

Chapter 6

Translanguaging in the Multilingual Montreal Hip-Hop Community: Everyday Poetics as Counter to the Myths of the Monolingual Classroom

Bronwen Low and Mela Sarkar

Abstract This chapter explores the possibilities multilingual hip-hop offers for language instruction within multiethnic classrooms in Montreal shaped by multiple discursive practices. The authors review current research on multilingualism and teaching and propose strategies for overcoming the French prescriptivist monolingual mindset in education in Quebec. They also turn to poetics, and in particular the literary theory of Edouard Glissant (Caribbean discourse, 1989; Poetics of relation, 1997) and the Martinican school of *Créolité*, offering possibilities for rethinking relationships between oral and written, vernacular and standard language forms and for igniting language teachers' pedagogic imaginations.

Keywords Hip-hop · Creolization · Oraliture · Popular culture

6.1 Montreal and Parler Multilingue/Parler Hip-Hop

Lou Piensa: Si le langage Hip Hop Québécois existe, il est composé de quoi?

Ken-Lo: Y'est composé de part de l'immigration pêle-mêle man, des voyages, des témoignages de voyages...

[Lou Piensa: If a Quebec Hip Hop language exists, what is it made up of?

Ken-Lo: It's made up in part by the jumble of immigration, man, trips, travel tales]

(Ken-Lo interview by Lou Piensa, April 2010)

My language attempts to take shape at the edge of writing and speech. (Glissant 1989, p. 147)

B. Low (✉) · M. Sarkar

Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), McGill University,

Education Building, 3700 McTavish Street,

H3A 1Y2, Montreal, QC, Canada

e-mail: bronwen.low@mcgill.ca

M. Sarkar

e-mail: mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca

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Since its French colonial origins in the seventeenth century, Montreal has been a site of complex, often contested relationships among speakers of different linguistic origins.¹ Since 2012, Montreal has been the hub of an urban area of about four million people and the largest metropolis in the Canadian province of Quebec. Two centuries of historical jockeying for position, from about 1760 to 1960, between speakers of French (always numerically stronger²) and the previously economically dominant English and Scots, has in recent decades been augmented by new waves of immigrants from all over the world. Added to older waves of mostly southern and eastern Europeans, their far-flung languages and cultures of origin have made present-day Montreal an exciting, if far from simple, place to experience “linguaging” of many kinds. The perpetual otherness and diversity of tongues or voices encapsulated in the term “heteroglossia”; the boundary crossing implied by “translinguaging”—these are part and parcel of daily living and speaking in downtown Montreal. It is commonplace to hear locals declare that “you can’t open your mouth to speak in public in Montreal without making a political statement”—that is, by virtue of the language(s) you choose to speak.

Hip-hop, as a youth social movement and cultural/linguistic phenomenon, came into this fertile ground for heteroglossic mixing in the 1970s. The geographic proximity of New York City, only a day’s drive away, and the coming and going of immigrants from many parts of the Caribbean across the Canadian-American border as they looked for better economic opportunities, meant the early incursion of hip-hop-identified uses of language into Montreal youth communities, which at first looked only southward for rap models. With the advent of 1990s, European French rappers began to have an influence on Quebec rappers. Constant immigration from former French colonies in sub-Saharan West Africa and the Northern African Maghreb, from Haiti, and from France itself meant that local hip-hop in Quebec soon took on a multilingual character (Laabidi 2006). Our research team is based at the McGill University in Montreal, itself an English-speaking enclave within an officially French city, which is nevertheless actually a diverse multilingual conurbation within a resolutely French-dominant province. We began to look

¹ The physical location of Montreal has been inhabited for many thousands of years. Until the arrival of European settlers in the sixteenth century, the inhabitants of this area were mostly speakers of Iroquoian languages. To this day, there is linguistic and political tension between Kanien’keha (Mohawk) communities and the municipalities they are contiguous within the *Région métropolitaine de Montréal* (RMR). A full discussion of the pertinent Indigenous language issues lies outside the scope of this chapter (but see Drapeau 2011).

² Historically, Quebec has always been the only majority-French-speaking province in Canada. The population claiming French as their mother tongue has never been less than 80% (of roughly seven and a half million as of the 2006 census, the most recent one for which language figures are available (Statistics Canada 2012)). However, the city of Montreal is much more linguistically diverse than the still largely French-monolingual, much less cosmopolitan “regions” of Quebec. Recent demographic trends show the historical French-speaking majority gradually being encroached upon by speakers, not only of English, but of many other languages of more recent arrival such as Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Spanish as well as the older Italian or Greek (Ville de Montréal 2010).

at the nature of multilingual mixing in Montreal rap in 2001, focussing first on what we were then calling code-switching in the groundbreaking linguistically mixed rap lyrics produced from 1999 on (Sarkar et al. 2007; Sarkar and Winer 2006). This mixing is not only a maker of a Montreal rap style but also found elsewhere in the province. We recognize that the multilingual mixing we have been documenting in Quebec rap lyrics per se is a mirror, or a particularly strong distillation, of the kind of heteroglossic mixing common in wider Quebec and especially Montreal society. This wider scale phenomenon has been termed by the Université de Montréal researcher Patricia Lamarre *parler bilingue* or *parler multilingue* (2012), an appropriately local French stylistic device that enables us to now avoid the baggage of a term like “codeswitching,” with its implications of separate, hived-off languages and speech communities.

In the latest phase of our research on the Montreal and Quebec multilingual hip-hop communities, two rappers from a Montreal-based hip-hop collective entitled Nomadic Massive joined our team, analyzing lyrics and conducting interviews with hip-hop artists and fans (Winer et al. 2010). We have also been investigating, through interviews, the rap group Muzion member J-Kyll’s claim that “en général, on chante, on rap comme on parle” (“in general, we sing, we rap like we speak”). With 11 members of multiple ethnicities and nationalities, Nomadic Massive regularly mixes five languages in their lyrics. The recent interviews conducted for us by Louis Dufieux (MC Lou Piensa) and Nantali Indongo (MC I am Black Girl) explore more deeply some of the dynamics and contexts for code-switching in Quebec hip-hop, all the while enacting their themes as form mirrors content. For instance, Lou Piensa’s questions switch seamlessly back and forth between French and English, as do the responses from the rappers he interviewed. So natural is this way of speaking to these hip-hop artists that even when being interviewed (mostly in French) by an English-dominant academic researcher, our teammate Lise Winer, rapper Webster describes how he first came to know about hip-hop (and relatedly, to learn English) in a fluidly mixed idiom:

J’avais mon cousin Frankie qui [‘I had my cousin Frankie who’], regularly, he would go to the States and he would bring back some tapes pis une des cassettes qui m’a vraiment marqué, c’était EPMD, leur premier album. Dans le temps c’était des singles qui sortaient, je me rappelle plus c’était quel single [‘and one of the tapes that really impressed me was EPMD, their first album. Back then it was singles coming out, I don’t remember any more which one’] but anyways...it really struck me. (Webster interview by Lise Winer, December 2009)

All of the artists interviewed describe learning English in part through US rap music (and in some instances of having to unlearn some US English colloquialisms when attending an English class in Montreal), as family members and mixtapes acted as conduits to the US scene. The language of US rap, which blends African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Hip-Hop Nation Language (HHNL) (Alim 2009), as well as that of European French rap, with its specialized *argot* and *verlan*, are the earliest influences on what MC Webster calls the “parler hip-hop” in Quebec. Haitian Creole, Spanish, Arabic, and other languages of immigrant populations then get folded into the mix. In these interviews, one artist to another, as they speak

about their creative histories and presents, Lou and his interviewees theorize the multilingual poetics of contemporary Quebec both explicitly in the content of their exchanges and implicitly in the translanguaging practices that characterize their conversations.

In the field of education where we work, most scholarship attentive to popular culture tries to build bridges between the popular cultural capital of young people and the school curriculum, in the interests of student engagement and learning (Hull and Schultz 2002; Alvermann et al. 1999). In contrast, our studies to date of the multilingual Montreal hip-hop community (Low et al. 2009; Sarkar 2009) have investigated what we can learn from hip-hop more generally. The possibility of classroom applications has only recently entered our work. We assume that distinctions between the popular and mainstream are fluid and transitional and that youth can be the vanguard of both cultural and linguistic change, which means that youth popular culture both drives and reflects changes to the larger culture and language. Through our studies of Quebec hip-hop, we seek to better understand changing forms of language, sets of communicative conditions and relations, and in turn, models of political action and community.

Along with the pleasures of studying the language practices of young Montrealers in all of their subversive playfulness, we also recognize that these can come crashing into the French-only language regimes of schooling in Quebec. In a radio feature on CBC's *All in a Weekend* called "Beyond Franglais" about code-switching in Montreal, Nantali Indongo (MC I am Black Girl) describes walking into a classroom in which two students, one whose family was from Haiti and the other from St. Vincent, were having a dispute about how you pronounce an Arabic word for "let's go"—*yalla* (a term now included in <http://www.urbandictionary.com>). In the segment, she speaks with youth at a local multilingual French public school about language mixing. The students said that they feel their love of switching, including language crossing, "shows that we have a lot of culture and that we're accepting of other nationalities." However, they also describe how their parents and teachers see this switching as worrisome, something to critique and correct, and a real impediment to mastery of French. As one young woman put it, "our teachers think, if we keep talking the way we talk, *on s'améliore pas* (we won't improve ourselves)." Particularly worrisome, it seems, to teachers is code-shifting in writing.³

In response, we explore in this chapter some of the tensions between these very different philosophies of language and learning, proposing what we feel would be more pedagogically productive relationships. Our vision is shaped by conversations between Quebec rap artists, as well as by the poetics of creolization of poet-critic *Martiniquais* Edouard Glissant. We draw upon Glissant's poetic and cultural theory to bring new vocabulary and frameworks into the conversation about multilingual identities, practices, and possibilities.

³ This finding from our interviews resonates in interesting ways with the recent work on translanguaging in academic writing by Canagarajah (2011).

6.2 (Hip-Hop) Language Studies, Popular Culture, and Education

Our specific interest in the multilingual rap lyrics and the speech practices of hip-hop-identified youth in Quebec has been in conversation with the work of other hip-hop sociolinguists around the globe. As we argue elsewhere (Sarkar and Low 2012), the field of hip-hop and language studies has been the site of the richest reflection on multilingualism in popular culture, a point also noted by Pennycook (2010), who posits a complex and non-obvious relation between popular culture and national identity, particularly striking in the case of hip-hop popular culture. Scholars outside the hip-hop and applied linguistics field do not seem to have noticed the potential for theorizing the inherent culture in the heteroglossic nature of so much current popular culture production worldwide.⁴ The reasons for this academic neglect are manifold, but seem to us to be driven mainly by the monolingual mind-set shaping a good deal of scholarship on both language and popular culture produced in disproportionately influential English-speaking North America (Sarkar and Low 2012). The international community of hip-hop language scholars takes multilingualism as a normal, while complex, state of affairs and object of inquiry, interested in, for example, the localization of English attendant upon hip-hop's global spread (Pennycook 2003, 2007, 2010) as well as the ways in which local language practices—such as tonally based Cantonese rhyming patterns (Lin 2009) or pre-existing language mingling among African languages (Higgins 2009)—transmute hip-hop from the (local) ground up. The 2009 edited volume, in which these two examples appear (Alim et al. 2009), and another edited volume that appeared the following year (Terkourafi 2010) are rich compendia of research-grounded information showing the potential of hip-hop to transform educational praxis “glocally” both implicitly and explicitly.

6.2.1 *From Code-Switching to Heteroglossia/Translanguaging (etc.): Terminological Profusion*

Barely 20 years have gone by since the beginning of the rapid rise of hip-hop studies, starting with Tricia Rose's groundbreaking *Black Noise* (1994), and the subsequent spillover into applied linguistics “proper” (in several senses) and then, as discussed above, into critical sociolinguistics and critical pedagogy, where we situate ourselves—along with, for example, H. Samy Alim, who advocates the use of “Critical Hip-Hop Language Pedagogies” in US schools (2009). Perhaps not coincidentally, this period has also seen a groundswell in academic dissension over the term “code-switching” as a useful label for what happens when speakers do not restrict themselves to one (as defined by the dictionary) “language.” Disagreements

⁴ The runaway nature of globalized English certainly is heavily implicated in this phenomenon, but it's only part of the story (Pennycook 2007).

about the nature of the object of study within the ranks of well-known older established researchers on code-switching (Gardner-Chloros and Edwards 2004; Myers-Scotton 2006; Poplack 2004) have, for some time, been eclipsed, in our opinion, by even more fundamental shake-ups questioning the very existence of language boundaries at all (Makoni and Pennycook 2007).

Researchers who formerly would have talked confidently about “code-switching” now may feel obliged to enclose the term in scare quotes, as we do here; to apologize for it; to eschew it altogether; and, most exciting of all, to devote entire volumes (such as the present one) to proposals for alternate ways of looking at this age-old, universally attested human phenomenon. A profusion of terms now exists to, first, simply describe, and, second, use as aids to theorizing non-monolingual language use⁵ by one or several speakers, or by a community of speakers, as the norm. From the “multicompetence” put forward by Cook in the 1990s, through various language-policy-derived attempts to deal with increasingly diverse populations—multilingualism, plurilingualism (the official government term here in Quebec)—to more experimental and less widely known, but theoretically exciting terms such as “polylingual languaging” (Jørgensen 2008), “translingual activism” (Pennycook 2006), and, of course, “translanguaging,” as adopted by García et al. 2007 (from Cen Williams’ Welsh *trawysieithu*) or the current reworking of Bakhtinian “heteroglossia” (Bailey 2012; Creese and Blackledge, this volume), there is ample evidence of a deeply felt need to go beyond the code-switched binary. In the welter of Classical glosses—multi, pluri (Latin), poly, hetero (Greek)—it is a relief to find researchers who prefer locally grounded labels (Canagarajah’s *code-meshing* 2006); Rampton’s UK English *crossing* 1995; Rampton and Charalambous 2012); Lamarre’s Quebec French *parler multilingue* (2011). But even these more reader-friendly concepts are, upon analysis, as theoretically complex as the competition. As Canagarajah and Liyanage say with perhaps a hint of despairing irony, “we have to develop a better articulation between theorizations...” (2012, p. 62). We agree but will not attempt to do it here. Rather, we will turn to the words of Quebec rappers, as used by them in interviews and lyrics, to try to get a sense of the depth and breadth of linguistic creativity that lies beneath this academic astonishment at how complex it all is. And to further complicate matters, we will throw even more conceptual vocabulary into the mix of theorizations, as we are convinced that Glissant’s writing on creolization, “language,” and orature has important implications for understanding multilingual possibilities and futures, mostly overlooked by language and literacy theorists (an important exception is Pennycook (2010), who, in his discussion of the “circles of linguistic flow” (French as well as English), draws on Glissant’s theorizing about the ways French is rapidly evolving as a result of creolization and *métissage*).⁶

⁵ It is of course very difficult, when attempting to reverse an established habit of reference in speech, to refer to the thing being discussed at all. An analogy could be made in the unrelated area of studies of sexual orientation; if queer theorists were to insist on referring to a certain kind of sexual preference as “non-monosexual,” we would know what they meant, but we would likely find the wording awkward. An interesting and courageous attempt in a similar direction was made by Hofstadter (1990).

⁶ “...there are several French languages today...French can no longer be monolingual...If language is given in advance...it misses out on the adventure” (Glissant 1997, cited in Pennycook 2010, pp. 69–70).

6.2.2 *Language Mixing in Quebec: “It’s Made Up in Part by the Jumble of Immigration, Man, Trips, Travel Tales”*

6.2.2.1 **Playing with a Well-Established Local Tradition**

Why is linguistic mixing such a feature of rap in Montreal, and, to a lesser degree, other parts of the province? Such mixing has been documented in other kinds of Quebec musical production since the 1970s, but not before (Grenier and Guilbault 1997; Ransom 2011) and is very much frowned upon in ordinary non-musical language by the French language purists who make up so notable a feature of the Quebec linguistic landscape (Bertrand 1999, 2006; Bouchard 2012; Gervais 2012). There are, arguably, more trilinguals in Montreal than anywhere else in North America, due to language-in-education policies which have, since the late 1970s, made French the mandatory language of instruction for all children, irrespective of ethnic or linguistic background, whose parents were not schooled in English in Canada at primary level (Oakes and Warren 2007). Surprisingly, as we found in our data collection, in the even more multiculturally diverse Canadian city of Toronto wherein there are as many or more bilingual (if perhaps not *trilingual*) speakers, there is much less code-switching in rap lyrics (Tan et al. 2009). While some Toronto rappers with ties to the Caribbean, such as Kardinall Offishall, JDiggz, and Rochester, make creole references, these are not nearly as common as in Montreal. There are a number of possible explanations. First, the rap scene in Toronto is English based, which means that Toronto rappers can hope to get signed by a prominent US music label serving English-speaking audiences. Quebec rappers whose base language is French tend to seek out more local as well as international audiences, shut out from the major scene to the south. As well, because of the historical, and uneasy, relationship between French and English in Quebec, mixing between the two languages has long been a significant and controversial feature of popular discourse, as has the relationship between Quebec standard and non-standard French, including *joual* (a heavily loaded label covering much non-standard French use in Quebec).

The highly charged sociolinguistic context of Quebec, in which the promotion and maintenance of French as the language of public life is the central tenet of the Quebec nationalist project, brings with it a heightened interest in and awareness of linguistic questions and politics. Take, for instance, these lyrics from Montreal rapper Sans Pression:

Mon *beef* avec les **fakes**, c’est comme l’FLQ pis l’Canada, Yo, 5–1–4, *joual* en partant,
 Dans mon son, dans mon accent, j’ai ça dans l’sang,
Dat’s right, j’ parle **franglais** même quand j’ai pas l’*mic*
 Le côté sombre de Montréal, yo sors ta *flashlight*.⁷
 (Sans Pression 2003,
 « Cimetière des CDs », *Réplique aux offusqués*)

⁷ (“My beef with fakes is like the FLQ’s with Canada, yo, 5–1–4, *joual* from the start/ In my sound, in my accent, I’ve got it in my blood/ *Dat’s right*, I speak *franglais* even without a mic/ The dark side of Montreal, yo get out your flashlight”).

Here Sans Pression, through his overt use of the term “Franglais” (used in Quebec for many decades, but usually to disparage local language use characterized by heavy borrowing and mixing of English into French), claims ownership and pride in its use. He also makes a cultural reference that grounds the text in Quebec politics and historical French-English, separatist-federalist tensions (FLQ = *Front de libération du Québec*, famous for violent protests throughout the 1960s, including terrorist attacks, bombings, and, culminating in 1970, a murder (Haque 2012)) and uses the word *joual*.

In our analyses of lyrics, our initial data set made up of the complete lyrics from two 1999 CD releases (Sarkar and Winer 2006) led us to make certain coding decisions from the outset. We began by coding for Standard Quebec French, Non-standard Quebec French, European French, Standard North American English, AAVE, HHNL, Haitian Creole, Jamaican Creole, and Spanish. As our data set expanded, so did our codes, to include French hip-hop language (including verlan—French “backward” or inverse slang—and argot, see Calvet 1994), Arabic, Wolof, and Swahili. However, as we have moved toward a more heteroglossically oriented, “translanguaging” position in our interpretation of mixed language use, the rather rigidly defined categories we started out with have come to seem less appropriate. In one typical example, “Zacts Slicks,” Haitian-Montreal crew Rainmen moves between English, Quebec French and *joual*, Haitian Creole, Franglais, AAVE, HHNL, Jamaican Creole, verlan, and their own lexical inventions which we now code simply as “Rainmen.” This rap crew, one of the first to go public with mixed-language lyrics in the mid-1990s, and still active on the Montreal scene over 10 years later, are known for their unique linguistic identity, which comes through clearly here in a typical “gangsta” lyric, although it is not about language at all. For instance, Rainmen calls girls “grels,” reworking a French (slightly archaic) derogatory term for a stupid woman, “greluche.” In this verse from “Zacts Slicks” (a verlan-inspired play on Slick Acts), they move between French, Haitian Creole, *joual*, and English:

Garde ton kob sâle stash kek part
 Les flics sâles essaient d’nous lock kekpart
 Y a un U-C qui s’cache kekpart
 Ou un snitch avec un cable su’l’chest
 Zacts slicks.⁸
 (Rainmen 2006, “Zacts Slicks”, *Bi’ne\$\$ Legal*)

Interviews conducted for this project by Nomadic Massive rapper/project researcher Lou Piensa, with Quebec rappers Beyondah and Cotola from Metazon, Ken-Lo, and Webster, make clear that in their lyrics the artists are exploring aspects of their sociolinguistic realities. Part French-Canadian and part Senegalese, Webster raps principally in French and English, but has started introducing some Wolof words into his lyrics. He describes the ways he and his friends usually mix languages:

⁸ (“Keep your dirty money stashed away somewhere/ The dirty cops are trying to lock us up somewhere/ There’s an underground cop hiding somewhere/ Or a snitch with a wire on his chest/ Slick acts”).

Avec mes amis c'est vraiment du n'importe quoi. On pige partout, anglais, français, même verlan des fois. T'sé, on déconne beaucoup aussi et je dirais on a une manière de parler qui est un peu différente du reste des gens du fait qu'on coupe beaucoup les mots.⁹
(Webster interview by Lise Winer, December 2009)

As Webster notes at the end, he and his friends not only grab words from different languages but also have developed their own speech style, where they clip the ends of their words in phrases, saying: “Au lieu de [‘Instead of’] ‘What’s the deal,’ on dit [‘we say’] ‘Wha’the’d,’ ‘Hey yo, wha’the’d? Ah trank! ‘trank, c’est ‘tranquille.’”

Cotola, who raps principally in French, Spanish, and English, also cites the way he speaks as the basis for his artistic choices. When Lou asks: “When are you like: ‘I’m’a put some English in here’... what is the reasoning behind your whole structure?”, Cotola responds:

The reasoning is the realness. How I would speak it. How I speak naturally with my friends.... When you live in Montreal and you’ve been around people that I’ve been in contact with, it always used to be, like, French, English, Spanish and Creole... it’s like having a gumbo soup of different elements in it and at the end it tastes different, you know?... It’s ‘cause of the city we live in. We speak like that.
(Cotola interview by Lou Piensa, March, 2010)

This feeling of “naturalness” is confirmed by Cotola’s partner Beyondah, who claims:

C’est naturel parce que constamment, quand on parle le slang à Montreal, on mélange couramment dans une phrase le français, en anglais et pis woop, tsé y a un slang, un créole qui va slide, tu comprends?¹⁰
(Beyondah interview by Lou Piensa, February, 2010)

This swooping and sliding of words from different languages or registers into the “slang” in Montreal suggests the movement and energy of the ways language is lived in urban Quebec neighborhoods.

Recent sociological and sociolinguistic work on Montreal’s *nouvelle francophonie*, whose identities and language practices are shaped by local immigration and language policies as well as global processes, also supports the rappers’ sense that their dynamic code-shifting is part of a larger generational shift in attitudes toward multilingualism (see, for example, the special issue of *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 34, p. 3, (2002), on “the new French fact in Montreal: francization, diversity, globalization,” as well as Meintel 1992). Lamarre et al. (2002) describe the “appreciable linguistic adaptability of many young Montrealers and their extremely varied language practices,” which include, for instance, “trilingual codeswitching, not so much for negotiating language use, but rather to express plural identities and ties to many social networks” as well as “changing attitudes toward the maintenance of a minority language among young Allophones related to transnationalism

⁹ (“With my friends really anything goes. We dip in anywhere, English, French, even verlan sometimes. You know, we goof around a lot, too, and I’d say that we have a way of talking that’s a bit different from other people’s because we clip words a lot.”).

¹⁰ (“It’s natural, because constantly, when you talk slang in Montreal, you mix English and French fluently in one sentence, and woops, there’s a bit of slang, of Creole that slides in, you get it?”).

and globalization” (n.p). However, Lamarre (2012) also notes that in the contexts she has studied, this code-switching is less frequent, more closely tied to specific contexts, than in the rap lyrics we have been studying.

In this sense, we might think of these rap lyrics as performative and poetic extensions and expansions of everyday speech practices. J-Kyll reminds us of this when she describes the verbal artistry and play which also shape her writing process:

Mais si tu veux t’amuser après avec le slang, t’amuser avec les mots avec le flow, même t’amuser avec l’accent... ça peut très bien arriver que j’arrive pis que je fasse un verse en joual. Pourtant moi quand je parle, je parle pas tellement joual. Mais je peux vouloir artistiquement dans ma musique faire un verse en joual. Tout comme je peux faire un verse totalement en anglais alors que je parle pas vraiment totalement en anglais tout le temps. [“But after that if you want to have fun with slang, have fun with the words and the flow, even have fun with the accent...it can quite easily happen that I happen to do a verse in joual. However, when I talk, I don’t really use much joual. But artistically in my music I may want to do a verse in joual. Just as I may do a verse totally in English although I don’t really speak totally in English all the time.”] (Muzion interview by Mela Sarkar and Kobir Sarkar, June, 2004)

Here we see an example of hip-hop’s inventive, playful approach to language, in which whether one speaks a language or not is less important than what one *wants to do* with that language. J-Kyll draws upon all the languages that are available to her in her current context as raw materials for creative production. Although this kind of “borrowing” (or “crossing”—Rampton 1995) of words from languages one does not otherwise speak characterizes youth talk in many Montreal and Quebec neighborhoods, the rap lyrics exaggerate the practice. This artistic choice can also be a consciously political one, as in the case of fellow Muzion member Dramatik who describes the hybrid language of Montreal rap as “des artistes qui se décident à mettre la langue du peuple dans les textes” (“artists who decide to put the people’s language into their texts”).

6.2.2.2 Conflict Between These Practices and Education in QC

While this switching might seem natural to the rappers, it collides head-on with French language-in-education policies and French language pedagogical traditions and practices. Official Quebec Ministry of Education policy is heavily prescriptive (Lefrançois 2005), pushing for “good” French and the eradication from students’ (and teachers’) speech of *anglicismes*, *archaïsmes*, and *barbarismes*, all typical of local vernacular French (Bouchard 2012), a practice which does little to promote a sense of linguistic security. This prescriptive policy creates teacher anxiety and an atmosphere of hypercorrection, as many teachers become uncomfortable and anxious about their own local varieties of French. Nevertheless, *la norme orale*, despite the general brouhaha surrounding the need to improve it, remains elusive and undefined (Papen 2006).

The largest school board in Quebec, the Commission Scolaire de Montreal, which stretches across much of the island of Montreal, recently issued a policy statement solidifying what had until now been a widely accepted practice of insisting that French be the only language spoken at school, including between classes, in school

yards, and lunch rooms. In an article in *Le Devoir*, considered the most intellectual of Quebec's French-language daily newspapers, Université de Montréal professor Francoise Armand critiques this policy as supporting a reductive theory of language learning in which other languages are seen as impediments; in contrast, she argues for the cognitive and affective benefits of bilingualism and language transfer, citing the influential early work of Peal and Lambert (1962) on additive rather than subtractive bilingualism (Gervais 2012, retrieved on January 6, 2012, at <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/education/339523/l-ecole-100-francophone-un-raccourci-dangereux>). The comments from readers, many of them heated in the extreme, are evidence of deep anxieties about the spread of English (rather than of multilingualism per se, even though the article describes how, although over 50% of students are in fact francophone, 47% of the students enrolled at board schools have a home language that is neither English nor French, so essentially students are being told to keep Cantonese or Arabic or Farsi out of school, not English). These concerns about the dominance of English shape worries about code-switching more generally.

6.3 Pedagogical Possibilities

The conflict between how one speaks inside and outside of school shapes many sociolinguistic contexts, aggravated by cultural disconnects between school and home cultures, including racial, class, ethnic, and linguistic ones. Studies show that students are more likely to succeed in school if they are able to draw upon their social capital, including their communicative repertoires (Gee 2008). The challenge we face as researchers and educators concerned about high drop-out rates in the province, especially among racialized minority youth (many of whom make up the *nouvelle francophonie* generation we have been discussing), is how to build bridges between school and out-of-school practices. The students in Montreal schools are being taught to think of their speech practices, and in particular their exuberant code-switching, as at odds with effective French learning and written communication. And yet if these practices are considered as part of an exciting, and inevitable, explosion of languages and cultures in changing times, how might they be considered as pedagogic resources rather than impediments?

6.3.1 *Teacher Education (Professional Development and Preservice Teacher Education) About Language*

A key strategy involves teacher education at both the pre- and in-service levels. The popular position, evidenced in the angry responses to Armand's position discussed above, in which full immersion in the target language with no access to other languages is seen as the only way to learn language, seems widely held by French teachers in the province. As a result, it would be important to incorporate learning about the cognitive benefits of multilingualism (Grosjean 2010; Miller 1983) and the

important role played by home languages in the second and third language instructions (Cummins 2000; Sarkar 2005). In order to expand teachers' understanding and interest in language more generally, interrogating tacit and "common-sense" models of language learning and use, teacher education should include *éveil aux langues* or language awareness (Hélot and de Mejia 2008) and critical language awareness (Fairclough 1992) pedagogies. These can help combat deficit models of bi- and multilingual students who are learning the language of instruction. As well, explorations of sociolinguistic issues such as the ties between language, identity, and power can foster teachers' interest in how and why youth mobilize the linguistic codes at their disposal. Arming teachers with sociolinguistic insight might enable them to see the translanguaging found in hip-hop lyrics and youth speech as a unique and interesting feature of their students' linguistic repertoires rather than an affront.

We would also encourage teachers to teach language awareness to their students, as in Alim's work on critical hip-hop language awareness pedagogies (2009) in which he equips AAVE speakers with socio-linguistic and critical literacy knowledge, enabling them, for instance, to act as street lexicographers of "hip-hop nation language" and to understand processes of "linguistic profiling." Relevant to bi- and multilingualism, as with a number of the Quebec rappers we have interviewed, Ken-Lo describes how rap lyrics (as well as playing and watching basketball) were the basis of his learning English. In junior high, he realized that the colloquial English he had learned was not correct in a school context, prompting him to read in French and English in a spirit of discovery, which became the basis for his awareness that there are many versions of French and English:

Ken-Lo: ...ça m'a fait voir qu'il y a seulement différentes façons d'exprimer l'anglais, différentes façons d'exprimer le français pis éventuellement, j'ai commencé à apprendre la langue de mon père aussi, fait que ça m'a fait ouvrir encore cette notion de langage qui peut être perçue comme fermée mais qui en fait est comme...

Lou Piensa: ...t'ouvre sur d'autres choses...

Ken-Lo: Ouais c'est ça.¹¹

(Ken-Lo interview by Lou Piensa, April 2010)

Ken-Lo's growing language awareness led to his interest in learning Swahili, the language of his father's home country. To those who are worried about the influence of English, Ken-Lo says he would tell them that:

la langue est un accessoire, un instrument d'échange. Elle a un esprit aussi en tant que tel mais, cet esprit-là il est à notre guise là, tsé...je pense qu'apprendre une langue ça fait évoluer le cerveau...¹²

(Ken-Lo interview by Lou Piensa, April 2010)

¹¹ ("Ken-Lo: It makes me see that there are merely different ways of using English, different ways of using French, and eventually, I started learning my father's language too, so that this made me open up to this notion of language which can be perceived as closed but which actually is...")

Lou Piensa: opens you up to other things.

Ken-Lo : Yup, that's it."

¹² (language is an accessory, an instrument of exchange. It has a spirit in and of itself, but that spirit can be to our liking, you know...I think that learning a language makes the brain evolve...).

Teachers as well as youths in Quebec and elsewhere might very well learn ways of thinking about language from poets such as Ken-Lo, embracing an awareness of some of the multiple purposes of language as something to be used, made to suit our purposes, and which makes one smarter by opening one up to new things. Ken-Lo's attitude toward language also embodies what Dyson (2005) is naming the "new language arts basics."

Given the multiple languages and discourses that shape the worlds of most children, as well as the growing importance of respect and awareness of the politics and aesthetics of (multi)language use, Dyson (2005) calls for a literacy pedagogy which works to equip students with an ability to recognize and respond to the particulars of situation and event. She argues that children's writing processes in our multilingual times and contexts are naturally heteroglossic, and that we should think of children's writing development as a process of listening to, appropriating, and then revoicing the world around them. These new language arts basics should include "an ear for the diversity of everyday voices, a playful manipulation of—a flexibility with—those voices, and an alertness to opportunities for performance" (2005, p. 150). Such skills are very well embodied in the multilingual wordplay of Montreal rappers and youth. Fostering a "new language arts basics" in Montreal classrooms, with its emphasis on the ability to recognize and mobilize elements of the heteroglossia of everyday life, could encourage students to explore the ethnolinguistic diversity of their neighborhoods, and then try to capture some of the rich multilingualism (in standard and non-standard forms) of their discourse communities in speech and writing.

6.3.2 *The Poetics of Creolization*

These new basics make clear that grammatical correctness is not the only value in language education, and that schools might have something to learn from the quotidian literacy practices of street poets (e.g. Ken-Lo) such as how to develop an ear for and flexibility with language. Language awareness is only one piece of our pedagogic vision for new language arts basics in Quebec. The second is to think more poetically about literacy, inspired not only by the multilingual poetics of hip-hop but also of theorist and poet *Martiniquais* Glissant. His work, grounded in the French-speaking Caribbean, is particularly helpful in the context of Quebec, where at stake in language debates and policies is the use of the French language.

Glissant's major works, *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) and *Poetics of Relation* (1990), are so lyrical that they resist easy application, but offer a rich metaphorical vocabulary for thinking about the poetics of language in contemporary times. Glissant defines poetics broadly as "the implicit or explicit manipulation of *language*," differentiating (and opposing) *langage* (which Dash translates as "self-expression") from *langue* ("language"). Important *langues* in Glissant's Martinican context are French (the imposed colonial language) and creole (the dominated language), the raw materials for his idiomatic *langage*. Poetics is the art of self-expression in

language, and one of its central tenets is *creolization*, a key concept-metaphor for Glissant.

Glissant defines *creolization* in relation to *métissage*, also often used to describe hybrid cultural conditions:

If we posit *métissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time. Here [creolization] is devoted to what has burst from lands that are no longer islands. Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define. Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures. (1990, p. 34)

Creolization embodies one of its etymological roots, the Latin *creare* or to create. The Caribbean acts as one instance, perhaps even a paradigm, of advanced processes of creolization from which one can better understand the cultural mixes taking place elsewhere. This move from the specificities of the Caribbean to global processes is an important vector of Glissant's cultural model. Glissant's vision of creolization as a cultural process of meeting and diffraction, consequences unknown, aptly describes some of the vitality of youth scenes in multilingual environments such as Montreal; what if contemporary educational discourses were also drawing on this language of adventure and genius in their observations of vernacular linguistic changes?

One strategy of Glissant's that is particularly apt in a discussion of translanguaging is his linguistic *bricolage*. While Martinican Creole embodies the open-ended processes of creolization for Glissant, his *langage* draws on Creole but is not confined to it, since neither French nor Martinican Creole are adequate tools for self-expression—the former is the colonial tongue and the latter was forged through and in response to slavery. Glissant does not reject French, the language he speaks and writes so beautifully, nor Creole, but rather he insists:

Our aim is to forge for ourselves...based on the defective grasp of two languages whose control was never collectively mastered, a form of expression through which we could consciously face our ambiguities and fix ourselves firmly in the uncertain possibilities of the world made ours. (1989, p. 168)

While both *langues* are used in Martinique, they need to be consciously mobilized into a vital *langage*, an expression which creatively engages the context of its writing. One of his strategies is to forge French neologisms, compound words like *totalité-monde* and *chaos monde* or *agents d'éclats*. This resembles the lexical invention of Rainmen or of Webster and his friends. Glissant as well as other poets of creolization from the French-speaking Caribbean (Chamoiseau et al. 1990) take a radical stance toward language by claiming European languages as well as creoles as the raw materials for self-expression. They disregard the authority of the "standard" and instead borrow in the name of cultural production, national (or inter-Caribbean) self-determination, and the regeneration of language. This stance defies previously colonized peoples' continuing alienation from the official European languages by insisting on their right to all tongues. While many of the young people

in Montreal's "nouvelle francophonie" do not have a relationship to French and/or English that can neatly be described as colonized (although some might identify it this way), many of the lyrics we have been studying do embody a spirit of linguistic subversion, as rappers flatten and reorder dominant language hierarchies (Low et al. 2009). Their work might be productively studied in classrooms in relation to the literatures of peoples creatively grappling with the weight of languages that have been imposed and inherited.

Montreal rapper Ken-Lo speaks to the poetic and pragmatic functions (Sarkar and Winer 2006) of writing rap in several languages, noting, for instance, that "Du work dans plusieurs langues, ça ouvre les rimes infiniment."¹³ He also, however, describes the process in more spiritual terms, first invoking the image of "speaking in tongues" or spirit possession in the Pentecostal Church in order to explain what it is like to "grab un genre de [kind of] vibe" and then switch language or rhythm when rapping. He adds that this constitutes a kind of twisting and opening:

...tu vas juste comme... twist pis à c't'e moment-là tu peux t'ouvrir tsé, que ce soit mettons changer de langue ou changer de flow ou changer de beat ou changer de whatever, tsé, c'est juste ouvrir cet aspect-là; c'est sur que à la base, le fait de work dans plusieurs langues, ça ouvre les possibilités de connecter avec ces instants-là d'expression-là plus brute un peu... [*You just kind of... twist, and it's at that moment that you can open up, you know, whether by, say, changing the language or flow or beat or whatever, you know, it's just opening up that aspect; it's true that basically, the fact of working in multiple languages opens up the possibilities of connecting with these instances of raw expression a bit...]*
(Ken-Lo interview by Lou Piensa, April 2010)

This description of artistic process suggests that Ken-Lo moves into a kind of creative zone or psychological "flow" (Csikszentmihályi 1990) in which drawing upon some of the many languages heard in some Montreal and Quebec communities is instinctive and natural, as much a part of artistic inspiration as the choice to switch beats or verbal rhythmic delivery (which in hip-hop is also called "flow"). Such twisting and opening seems deeply pleasurable, a key element in the popularity of translanguaging.

Also relevant to understanding translanguaging in the Montreal hip-hop community is Glissant's thinking about orality, for as he tells it, "My language attempts to take shape at the edge of writing and speech" (1989, p. 147). "Code-switching" is foremost an oral practice, and while most creole languages now have official orthographies, these are less widely known and used than those of languages taught in schools. It is also used in art, in literary dialogue, and in songs, as people explore issues of identity and aesthetics (Androtsopoulos 2007; Bentahila and Davies 2002; Picone 2002). Glissant's embrace of the oral tradition exceeds a novelist's experiments at putting colloquial dialogue in written form. Instead, it requires a:

synthesis of written syntax and spoken rhythms, of 'acquired' writing and oral 'reflex,' of the solitude of writing and the solidarity of the collective voice—a synthesis that I find interesting to attempt. (1989, p. 147)

¹³ ("Work in several languages opens up the rhyming infinitely.").

This synthesis forms what Glissant calls *oraliture*, which is writing infused with the characteristics of oral expression and traditions. Within this vision the oral and the written enrich, contest, subvert, and repeat the other—always in relationship. Drawing from Glissant, fellow Martinicans Chamoiseau et al. (1990) describe some of the textures of the oral tradition, including:

sudden changes of tone, the continuous breaking of the narration and its “slidings”...The art of meandering. Excessiveness...The art of repetition is rich and new. To keep rehearsing the text is a pleasure. Onomatopoeia, or more deeply, threnody [wailing song] turn in the drunkenness of reality... (Chamoiseau et al. 1990, p. 906, fn 17)

An important implication of Glissant’s poetics is that language changes are to be celebrated as expressions of linguistic vitality and renewal, rather than dismissed as degradations. He stresses the *create* of creole and of language in general and in so doing challenges utilitarian attitudes to language education. Within this vision the oral and the written enrich, contest, and subvert each other—always in relationship.

Glissant’s *oraliture* asks us to consider language modes as having potentially transferable qualities. Students might be encouraged to move between performance and writing if shown the intimate relationship between the spoken and the written word, including the possibility of infusing written texts with the oral tradition’s “art of meandering,” “art of repetition,” and “onomatopoeia.” In so doing they could be developing an “oraliture” which has the textures of speech and the permanence of writing. As well, some of the movements, rhythms, and ways of using language in Haitian Creole, for instance, could shape a student’s writing in French without the student actually switching into Creole.

6.4 The Sublimity of Word-Work

Taken together, Glissant’s *langage* and *oraliture* ask educators to take seriously the poetics of everyday life as raw materials for the learning of French and other languages. Given the congruencies between the work of multilingual rappers and these Francophone poets of creolization, they might be studied together in a French language arts curriculum that sees creativity as central to motivation and learning. Glissant’s emphasis on the value of linguistic change and diversity is echoed by Toni Morrison (1995) who writes that “[w]ord-work is sublime...Because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference—the way in which we are like no other life” (p. 321). In linguistic creativity and generation lies the promise of some sort of cultural autonomy in an increasingly interdependent global economy. The linguistic innovations of youth and rappers are some examples of generative word-work, instances of diversity resisting the deadening of standardizing tendencies in language.

A truism about learning to read is that its most important element is a desire to read. We think the same should be said for learning a language. If the excitement Glissant and the Montreal rappers interviewed convey about language could infuse

a language and literature curriculum, more students might embrace the possibilities of literacy. This means recognizing that everyday translanguaging practices can be evidence of a love of language, rhetorical skills in which youth are adapting language choice to context and purpose, and performative ability. If teachers as well as multilingual students could imagine an active, kinetic relationship between the poetry in their lives and the language taught in schools, youth might be better able to see themselves as authors and linguistic agents inside as well as outside school.

6.5 Shout Outs

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