

**'Ja toch?' Linguistic style,  
discourse markers and  
construction of identity by  
adolescents in Amsterdam**

*Gerda H. Schokkin*

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"Our speech... is filled with other's words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of 'our-own-ness', [which] carry with them their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework and re-accentuate." **M. Bahktin (1986)**

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[13-08-2009]

## Transcription conventions

<i>italics</i>	discourse marker
<u>underlined</u>	nonstandard lexical item
<b>boldface</b>	noteworthy stretch of conversation
< >	description of non-speech sound
(( ))	remark transcriber
( )	unclear stretch of speech
xxx	incomprehensible stretch of speech
(2.1)	silence in seconds, tenths of seconds
	place of interruption
-	partly realised word
↑	rising intonation
↓	falling intonation
<b>CAPS</b>	intonational/prosodic stress
±	alveolar click
:	extended vowel length
[ ]	phonetic transcription of previous word
<b>g, z</b>	heavily geminised /x/ and /z/

## 1. Introduction

During the last decade, much attention of sociolinguistic researchers in Europe has been drawn to the speech of adolescents of immigrant backgrounds and their majority background peers. Across several urban areas in North-Western Europe, phenomena have been described which have much in common: the emergence of a style or variety which carries distinctive features, yet remains close to the majority language spoken in the country. Features on all linguistic levels (prosodic, phonetic, morphological, lexical and grammatical) can sometimes be traced back to the mother tongues of minority immigrant groups, sometimes to reduction or simplification of the majority language, sometimes to neither. Studies have been carried out in, amongst others, Germany (Auer 2003; Dirim & Auer 2004), Sweden (Kotsinas 1997, 1998), Denmark (Jørgensen 2008; Quist 2008), The Netherlands (Appel 1999, Nortier 2001) and Belgium (Jaspers 2005, 2006).

These linguistic varieties are typically in-group phenomena, used in informal, 'joking' conversational settings, by groups with a multi-ethnic composition, which often also share non-linguistic stylistic features (clothing, musical preferences, affiliation with 'street culture'). The strong context-dependency of the varieties gives rise to the question whether these can truly be seen as linguistic varieties, or rather as 'linguistic styles'. Linguistic style is, comparable to style in a more general sense, something that has "holistic properties" and that "'hangs together' in some coherent matter" (Coupland 2007: 2). Linguistic styles can be varied, more or less consciously, by speakers in order to distinguish themselves and position themselves relative to others. These issues will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The current study will focus on an aspect of language use which hasn't received much attention yet in the research context of multi-ethnic youth language. In this study, the role of the discourse markers *maar* and *toch* has been investigated for a number of conversations involving adolescents of Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch background. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The quantitative part of the study focused on differences between the groups with regard to the use of the two discourse markers, and whether there was a difference in use based on the ethnic background of the interlocutors. The qualitative part adopted a broader view, taking into account not only discourse markers but also others aspects of style, to analyse in what ways speakers dynamically use linguistic features for processes of stylisation and identity construction. It turns out that there are a number of interesting differences between the ethnic groups, but what speakers do is not determined by ethnicity alone. In addition to a quantitative analysis, it is of vital importance to qualitatively analyse the underlying processes of social meaning-making. In this way, the aim will be not only to discover trends and patterns and describe them, but to explain them as well.