattaal* (cf. Cornips & de Rooij 2005, 2009, Cornips, Jaspers & de Rooij to appear, Cornips, de Rooij & Reizevoort 2006) since it essentializes groups and their language use, it obscures speakers’ styling practices, and it suggests systematic linguistic differences reflecting a pre-existing social category such as youth or ethnicity (cf. Jaspers 2008: 85, 87). In this paper, however, we use the term *straattaal* as it is used between the fieldworker and informants. As an anti-language in Hallidayan sense, *straattaal* comes to index anti- or non-mainstream social categories and practices (cf. Irvine 2001). Irvine, talking about styles as indexes, emphasizes the inherently local, contextual nature of this indexing process:

[...] an index can only inform social action if it functions as a sign; and a sign needs an interpretant, as Peirce long ago pointed out. That is to say, it must be meaningful to, and at some level understood by, some persons whose actions are informed by it. So these indexes must partake in participants’ understanding of their social world and the semiotic resources available in it. Those understandings are positioned, depending in some measure on the participant’s social position and point of view. They are also culturally variable; that is, they are neither universal nor entirely predictable from social position (such as socio-economic class) alone, without consideration of local history and tradition. (Irvine 2001: 22)

Straattaal offers a range of social, cultural, and linguistic resources that anyone can experiment with, and urban youth in particular seem drawn to the possibilities for self-definition that these symbolic resources can offer (cf. Cutler 2008: 8). Answering the fieldworker’s question with whom they would speak *straattaal*, the friends make a categorical distinction between Surinamese and Antilleans on the one hand and Dutchmen on the other (see Fragment III).

(III) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use of *straattaal*]

fieldworker: met wie zou jij dan zo praten. Met welke bevolkingsgroepen?
Vincent: Surinamers, Antillianen maakt niet uit behalve Nederlanders.

fieldworker: Marokkanen ook?

Vincent: ja, Mokro's zijn er meester in.

fieldworker: *with whom would you talk like that?*

Vincent: *Surinamese, Antilleans, doesn't matter except for Dutchmen.*

fieldworker: *Moroccans as well?*

Vincent: *yes, Mokro's are masters in it.*

Upon the question by the fieldworker if they would talk *straattaal* with Moroccans, they place Moroccans (*Mokro's*) in the same category with Surinamese and Antilleans. Self is thus associated with speaking and being addressed in *straattaal* whereas the other is constructed as those who will never be addressed in *straattaal*.

Relying on the simplest binary categorization schema (Baumann 2004), speakers define self and other by opposing on the one hand Surinamese, Antilleans, and *Mokro's* 'Moroccans' through speaking *straattaal* (self) to Dutchmen through not speaking *straattaal* (other). In fact, this differentiation reflects the dominant binary categorization of inhabitants of the Netherlands into *autochthonen* 'autochthons' and *allochthonen* 'allochthons' (see Section 1).

The status of individuals labeled as Dutchmen, as in (3), is open to negotiation similar to individuals labeled as Surinamese, Antilleans etc. In Fragment (IV) below, Romano and Vincent present the case of a Dutchman speaking Sranan, who clearly does not fit in one of the categories Surinamese, Antillean, Dutch(man), and/or Moroccan in (3). While group norms would normally illegitimate a Dutchman's identifying as Surinamese, as already illustrated above, such behavior may be acceptable under certain conditions (cf. Hewitt 1986: 163, Rampton 2005 [1995]: 39). Fragment (IV) demonstrates that a Dutchman using Sranan (used by the friends interchangeably with *straattaal* and Surinamese) is accepted if he 'just acts ordinary' *hij doet gewoon normaal* (line 5–6).⁷ Qualifying features of 'acting ordinary' are dressing as Dutchmen do and knowing how to speak Sranan (lines 6–7), unlike some who do not really know the language and only use it to act tough (lines 4–5). Vincent's comment "Him we just accept" (line 8) is not quite transparent: there is acceptance but it is not clear whether the Dutchman is accepted as one of them or whether it is merely his behavior that is accepted on the grounds that it is regarded as authentic, not as a poor imitation of their way of speaking:

7. It seems that for these youngsters Sranan or Surinamese covers a wide array of linguistic varieties, from monolingual Sranan to varieties of Dutch characterized by lexical insertions from Sranan, such as *straattaal*.

(IV) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use of *straattaal*/Surinamese/Sranan]

1 Romano: bijvoorbeeld een Nederlandse man die ik ken die al heel lang
 2 met een Surinaamse vrouw is en die Sranan kan praten. hij
 3 speelt ook Surinaamse muziek. als je hem nou hoort praten
 4 gewoon hij kan het gewoon. sommigen doen het om stoer te
 5 doen en ze kunnen het helemaal niet. hij doet niet
 6 overdreven, hij doet gewoon normaal. hij kleedt zich als een
 7 Nederlander maar hij praat Surinaams.

8 Vincent: hem accepteren we gewoon.

9 Romano: als je meer talen kent vind ik het goed van je, maar je moet
 10 wel normaal blijven, jezelf blijven.

1 *Romano: for example, a Dutchman I know who has been living with a*
 2 *Surinamese woman for a long time and who can talk Sranan.*
 3 *He also plays Surinamese music. when you hear him talk, he*
 4 *is just able to do so. some do it in order to act tough and they*
 5 *aren't able to speak it at all. he doesn't act exaggerated, he*
 6 *just acts ordinary. he dresses like a Dutchman but he talks*
 7 *Surinamese.*

8 *Vincent: him we just accept.*

9 *Romano: if you know several languages, I appreciate you for that but*
 10 *you have to stay normal, be yourself.*

The interaction presented above shows the workings of Bucholtz and Hall's (2005: 599) relational process of adequation/distinction, instead of similarity/difference:

[it] [...] emphasizes the fact that in order for individuals to be positioned alike, they need not be identical, but must merely be understood as sufficiently similar for current interactional practices. [...] differences irrelevant or damaging to ongoing efforts to adequate two people or groups will be downplayed, and similarities viewed as salient to and supportive of the immediate project of identity will be foregrounded. (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 599)

The youngsters position this man as sufficiently similar to them to accept his speaking as Sranan and/or Surinamese.

This Dutchman is redefined ambiguously as someone falling in between the division of self and other. In this case, the binary categorizing of other, i.e. Dutch (autochthon), and self, i.e. non-Dutch (allochthon), is suspended allowing speakers to redefine category membership by downplaying or foregrounding category features, while the very structure of familiar opposing categories remains intact.

Not only the categorical distinction Dutch versus Surinamese, Antillean, Moroccan is subjected to renegotiation. The category Surinamese, the basic

category by which the friends define self, becomes problematic in the interaction with the fieldworker. The friends really like the fieldworker but, in contrast to them, she speaks Sranan fluently. They know because sometimes she tries to interact with them in Sranan but they are not able to respond accordingly. In the following conversation, she reiterates Ronald's remark that they only speak Sranan or *Surinaams* ('Surinamese') in specific contexts: making jokes and music or singing and rapping. Gerard then adds that they also use *Surinaams* when playing football against Turks and Moroccans.

(V) [October 1, 2002 in front of Ronald's house in Feijenoord, Rotterdam, between 7 and 10 pm]

fieldworker: hoe goed kan Gerard Surinaams praten?

Ronald: wie?

fieldworker: Sranan.

Romano: goed.

fieldworker: hoe goed..

Romano: we kunnen allemaal goed

Romano: we kunnen allemaal goed

Ronald: we praten bijna nooit Surinaams.

Ronald: alleen als we grappen maken.

fieldworker: praten jullie Surinaams?

(...)

fieldworker: jullie praten nooit constant Surinaams.

fieldworker: jullie doen het alleen om grapjes te maken.

Romano: soms.

Gerard: kijk als we tegen de Turken spelen dan praten we wel Surinaams.

Gerard: tegen Turken dan wel.

Ronald: of tegen Marokkanen.

Gerard: ja.

fieldworker: how good is Gerard's command of Surinamese?

Ronald: who?

fieldworker: Sranan.

Romano: good.

fieldworker: how good..l

Romano: we all have a good command

Romano: we all have a good command

Ronald: we hardly ever talk Surinamese.

Ronald: only when we make jokes.

fieldworker: do you talk Surinamese?

(...)

fieldworker: but you never talk Surinamese continuously.

- fieldworker:* you only use it in order to make jokes.
Romano: sometimes.
Gerard: look when we play against the Turks then we do talk Surinamese.
Gerard: against Turks, yes.
Ronald: or against Moroccans.
Gerard: yes.

These youngsters, notwithstanding their apparent limited active command in Sranan, underline the social significance of using Surinamese in combination with specific clothing styles (as we will see later in Fragments X and XI), when talking to each other in the presence of 'others' like Moroccans and Turks and when making jokes among themselves.

3. Selfing and othering through race: Self as *neger* ('negro')

So far, we have shown how categories of language play a role in the process of selfing and othering. In this section, we focus on the role of the racial label *neger* ('negro'). Nowadays, in linguistics as well as in the social sciences, nothing could be less controversial than saying that the meaning of a word is context and use-dependent.

However, taking a dynamic perspective on word meaning should not blind us to the fact that certain words evoke strong feelings and emotions regardless of the contexts in which they are used. Loaded terms such as *neger* always carry with them negative connotations that are shaped by past occurrences. Intertextual relations between occurrences of a particular word make sure that meanings attached to past occurrences of a word resonate in the use of the same word in the here and now (cf. Bakhtin 1981, 1986). So, the language user is always in some sense a prisoner of past usage. And yet, he is also free to use words in unexpected, unconventional ways. In an anti-language (Halliday 1976) like *straattaal*, the use of loaded terms is especially attractive.⁸ Because *neger* is interpreted and evaluated in dramatically different ways depending on who is using it and who is doing the interpretation and in what context, *neger* has become a clear example of a 'floating signifier', "a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or

8. It should be noted that Halliday's anti-language is characterized by the principle 'same grammar, different vocabulary' (Halliday 1979: 571). 'Straattaal', however, may also differ from standard Dutch in morpho-syntax as in the loss of grammatical gender. However, this feature is not unique for 'straattaal' (Cornips & De Rooij 2003, Cornips 2008).

non-existent signified” (Chandler 2001).⁹ The use of *neger* requires more conversational effort than the use of less controversial words. Interlocutors must do extra work to contextualize *neger* and to construct its local meanings. Because of the loadedness of the term and the risk of being accused of racism, many white speakers refrain from using the term altogether. Of course, this makes *neger* an ideal word to play with in a youth language and culture that wants to upset, challenge, and redefine mainstream social categories.

Some black speakers regard *neger* as a neutral term of self-reference. In street interviews published in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad (Steenhuis 2002), black youths explain that the word *neger* is not a racial slur. For them it is a neutral, albeit somewhat old-fashioned word to refer to a black person.¹⁰ At the same time, the interviewees point out that when a white person addresses them with *neger*, it is taken as an insult. *Neger* is also associated with a cool and hip urban lifestyle visible in clothing, musical preferences, hair-dos, and body decoration (e.g. custom-made dental jewellery), a stereotype that is reproduced continually on popular music channels such as MTV Europe and The Box, and TMF. In some of the text fragments below (see Section 4), this link is discussed in more detail. It is important to note that both black *and* white persons made this association. Stereotypes of black men as hip, well-dressed, streetwise, witty, verbose, womanizing have been used in recent Dutch TV commercials for mobile phones, soft drinks, and exotic food.

Our main concern here is not to come up with a specific description of the social meaning or meanings of *neger*. Instead, we will try to focus on the process in which *neger* is used in the construction of particular social identities. Our primary interest is, therefore, not what *neger* means but how it means, or is made to mean. Such a view reflects the poetic, creative force that language has: as Malinowski (1935) pointed out long ago, speaking is first and foremost doing and acting upon the world. By speaking, we forge the social world we live in. This fundamental feature of speaking may not be directly evident when looking at mundane conversations among speakers from a homogeneous cultural background but it is hard to miss in the interactions of young speakers coming from mixed cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

9. For a related case in Norway, see Gullestad (2005).

10. Viewing *neger* as an old-fashioned word is undoubtedly related to the fact that in Suriname *neger* was replaced by *creool* in the 1960s. Descendants from black slaves from the city were called *stadscreolen* ('city creoles') while the descendants of runaway slaves living in the Surinamese rainforest were called *boslandcreolen* ('forest creoles') although they preferred to call themselves *bosnegers* ('forest negroes'), a translation of Sranan *busineng(r)e*, or *marrons* ('maroons'). Nowadays, many of them prefer the term *marrons*.

We feel that trying to uncover at least some of the fluid semantics of *neger* in a Rotterdam youth variety of Dutch can help us understand how classificatory labels are creatively appropriated in youth languages in order to express new, sometimes very localized, group identities. We argue that the Rotterdam case is yet another example of identity formation by ‘styling’ (cf. Rampton 2005 [1995], 1999). Following Rampton (1999) and Irvine (2001), we see styling as a fundamentally dialectic process of identity formation in which identities can only be formed through differentiating between one’s own group and other groups. In other words, identities and the social categories on which they are based can only be constructed and remain meaningful in interaction with identities and categories that are constructed as oppositional (cf. Barth 1969). We will look at the various uses of *neger* and *straattaal*, as a repertoire of linguistic forms indexing personas and identities (Bucholtz & Hall 2005:597). What Irvine says about styles as indexes can, of course, also be applied to elements of a particular style (Coupland 2002), in our case, the lexical element *neger* and words derived from it.

The (recorded) interactions show that particular uses of *neger* play a pivotal role in positioning self vis-à-vis other. The emergence in the conversations of the term *neger* in Fragment (VI) is not prompted by the interviewer but is volunteered so to speak when the youngsters authorize the use of *straattaal* by some and illegitimate its use by others.

(VI) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use
of *straattaal*/Surinamese/Sranan]

fieldworker: hoe zit het met Nederlanders, kunnen die het wel praten?

Vincent: ze proberen het, maar eh

Gerard: ja maar zijn echt Nederlanders die met negers omgaan.

fieldworker: what about Dutchmen, are they able to speak it [*straattaal*]?

Vincent: they try but eh

Gerard: yes, but [they] are in fact Dutchmen who associate with negers.

The use of *neger* in processes of identifying is not restricted to the group of friends. It also occurs in conversations the fieldworker had with a group of girls who also live in the Feijenoord neighborhood (see methodology in Section 1.2). In Fragment (VII), Lilian describes Dutchmen speaking *straattaal* as “wanting to be *neger*”, while Zara and Silvie further articulate the fakeness of these speakers and their behavior describing them as “that nigger wannabe” and “wigger”.

(VII) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use
of *straattaal*/Surinamese/ Sranan]

fieldworker: dus Nederlanders gebruiken het [*straattaal*] veel minder?

Lilian: nee want je hebt ook een paar die *neger* willen zijn.

Zara: die nikker wannabe.

Silvie: ja wigger.

fieldworker: so Dutchmen use it [streetlanguage] much less.

Lilian: no, because there are some who want to become a neger.

Zara: that nikker [nigger] wannabe.

Silvie: yes wigger.

The use of *straattaal* by Dutchmen constitutes an unwarranted claim to insider status in a group they are not entitled to be a member of (cf. Lo 1999). It is interesting to observe that in discussing “white” use of *straattaal*, a rigorous binary opposition is set up between self, defined in terms of *neger*, and the Dutch white other seeking to become *neger*. This opposition remains fixed throughout the discourse.

The friends invoke the concept of *neger* not only to create a white other; they also use it to include certain persons or groups through the strategy of adequation (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). When the interviewer asks whether Sammy, a youngster from Eritrean descent who belongs to the group but is not Surinamese, is allowed to use Surinamese words or *straattaal*, Ritchie makes use of the concept of *neger* in his reply. The use of the diminutive *neger-tje* (‘little *neger*’), may be linked to the physical size of Sammy (literal meaning) or may signal that for Ritchie, Sammy has not yet acquired full membership status or it is used affectionately:

(VIII)

fieldworker: Sammy hoort ook bij de groep maar is geen Surinamer. mag hij dan wel Surinaamse woorden gebruiken?

Ritchie: hij is een negertje, met hem gaan we al jarenlang om.

fieldworker: Sammy is also part of the group but he is not Surinamese. is he allowed to use Surinamese words?

Ritchie: he is a ‘negertje’ [*neger* + diminutive suffix: little *neger*] we’ve been associating with him for many years.

This passage clearly shows that the category Surinamese is tightly connected to the category *neger*. In other words, we find confirmation here that the friends’ identification as Surinamese is closely linked to *neger*: if someone cannot be included in the group because he is not Surinamese, the superordinate category *neger* is mobilized to make inclusion possible.¹¹ Sammy’s use of Surinamese words is contrasted with that of (white) Dutchmen – called *tata* – in (IX). This usage is qualified, first, as annoying (*hinderlijk*), and then as abnormal or unimaginable: “you won’t hear that”:

11. Quite interestingly, the youngsters nowhere directly refer to themselves as *neger(s)*. This may be indicative of the highly charged semantics of the word leading to avoidance of self-reference through *neger*.

(IX) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use of *straattaal*/Surinamese/Sranan]

- Vincent: ja het is hinderlijk als tata's het praten.
 Romano: zie je een tata al zeggen, *wo go na damsko see*?
 Vincent: ja dat hoor je niet.
 fieldworker: dus het komt niet zo vaak voor dat ze het gebruiken?
 Ronald: nee komt niet vaak voor.
 Romano: sommigen willen vernegerd doen.
 Vincent: *yes, it is annoying when tatas speak it.*¹²
 Romano: *can you imagine a tata saying wo go na damsko see (Sranan: "let's go to Amsterdam")?*
 Vincent: *you're right, you won't hear that.*
 fieldworker: *so, it doesn't happen very often that they use it?*
 Ronald: *no, it doesn't happen frequently.*
 Romano: *some want to do 'vernegerd' [neger-ized].*

At the end of this fragment, after Ronald says that the use of Surinamese by *tatas* is not very frequent, Romano continues in Fragment (X) adding that those *tatas* who use it, 'want to do *neger-ized*'. According to the friends, this doing *neger-ized* is enacted not only through language but also by their style of clothing, and their behavior in general. Dutchmen doing *vernegerd* are disqualified as 'fake *neger*' (*nepneger* in (X)), appropriating that which is not theirs, like particular brands of clothes 'that are made for Surinamese'.

(X) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use of *straattaal*/ Surinamese/ Sranan]

- Martin: sommigen willen vernegerd doen.
 fieldworker: hoe doe je dan vernegerd?
 Martin: ik weet niet hoe ze doen je ziet het dan ook hoe ze zich kleden. ik weet niet, gewoon nepneger zo.
 Martin: je ziet het aan hun kleding.
 Winslow: sommigen dragen Kangol. het merk Kangol is voor Surinamers gemaakt.
 Martin: je hoort het ook hoe ze praten, je hoort dat hun accent verandert.
 Martin: *some want to act vernegerd [neger-ized].*
 fieldworker: *what does it mean to act vernegerd?*
 Martin: *I don't know how they act, you can tell also by the way they dress. I don't know, just 'nepneger' [fake neger].*

12. The Sranan word *ptata* or *tata* means 'potato' (Blanker & Dubbeldam 2005) and refers to Dutchmen in general.

- Martin:* you can tell by their clothes.
Winslow: some wear Kangol. The brand Kangol is made for Surinamese people.
Martin: you can also tell by their way of talking, you hear their accent change.

The style that is taken to be characteristic of ‘Dutchmen who think they are *negers*’ thus combines behavioral and communicative modalities (wearing particular clothes, talking in a rude manner, see (XI) below, and cf. Irvine 2001: 23). Clearly, this style is negatively evaluated as inauthentic by repeatedly saying that these Dutchmen change their way of speaking: “you hear their accent change”, and “they start to talk ruder”, thereby implying that it is not their “natural” way of speaking and behaving.

(XI) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use
of *straattaal*/Surinamese/Sranan]

- Ronald: Nederlanders die het gebruiken denken dat ze negers zijn
 fieldworker: hoe doen ze dan?
 Ronald: ze dragen kleding die negers dragen.
 fieldworker: geef eens voorbeelden van bepaalde kleding?
 Ronald: hun broek is dan afgezakt en ze dragen lammycoats.
 fieldworker: en gedrag?
 Ronald: ze gaan dan grover praten.
Ronald: Dutchmen who use it think they are negers.
fieldworker: how do they act then?
Ronald: they wear clothes that are worn by negers.
fieldworker: can you give some examples of specific clothing?
Ronald: their pants are sagging and they wear lammy coats [coats made of sheep skin].
fieldworker: and behaviour?
Ronald: they start to talk ruder.

The opposition between *neger* and *tatas* or Dutchmen remains important throughout the interaction. Evaluating individual Dutchmen’s appropriation of what is seen as Surinamese, however, is open to negotiation. Earlier, in the discussion of the Dutchman married to a Surinamese woman, we saw that Surinamese language use and Surinamese behavior by Dutchmen is not by default negatively evaluated. In Fragments (IX) through (XI), however, Surinamese behavior by Dutchmen is judged inappropriate. The illegitimation of this behavior is achieved by describing the attempts by Dutchmen not as inauthentic appropriation of Surinameseness but as inappropriate appropriation of *neger*-hood. This rephrasing of the opposition Surinamese/Dutchmen into *neger* versus *nep neger* (‘fake *neger*’) is interesting since it seems to indicate that the friends’ Surinamese identity is based on the category

of race. In the opposition between self as *neger* and the other as Dutchmen, the other behaves in an exaggerated way, does not dress as a Dutchmen and talks *straattaal* to act tough. Note that the Dutchman who is allowed to speak like them (see Fragment (III) in Section 2) is the one who acts normal.

The meaning of *neger* is thus contested and negotiable as is evident from the various uses of the concept *neger*, especially in the verb *vernegerd* ('*neger*-ized'), which is used to talk about white people who have acquired behaviors and tastes, linguistic and non-linguistic, routinely associated with black people. To be *vernegerd* or to act as a *neger* can be evaluated in positive and negative terms depending on whether the behavior of the person who is *vernegerd* is judged to be authentic, phrased in terms of *normaal zijn* 'being normal' or *jezelf zijn* 'being yourself.' In their interaction, lexical elements reorient the social meaning of *neger* from a fixed racial reference to an intersubjectively negotiated identity reference depending on whether and how *neger* co-occurs with other words, most notably *straattaal* and *Surinaams* 'Surinamese' (cf. Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 594).

4. Selfing and othering through the category Antillean

Although Antilleans make up only a small minority of the Feijenoord population (5%, see Section 1.2), they play a major role in how the friends construct self and other. Let us see how they identify with and distance from them. We will first discuss positive identification with Antilleans. Ronaldo portrays Antilleans in Fragment (XII) as self-assured streetwise youngsters uttering American English words and phrases from gangsta raps played on the major Dutch music networks. *Nigga* is used here not to offend the addressee but as an extreme way to express social intimacy with the addressee. Of course, outsiders, white and black, may take offense at this usage, which adds to the effectiveness of its use.

(XII)

Ronald: hun doen dat soort dingen of eh # okay #. I'm deep in the street nigga!
Ronald: *they [Antilleans] are doing these kinds of things okay. I'm deep in the street nigga!*

Identification with Antilleans is also apparent in the way the friends talk about *Antilliaans* ('Antillean', a denominal adjective, here meaning 'Antillean language') as part of, or as interchangeable with, their *straattaal*. For the Surinamese youngsters, the use of *straattaal* and *Antilliaans*, by which they mean Papiamentu, the heritage language of most Dutch Antilleans, is seen as constitutive of their group membership:

(XIII)

- fieldworker: kun jij ook Antilliaans.
 Ronald: dumpen+..
 fieldworker: hah?
 Gerard: gewoon 'straattaal' Antilliaans xx.
fieldworker: are you able [to speak] Papiamentu.
Ronald: get rid of it+..
fieldworker: hah?
Gerard: just 'straattaal' Papiamentu xx.

Identification with Antilleans is also evident in (XIV) (see also (2) in Section 2) where they are mentioned in one breath with Surinamese as those with whom one would speak *straattaal* as opposed to Dutchmen who are the only group mentioned with whom they would never speak it:

(XIV) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use
 of *straattaal*/Surinamese/Sranan]

- fieldworker: met wie zou jij dan zo praten. met welke bevolkingsgroepen?
 Vincent: Surinamers, Antillianen maakt niet uit behalve Nederlanders.
fieldworker: with whom would you talk like that?
Vincent: Surinamese, Antilleans, doesn't matter except for Dutchmen.

Inclusion of Antilleans may be accompanied by exclusion of other groups than Dutchmen as well. When the friends find out that the fieldworker has a Moroccan boyfriend, they make various comments about it and Ronald and Vincent tell her she should take an Antillean or Surinamese boyfriend instead. In doing so, Antilleans are included in the self:

(XV)

- Ronald: Mokro (=Moroccan) doe normaal man, neem een Antilliaan of zo.
 (de veldwerker lacht)
 Vincent: Surinamer.
Ronald: Moroccan, just act normal men, take an Antillean or so.
(The fieldworker laughs)
Vincent: Surinamese.

The vital role Antilleans play in the processes of identity formation between self and other is also evinced by the fact that the Surinamese friends use Papiamentu. The use of Papiamentu by speakers of Surinamese – and not Antillean – descent is unexpected because it is not their heritage language; hence, it does not conform to the ethnic category to which these speakers are normally assigned.

(XVI)

fieldworker: maar hoe goed kan je het (=Papiamentu) praten dan, niet zo goed.

Vincent: 80%.

fieldworker: hahn? kan je alles verstaan.

Ronald: de meeste wel, maar niet alles.

fieldworker: maar je hebt de meeste van jongens geleerd dan.

Ronald: meisjes, jongens, ik ben nog steeds aan het leren xx.
(iedereen lacht).

fieldworker: but how well are you able to talk it (=Papiamentu), not so good.

Vincent: 80%.

fieldworker: hm? are you able to understand everything?

Ronald: most of it yes, but not everything.

fieldworker: but did you learn most from the boys then.

*Ronald: girls, boys, I'm still in the process of learning xx.
(everyone laughs).*

This unexpected choice provides a window on recognizing identity as emergent: by the use of Papiamentu they actively produce new forms of identity by disrupting naturalized associations between a specific language variety and specific social categories (Bucholtz & Hall 2005:593). What this group of youngsters is doing, is not only doing age, ethnicity, and urbanity but they are also doing gender, that is to say, performing a macho masculinity in different ways by creatively deploying *straattaal*. When the Surinamese youngsters imitate Antilleans they often use pragmatically deviant sentences. The heavily stylized linguistic representation of Antilleans is iconic of their social representation by the Surinamese youngsters as violent and macho, present in utterances in Fragment (XVII) below as “..you shoot that boy” and “I shoot you with that knife.”

Thus, apart from instances of positive identification with Antilleans, as illustrated above, the friends also display a more ambiguous relation to Antilleans, relying on Baumann's (2004: 21) orientalizing grammar: “an operation of reverse mirror-imaging: selfing and othering condition each other in that both positive and negative characteristics are made to mirror each other in reverse”. In other words, what is valued as positive in the self finds its negative mirror image in the other, and, conversely, what is valued as negative in the self finds its positive mirror image in the other. Orientalizing is clearly at work in the friends' identification vis-à-vis Antilleans in their neighborhood:

(XVII) [is a continuation of (XVI)]

fieldworker: kun jij ook Antilliaans..

Ronald: dumpen+..

fieldworker: hah?

- Gerard: gewoon 'straattaal' Antilliaans xx.
 fieldworker: xx een voorbeeld?
 Gerard: ja dat, ik schop die ding terug.
 (hij doet een aantal Antillianen na. hij lacht.)
 Ronald: ik heb gezien dat je xx.
 Vincent: ik rende voor die bus, maar die bus rende weg.
 Ronald: ik heb gezien dat je die jongen hebt geschiet.
 Vincent: ik schiet je met die mes.
 Ronald: jongen met die broek met die korte mouwen.
 fieldworker: maar dat is geen Antilliaans?
 (ze lacht.)
 Vincent: zo praten ze.
fieldworker: are you able [to speak] Papiamentu
Ronald: dump+..
fieldworker: hah?
Gerard: just 'straattaal' Papiamentu xx.
fieldworker: xx an example?
Gerard: yes that, I kick that thing back.
(he is imitating Antilleans. he laughs)
Ronald: I saw that you xx.
Vincent: I run for that bus but that bus ran away.
Ronald: I saw that you shoot that boy.
Vincent: I shoot you with that knife.
Ronald: boy with those trousers and short sleeves.
fieldworker: but that is not Papiamentu?
(she laughs.)
Vincent: that's the way they talk.

Not only do the friends present Antilleans as speaking a deviant tough form of Dutch, the interview tells us more why they use Papiamentu: for them, the use of this language is connected to seducing women and, hence, performing a masculinity that they aspire to:

(XVIII)

- fieldworker: waarom heb je eigenlijk Antilliaans geleerd xx?
 Vincent: <flowen> [/] flowen.
 Ronald: flowen wij noemen dat flowen.
 fieldworker: wat is flowen?
 Ronald: dat betekent versieren.
 Vincent: doing the flow.
 Ronald: een praatje maken+..nummer vragen+..klaar klaar is Kees+..niet meer niet minder+..

- fieldworker:* *why did you learn Antilliaans (Papiamentu) xx.*
Vincent: *<flowen> [/] flowen.*
Ronald: *flowen we call that flowen.*
fieldworker: *what does flowen mean?*
Ronald: *that means to pick up girls/women (to seduce them)*
Vincent: *doing the flow.*
Ronald: *to make a chat, to ask for a number and there you are! that's all.*

This use of *Antilliaans* is not only in the form of reported speech, as in (XVII). Their interactions, as in (XIX), reveal what it means for them to perform in Papiamentu; every time when a young woman passes, they switch to Papiamentu to address her:

(XIX) [Situation: Romano notices a girl – Nadia – across the street
 (italics: Papiamentu)]

- Romano: *hey Nadia! roep haar even?*
 Vincent: *menina!*
 Ronald: *menina!*
 Vincent: *gusta bo. unda bo ta bai?*
 Romano: *hij praat echt Antilliaans. unda bo ta bai?*
 Ronald: *come and talk to me. (ze lachen allemaal)*
 Vincent: *menina!*
 Romano: *hey Nadia! just call her?*
 Vincent: *girl!*
 Ronald: *girl!*
 Vincent: *I like you. where are you going?*
 Romano: *he is really able to talk Papiamentu. where are you going?*
 Ronald: *come and talk to me. (English) (they all laugh)*
 Vincent: *girl!*

The Surinamese friends show a reinforced use of Papiamentu to perform a strong masculine gender identity to female passers-by. It is quite plausible that also the presence of the female fieldworker triggers performing gender. Their specific behavior in this context, calling out to female passers-by, using intimate terms of address like *dushi* ('sweetie', 'sweetheart') is a way to take the initiative in the mixed gender situation and assume control of it. The use of Papiamentu allows them to symbolically enact a macho masculinity. Performing the Antillean other is attractive because it offers an effective way to perform maleness but at the same time it offers a way to dissociate from the transgressive behavior that goes with it; after all, the transgressive behavior is clearly performed as Antillean through the use of Papiamentu. The reason for choosing Papiamentu could be connected to the

identification of the friends with Antilleans based on their constructed common identity as *neger* (see Section 3).

Antilleans form a rich symbolic resource, so to speak, in identity work as they can be used to assume a macho streetwise identity by switching to a stylized form of Papiamentu loaded with intimate terms of address. One could speculate that the friends try to regain some of the tough and streetwise image that Creole Surinamese Dutch youngsters have lost over past decades to Antilleans and Moroccans.

5. Selfing and othering through the category place

Until now, we have argued that the dynamic and constantly re-defined segmenting of categories as *straattaal*, *neger*, and Antillean enables the Rotterdam youngsters to authenticate or denaturalize groups and individuals. In this section, we will show that if selfing and othering through linguistic and ethnic-racial categories alone becomes too problematic, the speakers take recourse to categories of place to solve the identification problem.

Although the fieldworker knows Sranan (see also Section 2), she systematically asks them about the meaning of the words they borrow from Sranan in Dutch because these words are often used with new meanings in the friends' variety of Dutch and, subsequently, are different from the meaning in Sranan. Due to these new meanings, the fieldworker reacts to the use of Sranan *lusu*, which as an adjective normally means 'loose', here in the meaning of 'gone':

(XX)

- Ronald: al mijn cd's zijn lusu. ik heb alleen Gabian, Undrufini, Dimension, Dimension.
- Romano: welke Dimension. die nieuwe?
- Vincent: xx.
- fieldworker: hoe bedoel je al je xx?
- Ronald: xx wat zei je?
- fieldworker: wat zei je nou? al je cd's zijn lusu?
- Ronald: ja?
- fieldworker: oh!
- Ronald: niet komen vragen wat betekent lusu.
- fieldworker: ik vraag maar want ik weet het echt niet. (lachend)
- Romano: weet je niet wat het betekent?
- fieldworker: nee. al zijn cd's zijn lusu.
- Romano: waar woon je?

fieldworker: in <Schiedam> [>].
Ronald: <Schiedam> [<].
fieldworker: hoe bedoel je al je cd's zijn lusu.
Ronald: zijn we:g.
fieldworker: oh!
Romano: uitgeleend.

[Sranan in bold]

Ronald: *all my cds are **lusu**. I only have Gabian, Undrufini, Dimension, Dimension.*
Romano: *which Dimension. the new one?*
Vincent: *xx.*
fieldworker: *what do you mean all your xx?*
Ronald: *xx what did you say?*
fieldworker: *what did you say? all your cds are **lusu**?*
Ronald: *yes?*
fieldworker: *oh!*
Ronald: *don't come and ask what **lusu** means.*
fieldworker: *I ask about it because I really don't know (she is laughing)*
Romano: *don't you know what it means?*
fieldworker: *no.*
fieldworker: *all his cds are **lusu**.*
Romano: *where do you live?*
fieldworker: *in <Schiedam> [>].*
Ronald: *<Schiedam> [<].*
fieldworker: *what do you mean all your cds are **lusu**.*
Ronald: *are gone.*
fieldworker: *oh!*
Romano: *lent.*

The friends' reactions to the fieldworker like "what did you say?" "don't come and ask what means lusu" and "don't you know what it means?" clearly bring about that they consider her as an anomaly: her behavior is in conflict with their idea of what it means to be Surinamese. The unmarked category membership of being Surinamese is to know the right words. Dealing with the anomaly, the friends are left with several options. First, they could reject her status as Surinamese; that would leave the neat binary opposition Surinamese versus non-Surinamese intact but the ensuing othering of the fieldworker would be highly undesirable given their good relationship with her. Secondly, they could refrain from unambiguous categorization of the fieldworker, the strategy followed when dealing with the Sranan-speaking Dutchman described earlier above (Fragment (III) in Section 2). As this would also entail a denial, at least in part, of shared Surinamese identity,

this option seems ruled out. A third possibility is showing surprise and formulating a problem concerning her identity but not denying their shared Surinamese identity. To do this, they could make her anomalous behavior fit by downplaying features that normally define category membership. This could be achieved by redefining the category Surinamese in such a way as to accommodate for Surinamese not knowing the meaning of words from *straattaal*. Thus, a social category such as Surinamese, initially thought to be fixed and unproblematic, is in fact constantly subjected to discussion and evaluation (cf. Cutler 2003, Hewitt 1986, Sweetland 2002).

The fact that the fieldworker is seen as atypical is interesting because by examining what makes her anomalous, we are able to find out what norms are being reinforced. For the friends it is hard to imagine how she, a Creole Surinamese speaking Sranan, does not know about *lusu* and other Surinamese words. They try to figure out how this is possible. Romano's question "where do you live?" in (XX) above seems motivated by the idea that her not knowing has to do with living in a (geographical) place that is different from the place where they live. They construct the place where the friends live as dominantly Surinamese, first, by pointing out that although their neighborhood is actually quite mixed with Turks, Dutch, and Surinamese, "we (i.e. Surinamese) just took over the neighborhood":

(XXI)

fieldworker: maar wat voor mensen wonen hier, meeste zijn+..

Ronald: meeste zijn Turken, daarna komen. Hindoestanen beginnen ook een beetje te komen, maar Turken, <Surinamers en ja Nederlanders> [>].

Vincent: <maar ik ben blij dat er Surinamers zijn> [<].

Ronald: Nederlanders waren hier, we hebben het gewoon overgenomen de buurt.

fieldworker: *but what kind of people live here, most of them are*

Ronald: *most of them are Turks, then Hindustanis. Hindustanis start to come as well a little bit, but Turks, Surinamese and yes Dutchmen.*

Vincent: *but I am glad that there are Surinamese.*

Ronald: *Dutchmen were here but we just took over the neighbourhood.*

When the fieldworker echoes Romano's statement that "it's only Surinamese who live in this street", he himself nuances his categorical statement by saying that there is also a *Cabo* ('Capeverdean') living there (see Fragment (XXII)). Then, the fieldworker, using a question intonation, points out that she has seen a Turkish gentleman. Romano's reaction is interesting as he first asks the fieldworker to repeat her statement (line 5) and, then, after she has done so, qualifies and thereby justifies his earlier categorical statement by saying that "the youths are exclusively Surinamese" (line 7).

(XXII)

- 1 Romano: alleen alleen in deze straat wonen alleen maar Surinamers.
2 fieldworker: in deze straat wonen alleen maar Surinamers.
3 Romano: een Cabo.
4 fieldworker: ik heb ook een Turkse meneer gezien?
5 Romano: een?
6 fieldworker: een Turkse meneer?
7 Romano: xx de jongeren zijn alleen Surinamers. ja
- 1 *Romano: only Surinamese live in this street.*
2 *fieldworker: only Surinamese live in this street.*
3 *Romano: a Cabo [Capeverdian].*
4 *fieldworker: I also noticed a Turkish gentleman?*
5 *Romano: a?*
6 *fieldworker: a Turkish gentleman?*
7 *Romano: xx the youth is exclusively Surinamese. yeah.*

Thus the friends identify self and other using the categories Surinamese, youth and place, i.e., (young) Surinamese living in their street versus others living in another place. In this process of identity formation, the distinction Surinamese versus non-Surinamese becomes dominant through the erasure of distinctions within the group of non-Surinamese neighborhood dwellers: including Dutchmen, Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, either young or old.

The process of identity formation by assigning self/other is multi-layered, but, more importantly, the most fundamental layer of assigning self/other is not language or race but place. The interaction in (XXIII) is crucial in this respect. According to the group of friends as revealed in Fragment (XXIII), the use of *straattaal* or Sranan words in Dutch is associated with being Surinamese in nearby large cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The fieldworker, however, is Surinamese and also lives in an urban environment nearby, i.e. Schiedam, which is actually part of the Rotterdam urban agglomeration. The friends are confronted with the fieldworker whose behavior is in conflict with the idea that the unmarked category membership of being Surinamese is to know the right words. Fragment (XXIII) shows how they deal with this anomaly by redefining the category Surinamese in such a way as to accommodate for Surinamese not knowing the meaning of words from *straattaal*.

(XXIII) [Interview November 4, 2002 discussing the use of Sranan words]

- Vincent: je woont zeker diep in Schiedam?
fieldworker: hoezo?
Romano: omdat je de woorden niet ken.

- fieldworker: dus je wil zeggen dat iedereen zo kan praten?
 Vincent: iedereen in Rotterdam, Amsterdam.
 Gerard: heb je daar dan nooit over 'straattaal' gehoord?
 Vincent: het is echt voor het eerst dat ik een Surinamer zie die het niet kan.
 Gerard: ik zou denken dat je uit Groningen, Leeuwarden kom. Schiedam is nog te dichtbij.
- Vincent: you must be living [somewhere] deep in Schiedam.*
fieldworker: why?
Romano: because you don't know the words.
fieldworker: so, you're saying that everyone knows how to talk like that?
Vincent: everyone in Rotterdam, Amsterdam.
Gerard: have you never heard about 'straattaal' over there?
Vincent: this is really the first time I meet a Surinamese who doesn't know how to do it [speaking street language].
Gerard: I would think you're from Groningen, Leeuwarden. Schiedam is too nearby.

First, the exchange in (XXIII) shows that the Surinamese youngsters can hardly believe that the fieldworker who lives in Schiedam, a municipality bordering on Rotterdam city, does not know any *straattaal*. Vincent's asking if she lives "deep in Schiedam", i.e. as far away as possible from Rotterdam, may be seen as a first attempt to explain this state of affairs by constructing an opposition in terms of proximity versus non-proximity between self as Surinamese youths speaking *straattaal* and the Surinamese fieldworker who does not. In doing so, he and his friends expect that urban Surinamese youngsters from Rotterdam and Amsterdam speak *straattaal*. In other words, *straattaal* as a speech practice produces and projects the speaker's Surinamese identity. The fact that the fieldworker lives nearby in Schiedam and does not speak *straattaal* remains problematic. It is solved by assuming that she must be living "deep in Schiedam" because "Schiedam is too nearby". Thus, in order to reason away this anomaly, the opposition between self and other by means of place is applied recursively (Gal & Irvine 1995), i.e., within the category Surinamese. Subsequently, a distinction is made between Surinamese who are like self, those who know what *lusu* means and live in the same place nearby, and Surinamese who are different, not knowing the meaning of *lusu* and living in a place located at a distance. In order to deal sufficiently with the fieldworker who is a young urban Surinamese woman, they construct the deepest layer in the processes of constructing self and other by supposing that only Surinamese in their urban proximity use *straattaal* and only Surinamese at the other end of The Netherlands in Groningen and Leeuwarden can be imagined not to know or speak *straattaal*. According to Baumann and Gingrich (2004: x–xi) segmentation as in Fragment (XXIII)

[...] works by context-dependent and hence sliding scales of selfings and otherings among parties conceived as formally equal. It thus allows fusions and fissions of identity/alterity in a highly context-sensitive manner, but is always subject to disputes about the right place of the apex. (Baumann & Gingrich 2004:x–xi)

In this process of selfing and othering, self and other are subject to redefinition throughout the interaction: self may shift from non-Dutch, thus including Surinamese, Antilleans, Moroccans, and Turks, to Surinamese, to the very local group of *straattaal* speaking Surinamese friends. The fission and fusion of these categories enables speakers to authenticate or denaturalize (Bucholtz & Hall 2005) groups and individuals as self or as other.

The ways in which local interactions order the relationships between self and other show that claims of the group of friends to a collective identity are inevitably tied to the exclusion of others (Baumann 2004:18). Each attempt at segmentation brings about a process of exclusion, i.e. denial of group membership, and erasure by either foregrounding or downplaying specific categorical distinctions. The segmentary move distinguishing Surinamese from non-Surinamese and associating Surinamese with one place (own street) erases the ethnic mix of the street and erases potential ethnic distinctions between non-Surinamese living in the same street. Another segmentary move makes a distinction between Surinamese “knowing *lusu*”, who belong to the category of self, and those who do not, who are thus othered. The process of segmenting, then, is a dynamic one in which self and other are constantly redefined depending on the discursive context speakers are in. This is evident where the friends complicate the process of selfing and othering by the recursive use of place in terms of (non-)proximity by means of which the fieldworker is othered at the deepest layer of segmentation, with the least possible distance between self and other within the category Surinamese. The analysis also shows that the segmenting strategy, and the processes of denaturalization and authorization relying on it, make use of place when other social or linguistic categories that could index shared identity can no longer be successfully deployed. This is perhaps not very surprising given that physical or geographical distance can easily be understood as standing for social distance.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The classical paradigm in sociolinguistics, which some have characterized as a sociolinguistics of communities (Pratt 1987, Patrick 2002) rests on the assumption that there are more or less fixed links between specific language varieties and specific (sub)communities. Speakers, under this assumption, are first and foremost

members of a group, sharing a more or less stable set of norms and values, cultural and linguistic. In recent decades, many of us have come to realize that when dealing with societies affected by ongoing immigration such an approach to linguistic variation seriously restricts our understanding of how local variation, in the form of styling, is involved in the production of novel meanings. Instead of a linguistics of communities, Pratt (1987) argues we need to imagine a linguistics of contact,

[...] a linguistics that decentered community, that placed at its centre the operation of language across lines of social differentiation, a linguistics that focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages, that focused on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language. (Pratt 1987:60)

A greater emphasis on this type of research will make us more sensitive to the often grossly essentializing ways in which certain speakers are classified as members of certain groups on the sole basis of certain linguistic characteristics (Cornips, Jaspers & de Rooij to appear).¹³ Shifting and multiple group membership, let alone ambiguous or uncertain group membership have no place in the classical model. And yet, multiple, shifting, and ambiguous identities are the hallmark of human social life, especially in contemporary societies. Enhancing our understanding of how language use in processes of social (dis)identification works, and bringing our research results to the general public may help to change the simplistic essentializing way of thinking and talking that is characteristic of public debate in Western Europe and elsewhere.

The group of friends we have been looking at in this paper is a good example of a group which a sociolinguistics of community would have a hard time dealing with. Although they self-identify as Surinamese, as outsiders would probably also do, their Surinamese identity is highly flexible and in no way uncontested. Because of their lack of proficiency in Sranan, the heritage language of Creole Surinamese Dutch, they feel compelled to authenticate their Surinameseness by naturalizing the link between speaking *straattaal* and being Surinamese. This cannot be done without creating an opposition between a Dutch other who cannot be an authentic speaker of *straattaal* and a self that apart from Surinamese may include other minorities, notably Antilleans and sometimes also Moroccans.

13. It would be interesting to start studying youth language and youth culture at the age of 4 to 6 when children are starting their school careers and have to build social relations with relative strangers from different social backgrounds which has not been done in the Netherlands. It is there that 'contact' really takes on dramatic (in more than one sense of the word) forms and necessitates the kind of social (des)identification explained in the article.

This case study also points to the danger inherent in working with the concept of ethnolect, which seems all too often to rely on the idea that there is a stable link between ethnic group X and ethnolect X. In real life, speakers subvert mainstream categories and constantly define and redefine social categories in processes of selfing and othering (cf. Auer & Dirim 2003, Bucholtz 1999, Cornips & Nortier 2008, Cutler 2003, 2008, Hewitt 1986, Hill 1999, Jaspers 2005, 2008, Rampton 1999, 2005 [1995], Sweetland 2002). These processes require extra work as language contact and language mixing increase and speakers increasingly take part in transidiomatic practices (Jacquemet 2005) working with widely varying linguistic repertoires (Blommaert 2003: 608). The world may have become more complex linguistically, allowing much more space for linguistic hybridity, but this does not mean that users of new hybridized ways of speaking have stopped thinking in terms of stable (ethno-)linguistic categories and no longer have strong feelings of what they consider to be linguistically theirs.

In the processes of selfing and othering, the friends rely on what Baumann (2004) has called the grammars of segmentation and orientalization but not on the grammar of encompassment, which may not be very surprising since the latter can only be used routinely by members of a dominant group with a stable identity encompassing others more or less against their will. Baumann's grammars of identity/alterity were primarily meant to be used as heuristic devices. His heuristic concepts as well as Gal and Irvine's (1995) principles of recursivity, iconicity, and erasure, which we have all deployed in the analysis, can be fruitfully integrated in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach to identity.

In the various productions of self versus other that we have looked at, it is interesting to note that speakers rely on categories of place, race, and language that are more often than not interlinked. Applying the grammar of segmentation, the other is constructed and presented as not speaking *straattaal*, the language of self, and if s/he does, then s/he is described as an inauthentic, "fake" version of the self. Interestingly, a Dutchman speaking Surinamese/*straattaal* and whom the youngsters know, is accepted as a legitimate, authentic speaker because this Dutchman remains true to himself, i.e. he does not wish to become like them. However, other Dutchmen speaking 'straattaal' are seen not only as inauthentic speakers of that language variety but at the same time as people who try, in vain, to be *neger*. Using a racial category to base the opposition between self and other on, is a very robust criterion ensuring that white Dutchmen cannot lay claim on something the friends see as theirs. Self-identification in terms of *neger* is also crucial in understanding the friends' ambiguous identification with Antilleans, who are also "black" and authentic speakers of *straattaal*. The question of who is entitled to call themselves authentic speakers of specific language varieties, in particular hybridized ones, will always be an issue. Like the young men in this study, people will base claims

of authentic speakership on categories of race, or belonging to a particular territory (in the case of the speakers in this study, the micro-territory of the neighborhood). The mobilization of race and (belonging to a) place are both interesting: in the Netherlands and most other Western European countries, race has become a taboo subject in public debate after World War II. While race and racism may be marginal topics in public discourses, they surely play a much more important role in many popular debates. It would, therefore, be very important to stimulate more research in Western Europe that would investigate the mobilization of race in language practices, among elites and non-elites, to better understand how racial differences are constructed and used in processes of disidentification.

The relevance of place, or belonging to a specific place, is the most unexpected and interesting finding of this study. In Dutch society, the dominant classificatory schema *allochthon/autochthon* is wholly based on the idea of belonging to a specific place or not. The force of the Dutch dominant *autochthon* (from here) – *allochthon* (from elsewhere) binary schema may be so great that even those branded as *allochthons* may have internalized it and started applying it in processes of selfing and othering. This study, focusing on how a non-dominant group in Dutch society identifies self and other, clearly shows that, if identification through other social categories bogs down, one can fall back on place as a last resort to construct self and other.

Even as we have come to accept the phenomenon of deterritorialized language practices (cf. Jacquemet 2005, Blommaert 2003) we should realize that speakers still inhabit physical places with others and that place as an *emic* category defining identity is extremely relevant in sociolinguistic research.

Abbreviations

3	Third person
inf	Infinitive
MBO	Intermediate vocational education
nom	Nominative
pl	Plural
SOV	Subject–object–verb
SVO	Subject–verb–object
VMBO	Preparatory vocational education

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Appendix

Key to transcription

?	question intonation
x	unclear syllable
<>	stressing of a string of words
/	repetition
+	the completion of an utterance after an interruption
[/]	treatment of the words as a series of attempts to repeat the single word
!	the end of an imperative or emphatic utterance