

TRANSLOCAL STYLE COMMUNITIES: HIP HOP YOUTH AS CULTURAL THEORISTS OF STYLE, LANGUAGE, AND GLOBALIZATION*

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Abstract

This article addresses issues that lie at the intersection of debates about language, Hip Hop Culture, and globalization. Critically synthesizing a wide range of recent work on Hip Hop and foregrounding issues of youth agency as evidenced by Hip Hop youth's metalinguistic theorizing, the article presents an empirical account of youth as cultural theorists. Hip Hop youth are both participants and theorists of their participation in the many translocal style communities that constitute the Global Hip Hop Nation. Highlighting youth agency, the article demonstrates that youth are engaging in the agentive act of theorizing the changes in the contemporary world as they attempt to locate themselves at the intersection of the local and the global. The article concludes by calling for a linguistic anthropology of globalization characterized by ethnographic explorations of and a theoretical focus on popular culture, music, and mass-mediated language as central to an anthropological understanding of linguistic processes in a global era.

Keywords: Style; Speech communities; Youth identities; Youth agency; Language and globalization; Global Hip Hop Cultures.

1. Introduction

And actually, the first stuff I heard was on my boy's boombox. It was a tape that came from the [United] States, The Fat Boys... It had to be when I was ten years old. It was probably 1984... I literally felt the street, the concrete. The streets are something that you live, but that you can't feel elsewhere, except in Hip Hop. And so, it was the first time I felt that in music, you know what I'm sayin? Just even the beatboxing and the music sounded street. And their whole style on the album cover: they were raw with it, with their hats and leather jackets, you understand

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what I'm sayin? You didn't see that here [in Paris]. We were outdated. So, we were going crazy over that whole style. It was almost musical. You could imagine an entire way of life behind these pictures. It helped us to develop our imagination. It was the first time that I heard Rap music. - French Hip Hop artist Oxmo Puccino (Spady *et al.* 2006: 591-593)

This article addresses issues that lie at the intersection of debates about language, Hip Hop Culture, and globalization, with the hopes of moving us closer to a linguistic anthropology of globalization. Critically synthesizing a wide range of recent work on Hip Hop and foregrounding issues of youth agency as evidenced by Hip Hop youth's metapragmatic and metalinguistic theorizing, the article presents an empirical account of youth as cultural theorists (cf. Dyson in Jones 2006). In doing so, it merges the insights of *hiphopography* - a paradigm in Hip Hop Studies that integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural, and oral history (Alim 2006; Spady *et al.* 2006) - with the central focus on language in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. I view Hip Hop youth as cultural critics and theorists whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense not only of one of the most important linguistic movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries but also of the broader cultural changes in our modern world. For this reason, I frame my discussion in the context of recent shifts in the study of language brought upon by a world increasingly characterized by transnationalism, immigration, hybridity, diaspora, and flow.

In response to these shifts, several core and fundamental concepts that sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have taken for granted have come under increasing scrutiny. For example, variationist sociolinguistics can no longer justifiably continue to view identities as static and prefigured. Focusing on identification in and through interaction, Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 376) argue that identity "is better understood as an outcome of language use rather than as an analytic prime" and that our focus should be not on identity *per se* (which suggests a set of fixed categories), but rather on "identification as an ongoing social and political process." This process-based notion of identification has caused linguists to question our preconceived ideas about the naturalness of the relationship between speech and speakers. In this article, the stylizations of Hip Hop youth around the world further problematize these notions and push us to consider the simultaneity of multiple layers of identification.

Another fundamental concept that has undergone drastic revision in the last decade is the notion of "local speech community." As noted by Rampton (1998) and Silverstein (1998), *speech community* has always been a troubled term, mired in a number of methodological, theoretical, and political debates. But now more than ever, it is in need of serious revision if it is to remain useful for the study of language. A key study in this area by Spitulnik (1996), which addresses the social circulation of media discourse in Zambian society, introduces several new ways of thinking about speech communities in mass-mediated, technologically connected large-scale societies. More recently, Morgan (2004: 3) has noted that the concept of the speech community needs reworking in situations marked by "change, diversity, and increasing technology." In this article, I show the merits of this work and expand it by suggesting a new language to characterize what are fundamentally new times. Specifically, for a global level of analysis, I suggest a move from *local speech community* to *translocal style communities*, focusing on the transportability of *mobile matrices* - sets of styles,

aesthetics, knowledges, and ideologies that travel across localities and cross-cut modalities – to explore the repeated stylizations involved in Global Hip Hop Culture(s) and the need to seriously consider popular culture and music as central to linguistic processes. Similar to linguists' growing understanding of identification as the basis of identity, this move builds upon Pennycook's (2007: 73) call for an "anti-foundationalist" view of language, one that views language as a product of repeated stylizations and sedimentations rather than a predetermined object of analysis.

A third concept that has been the focus of much debate has been that of style and stylization. It is not by chance that this issue has recently garnered immense interest in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Rampton 1999, 2006; Eckert & Rickford 2001; Alim 2004a; Coupland 2007; Mendoza-Denton 2007). The idea of stylization, often drawing upon the work of Bakhtin (1981) is, of course, not new, but the increased attention to stylization often focuses on the crossing of traditional boundaries, on popular culture and the mass mediation of society, and on large-scale, digitally mediated societies. The growing consensus on the fluidity of identities and the increased importance of stylization has developed, in part, because of the fact that identities are being constructed in a world of increasingly decentralized authority and a proliferation of non-regionalized virtual places (Meyrowitz 1985). Recent work on stylization and Hip Hop Culture(s) affirms Rampton's (1999: 423) perspective on style by problematizing "*production within* particular cultural spaces" and instead looking at "*projection-across*," at speech's "transposition into and out of arenas where social conditions and social relations are substantially different" (original emphasis).

It is clear that globalization has created multiple new opportunities for youth in particular to rework, reinvent, and recreate identities through the remixing of styles which are now, as a result of a multitude of technological innovations, more globally available than ever before. By focusing on stylization in the many translocal style communities that constitute the Global Hip Hop Nation (which together may form a global style community), it is my aim to show how the use of style in popular culture and music in this era of globalization requires new concepts and new theory in the study of language and culture. Following Blommaert's (2003) call for a much-needed "sociolinguistics of globalization," I conclude with some ideas about a linguistic anthropology of globalization characterized by ethnographic explorations and a theoretical focus on popular culture, music, and mass-mediated language as central to linguistic processes. This linguistic anthropology of globalization takes youth agency seriously by exploring the fundamentally agentive act of theorizing the changes in the contemporary world as youth attempt to locate themselves at the intersection of the local and the global.

2. Global Hip Hop Culture(s) and the emergence of a global style community

Hip Hop Culture has potentially become both the most profound and the most perplexing stylistic (cultural, musical, and linguistic) movement of our times. In the preface of *Black Noise*, a groundbreaking scholarly study of Hip Hop, Rose (1994: xiv-xv) imagines, rather presciently, the emergence of a Hip Hop scholarship about diverse global scenes that would embrace the politics and aesthetics of "Hip Hop style." Since this early prediction, global Hip Hop studies has burgeoned into a diverse area of inquiry, with book-length treatments appearing about locations as linguistically and

culturally diverse as the Francophone world (Durand 2002), Africa (Remes 1998; Osumare 2007), Canada (Ibrahim forthcoming), Japan (Condry 2006), Australia (Maxwell 2003), Germany (Androutsopoulos 2003) and multiple scenes around the world (Mitchell 2001; Basu and Lemelle 2006; Spady *et al.* 2006; Alim *et al.* 2008). All of these scenes comprise the “imagined world” (Appadurai 1996: 33; cf. Anderson 1991) of the Global Hip Hop Nation, a multilingual, multiethnic “nation” with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present (Alim & Pennycook 2007).

As Pennycook (2007) points out in an in-depth, sweeping look at the relationship between Global Englishes and Hip Hop’s “transcultural flows,” Hip Hop Cultures may in fact be one of the most important sources for the study of globalization, not only because Hip Hops are found in nearly every corner of the world (from the San Francisco Bay to Beirut) but also because they are mass-mediated popular cultural forms that rely heavily on the use of language and technology even as they radically transform them. The recent outpouring of literature on the globalization and localization of Hip Hop Culture(s) – and the tensions between these two concurrent processes, captured, somewhat, by the term *glocalization* (Robertson 1995) – suggests that scholars are turning to the study of global Hip Hop Cultures as a means of both illuminating our understanding of the abstract, discursive popular cultural zone of “Hip Hop Culture” and delving deeper into the workings of complex processes such as transnationalism, cultural flow, syncretism, indigenization, hybridity, (im)migration, networks, and diaspora. Further, scholars of this increasingly globalizing – and localizing – world are viewing the flow of Hip Hop cultural materials, practices, and ideologies with an eye towards understanding the multiple processes of identification within the dynamics of globalization.

In this article, I take on a related and significant set of questions: Just how is it that Hip Hop Culture has become a primary site of identification and self-understanding for youth around the world? And even more specifically, what stylistic resources do youth manipulate, (re)appropriate, and sometimes (re)create, in order to fashion themselves as members of a Global Hip Hop Nation? How do these “Hip Hop headz,” through their use of multiple language varieties and styles, negotiate their membership within this “nation” as they index the multiplicities of their identities? Finally, and most importantly, how can an exploration of these questions about the globalization of Hip Hop Culture lead to the reworking of major concepts in the study of language (including language itself) and to a centering of popular cultural and mass-mediated forms of language use?

Youth all around the world have engaged Hip Hop, creating their own versions of Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties (see below) and communicating with one another through the prism of style to form a global style community. The use of style to bond, connect, network, and imagine a Global Hip Hop Nation has led many artists around the world to refer to Hip Hop as a “universal language.” Masta Killa, a member of the Wu-Tang Clan, a U.S.-based group that has performed and collaborated with artists from Europe and Africa, captured this sentiment in a July 28, 2006 interview with Brolin Winning of mp3.com, a major website for artists and fans to share music and stay informed about the industry: “And you know, Hip Hop is a universal language, it’s a universal family, you know what I’m saying? That’s what we can’t forget. No matter if it’s east, west, north or south. It’s all one.” Though far more complicated than the all too common trope of “Hip Hop as a universal language” (too often echoing “music as a

universal language”), as I discuss below, such comments are meaningful in that they reveal a sense of belonging to a community despite differences in linguistic, ethnic, and national identification. As I show in this article, a defining feature of Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties is that they are not bound by specific languages, at least as linguists would identify them.

Given the centrality of style in Hip Hop, I refer to this community, the Global Hip Hop Nation, as a *global style community*. Although global style communities may indeed grow out of particular sociohistoric originating moments, or moments in which cultural agents take on the project of creating “an origin” (in this case, Afrodiasporic youth in the United States in the 1970s), it is important to note that a global style community is far from a threatening, homogenizing force (Appadurai 1996; Blommaert 2003; Pennycook 2003).

For Appadurai, the global situation is interactive and constructed of multiple nodes, unlike previous center-periphery models. His theoretical framework of the imaginary landscapes of globalization has five dimensions: *ethnoscapes*, the landscape of people who are constantly shifting; *technoscapes*, the technologies that link us across traditional borders; *financescapes*, the global landscape of capital transfer; *mediascapes*, the endless array of mediated images, sounds, and narratives and the ability to produce them; and *ideoscapes*, the uncertain landscape of dominant and non-dominant ideologies. These imaginary landscapes shift across multiple nodes, suggesting that a global style community, such as the Global Hip Hop Nation, is better thought of as a network of overlapping and intersecting translocal style communities, with members in particular localities “making a choice to be connected across recognized boundaries” (Cooke & Lawrence 2005: 1) and negotiating their identities and memberships in the simultaneously localizing and globalizing imagined world of Hip Hop. This persistent dialectical interplay between the local and the global gives rise to the creative linguistic styles that are central to the formation of translocal style communities, and leads into theorizing about glocal stylizations and style as glocal distinctiveness.

3. “A new style nobody can deal with”: Glocal stylizations and style as glocal distinctiveness

It is now widely held that Hip Hop has increased Black America’s dominance within popular culture. Spady (1991: 223-5) was one of the earliest scholars to comment on Black American Hip Hop’s global influence: “Hip Hop Culture, that irresistibly dynamic and alluring Black American expressive form, is rapidly juicing the world. ... Styling and Profiling ... [Hip Hop artists] are bringing about a revolution in dress, talk, song, dance and nonverbal discourse [and] they are in the enviable position of influencing international values, trends, and styles.” Spady’s comments allude to “style” and “Styling and Profiling” in the Black American tradition and their global spread, as well as the multimodality of Hip Hop style through embodied verbal and nonverbal modes of communication. Leading French Hip Hop artist Oxmo Puccino, quoted in the epigraph that opens this article, strikes a similar chord and confirms Spady’s early observations. He recalls his first encounters with American Hip Hop as a ten-year-old boy in 1984, having first heard Hip Hop music through media channels and a tape from his “boy’s boombox” (‘friend’s boombox’): “And their whole style on the album cover: they were raw with it, with their hats and leather jackets, you understand what I’m

sayin? You didn't see that here [in Paris]. We were outdated. So, we were going crazy over that whole style. It was almost musical." Crucially, Oxmo Puccino places style at the center of his first experience with Hip Hop Culture and, furthermore, underscores the idea of imagination as social action, both of which are directly relevant to the formation of translocal style communities. Imagining a way of life behind the pictures enabled a stylistic revolution in France, one in which Hip Hop has been both utilized by African-Arab youth as a means of resistance and demonized by the French state as the source of "civil unrest." Moreover, Oxmo articulates all of this using many stylistic elements of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties.

Style is central to Hip Hop Culture(s) as an overarching, ideologically mediated and motivated aesthetic system of distinction (Irvine 2001). In cultural studies, the most notable work in this area is by Hebdige (1979), who highlights several uses that youth make of style, most notably as resistance to subordination. In her work on Hip Hop, Rose (1994: 37-38) productively draws on Hebdige, arguing that Hip Hop artists use style for alternative status formation, "forging local identities for teenagers who understand their limited access to traditional avenues of social status attainment." She continues, quoting U.S. Hip Hop MC and graffiti artist Fab Five Freddy on the relationship between style, identity, and local status in Hip Hop: "You make a new style. That's what life on the street is all about. What's at stake is honor and position on the street. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good – that pressure on you to be the best. Or try to be the best. To develop a new style nobody can deal with" (quoted in Rose 1994: 38).

We must begin theorizing style not simply by reading cultural texts but by taking the cultural theories of the stylists that we are studying as important points of departure (Muggleton 2000). This approach is exemplified by the "hiphopographies," or bio-ethnographies of key Hip Hop figures, collected by researchers at Philadelphia's Black History Museum (Spady & Eure 1991, Spady *et al.* 1995, 1999, 2006). For example, in their interview with bicoastal U.S. Hip Hop artist Kurupt, Spady *et al.* (1999) provide a deep sense of rappers' personal investment in style. Below, Kurupt explains that he learned his rhyming skills as a young buck in the East Coast ciphaz (or competitive and communal rhyme circles; see Alim 2006) of Philly:

Back in the day, I was like thirteen. A circle of ten or twelve people, ages of like thirteen and below, one might have been twenty, twenty-one. And when it came down to the last two [rhymers], I was always there. And I've always been number one. Always. I never lost them type battles. You bust and it's like you don't say the next person's name, and you're out of there. I've always been in there. I just sit back and bust rhymes and I used to spell things on people's shirts. Like he'd have a shirt that says "Walk" on it. I'd break it down like the "W" is for this, the "A" is for that, the "L" is for this, and the "K" is for that. And they be like, "What?!" **That's my style. Nobody else was doing that. That's something I created** ... Like, he could have a soda can, "Pepsi." Once, I spelled Pepsi for this nigga. "The 'P' is for punctuating rhymes and woo-woo-woo. 'E' is for executing." And they're like, "God!" And I'm like what – thirteen, fourteen. C'mon now. They called me "The Kid." That was my rappin name because I was the youngest nigga that would always make it into the cipa. (quoted in Spady *et al.* 1999: 539)

For Black American Hip Hop artists, and in Black American cultural practice more generally, style, as expressed through the creation and invention of new, fresh, original, and innovative productions is critical to the artists' reception. Further, in addition to style as distinctiveness (Irvine 2001), we see style as competitiveness in Kurupt's comments: "And when it came down to the last two [rhymer], I was always there. And I've always been number one. Always. I never lost them type battles." Or as Wu-Tang Clan member Raekwon demonstrates, responding to an interview question about what makes a "dope MC," we see style as originality: "Style, you know what I mean, you just gotta be original. You gotta be able to say things, you know, automatically that people don't normally say. You gotta design your own flow, you know what I mean? Because it's so many people out there with different type of flows, but if you make your own flow up, that makes you more original and makes you one of the more outstanding MCs" (unpublished interview, Alim 2001).

The above examples clearly demonstrate the centrality of style in Hip Hop and its function as a system of distinction, driven by a nearly obsessive desire to be "original," "creative," or simply "the best." In Spady *et al.* (2006)'s *The Global Cipa: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness*, the word *style* appears 260 times in the 700-page tome, which covers a wide range of interviews with artists from the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. Crucially, style appears to be equally prominent in discussions with MCs, DJs, dancers, and graffiti artists – its centrality to Hip Hop's transmodalities (Pennycook 2007) is evident in this text. Style in Hip Hop, as Irvine (2001: 23) notes regarding subcultural style in general, "crosscuts these communicative and behavioral modalities," and importantly, "integrates them thematically." It is for this reason that I am arguing for style as the central rubric through which to read Hip Hop Cultures. More than language in a purely structural sense, or even in a multimodal sense, style conveys an ideologically mediated and motivated phenomenon that cuts across traditional linguistic lines of communication. In this way, my use of *style* extends what Jacquemet (2005: 264) refers to as *transidiomatic practices* to describe "the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant." As previously noted, style allows us to integrate such insights and expand them to work at a level above language.

In this globalizing era of rapid technologically mediated communication, we must think of style as not only relevant to the construction of local identities and the gaining of local status (as in Rose 1994, above); as not only a system of distinction and aesthetics organized around locally relevant principles of value (as in Irvine 2001); as not only the property of local speech communities or locally situated communities of practice (as in much of the sociolinguistic and linguistic-anthropological literature). Rather, we must also view style, as theorized by global Hip Hop youth, as *glocal distinctiveness*, where members of the Global Hip Hop Nation put style to use in order to distinguish themselves from adherents to other possible styles in their local arenas as well as to simultaneously contrast with and connect themselves to a global network of practitioners, each claiming their "own style" (or what U.S. rapper KRS-One [1996: 60] refers to as a "my-style" and a "your-style"). Importantly, as Irvine (2001: 21) notes, "though [style] may characterize an individual, it does so only within a social framework (of witnesses who pay attention)" and "it thus depends on social evaluation" and "it interacts with idealized representations." In the case of the glocal stylizations

found in Global Hip Hop Cultures, local styles interact dialectically with the idealized representation of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties and various other possible styles, drawing on each other's semiotic resources in a process of "semiotic reconstruction" (Pennycook 2003: 527, citing Kandiah 1998: 100). This stylistic (re)mixing, as many have pointed out, goes well beyond mere imitation. The radical recontextualizations and creative uses to which semiotic resources are put signal an era of "global linguistic flows" (Alim *et al.* 2008) in which linguistic and other semiotic material circulates around the world's "langscapes" (cf. Appadurai 1996; Blommart 2003; Pennycook 2003) to produce not global languages that function on shared linguistic norms but rather global and translocal style communities operating on stylistic commonalities and contrasts that pay equal attention to the local and the global.

Black American Hip Hop artist Raekwon's interactions with multiple communities, from "the streets" of the United States to the *banlieues* of Black-Beur France, illustrate these non-language-bound concepts of global and translocal style communities. Raekwon (the Chef), a member of the mighty Wu-Tang Clan, represents Shaolin, also known as Staten Island, New York, and specifically the Park Hill neighborhood. Like other Wu affiliates, he's known for rappin in a distinct Shaolin, New York, East Coast style that centers around clever word and sound play, esoteric slang, and ample use of the Five Percent Nation of Islam's Supreme Alphabet and Supreme Mathematics (Miyakawa 2005). In addition to this local level of stylistic distinction (recall Raekwon's comments on style above), he is also in dialogue with various Hip Hop artists around the world. As Morgan (2004: 6) has pointed out, membership in the Global Hip Hop Nation is "partially constructed through transnationalism, technology, music, and politically and socially marginalized youth." Raekwon's collaboration with Black French artist Ol Kainry, "*De Park Hill à 91 Pise*" (2004), provides a perfect example of this and highlights the level of communication that is at work here, one that is above language, i.e., any one particular linguistic system.

In the video for "*De Park Hill à 91 Pise*," Ol Kainry and Raekwon exchange verses in a mixture of English, French, *verlan* (a French youth register where words are encoded by reversing syllables and by changes in spelling), Black Language (also known as Ebonics or African American Vernacular English), and their respective Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties. They rhyme in a studio, set against a moving backdrop of their local hoods (Park Hill and 91 Pise), with their lyrics inscribed on and circling around the concrete buildings and streets of the Shaolin housing projects and throughout New York City. In this first verse, Raekwon rhymes while Ol Kainry interjects:

Raekwon: "*Hey yo, hey yo, hey yo, drugs get served when it's nighttime*
/ *Bodies get found [Ol Kainry: Mm-hmm]* / *So many young niggaz*
gettin lifetime/ Don't know nu'in but the scrape up / That's France, shit,
[Ol Kainry: Word!] / *in other words, sun, get yo cake up...*

Here, Raekwon begins his flow with the classically Shaolin phrase, *Hey yo, hey yo, hey yo* and then uses a stream of esoteric and encoded Hip Hop Nation Language to highlight the shared conditions of marginality in both rappers' local hoods. His narrative depicts drug-dealing ('drugs get served') and its consequences – death ('bodies get found') or life in prison ('so many young niggaz gettin lifetime') – and a generation of youth who have no other option but to participate in the informal economy ('don't know

nu'in but the *scrape up*'). He closes by addressing the young men in that situation as *sun* (which doubles for *son*, as well as the Five Percenter term for 'male',¹ and offers an empathetic word of compassion that acknowledges one's right to do what is advantageous for oneself ('get yo cake up'). All the while, Ol Kainry interjects with stock phrases from Black American Hip Hop Nation Language, such as *Word!*, which also stems from the language of the Five Percenter community in the United States.

At this point, it is important to note that Ol Kainry both sees himself and is viewed by many in France as having an "American" style. His name is in fact *verlan* for 'Old American.'² Throughout the song, he interjects phrases like *Word!* and *Hey, yo!* and rhymes whole lines that complicate any notion of discrete languages. For example, he begins the last verse like this: 'Yo, *mon mic est un flingue pour mon hood un bad clin d'oeil*' [Yo, my mic is a gun / and much respect to my hood (or 'for my hood, a bad shout-out'), pointing out how his 'mic' serves as a weapon for his 'hood'. Further, his use of *bad* here follows Black American semantic inversion to mean something positive, as Run DMC pointed out over two decades ago in "Peter Piper" (1986), 'not bad meaning *BAD*, but bad meaning *GOOD!*'.

In this second example, the two rappers exchange lines in the hook, and we see some more verbal play:

Raekwon: Me and Ol Kainry explain /

Ol Kainry: *De Park Hill à 91 Pise, les scarlas s'tchekent* ('From Park Hill to 91 Pise, gangstas link up) / Ice Water Inc., Ol Kainry, Raekwon the Chef /

Raekwon: From Park Hill to 91 Pise, gangstas link up / Ice Water Inc. and Ol' Kainry / We all thinkers...

In the above example, Ol Kainry employs *verlan* when he spits '*les scarlas*', which is an inversion of the syllables in the French term *lascars*, meaning 'gangsta' or 'thug'. Additionally, he employs a Black American term, *check* (in French spelling, *tchek*), as in "Yo, I'ma go check my man," i.e., "I'm going to go see how my friend is doing," and completely recontextualizes it, submerging the term in a French Hip Hop Nation Language Variety that incorporates *verlan*, French, and Black American Hip Hop Nation Language.

This example reminds us that Hip Hop style does not impose a homogenized "one-world" culture upon its practitioners. Through Raekwon's use of Black Language and a Park Hill Hip Hop Nation Language Variety and Ol Kainry's use of the French youth register *verlan* and the 91 Pise Hip Hop Nation Language Variety – their respective "resistance vernaculars" (Potter 1995) – membership in the global style community of Hip Hop is negotiated not through a particular language, but through particular styles of language, and these styles are ideologically mediated and motivated in that their use allows for a shared respect based on representin one's particular

¹ In the Five Percent Nation of Islam, the sun represents man, the moon represents woman, and stars represent children. The Five Percent Nation of Islam (The Nation of Gods and Earths) was founded in Harlem in the 1960s and practices an indigenous form of Islam in the US.

² Ol Kainry adopts a Black American naming practice in Hip Hop, as seen in the Wu-Tang Clan's Ol Dirty Bastard (there's no father to his *style*, he claims!), but uses the French youth register of *verlan* in which *Américain* ('American') is shortened to *ricain* and then the syllables are reversed and the spelling changed to yield *Kainry*.

locality. A global style community is one that is not located geographically or even linguistically, as we have seen; rather, membership may have to do with language ideologies and transidiomatic practices as much as with shared linguistic systems and local norms (cf. Morgan 2004).

The notion of global and translocal style communities is more complex still. Despite the all too available metaphor of Hip Hop as a universal language, style in global and translocal style communities is hotly contested, as it is often a critical measure of one's artistic self-worth and a litmus test of one's authenticity in a community where, as Raekwon raps above, "we all thinkers." In the next section, I examine these tensions around moments of identification with local and global aspects of Hip Hop, as I attempt to reframe the Hip Hop Nation Language model developed in Alim (2004b, 2006) in relation to issues of globalization.

4. Dimmi com'e che Snefs stila 'sti stili ('Tell me why Snefs styles these styles'): Mobile matrices and the remixing of Hip Hop Nation language varieties

U.S. Hip Hop artist Guru rapped alongside several others in the 1994 hit single "You Know My Steez," which articulated the importance assigned to the meaning of style in Hip Hop. As I have stated in other work (Alim 2004a: 2-3), the fact that there are multiple variations of the word *style* in Hip Hop (*style*, *steelo*, *stizzy*, etc.) hints at its cultural centrality. This preoccupation with style and stylization and their links to identity and identification is found in nearly every locale where Hip Hop is practiced. In the Philippines, for example, Hip Hop group GHOST 13 (Guys Have Own Style to Talk; cited in Pennycook 2007: 130-131), explicitly makes the link between stylization and their linguistic and cultural identities when they claim: "Listen everyone we are the only one rap group in the land who represent zamboanga man! / Guyz have own style, style to talk a while di kami mga wanna ['we are not imitators'] because we have own identity."³ As this example illustrates, issues of locality, authenticity, and style as global distinctiveness abound in global Hip Hop Cultures.

In Italy, style emerges as central in rapper Snefs's rhyme *Dimmi com'e che Snefs stila 'sti stili* ('Tell me why Snefs styles these styles') (cited in Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003: 475); in Japan, in Hip Hop group Rip Slime's song "Yo, Bringing That, Yo Bring Your Style" (cited in Pennycook 2007: 96); in Senegal, Positive Black Soul discusses style at length in a conversation that itself is loaded with African American stylizations (Spady *et al.* 2006: 639-655); and in Nigeria, in Hip Hop artist 2-Shotz's commitment "to do *am Naija* style" [to do it Nigerian style] (cited in Omoniyi 2008). These and other examples suggest that there is more to Hip Hop cultural flows than the circulation of media, language, ideologies, or "connective marginalities" (Osumare 2007) or any one of Appadurai's (1996) scapes alone.

In theorizing globalization, a focus on style in Hip Hop Cultures allows us not only to highlight the role of aesthetics, but also to put some empirical clothes (baggy jeans and a white tee perhaps) on Appadurai's theoretical hanger, which gives us a promising vision of cultural globalization but no sense of its workings. Hip Hop is an

³ According to Pennycook (2007: 130), Zamboangueño is the most widely spoken of a number of Spanish-based creoles in the Philippines. Chavacano is the general term for these creoles and is derived from the Spanish *chabacano* ('vulgar'). In line with Hip Hop's language politics, the marginalized Chavacano is celebrated by GHOST 13.

example of what I refer to as *mobile matrices*, where sets of styles, practices, ideologies, knowledges, and aesthetics travel together across the globe – *globe-hip-hopping*, if you will⁴ – and are necessarily engaged with as a unit (but taken up partially and differentially) across a wide range of contexts. Like Pennycook and Mitchell (2008), I am not arguing that some hegemonic form of Hip Hop moves wholesale around the global market and creates other Hip Hops in its own image and likeness. Rather, I would like to draw our attention to how Hip Hop youth theorize the differential adoption/adaptation of the styles, practices, ideologies, knowledges, and aesthetics that necessarily must be engaged (sometimes by mere imitation, sometimes by outright rejection, but oftentimes by creative reworking) when entering the Hip Hop matrix.

Though not using these terms, Richardson's (2006: 65) discussion of respect and Pennycook's (2007: 14) discussion of authenticity in Hip Hop Culture are helpful in elucidating what I mean by Hip Hop's mobile matrix. Richardson describes how German Hip Hoppers were introduced to Black American ideologies of respect and adopted them in their online practice. In addition, Pennycook highlights the "constant tension" between the global spread of authenticity in Hip Hop, "a culture of being true to the local, of telling it like it is" and "the constant pull towards localization that this implies." All over the world, he argues, there is a "compulsion to not only make Hip Hop locally relevant but also to define locally what authenticity means." Viewing Hip Hop as a mobile matrix suggests that there are at least two levels of meaning working simultaneously in Hip Hop's globalization: the imperative to identify with global Hip Hop (with Black America as a dominant frame of reference for many contexts) and the imperative to create something that pushes local boundaries and distinguishes oneself from both local and global Hip Hop styles (mediated by a demanding and competitive ideology of style that obligates Hip Hop artists to "come wit the next shit").

Turning specifically to language, I here reframe my working notion of Hip Hop Nation Language and Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties (Alim 2004b, 2006) in relation to this concept of Hip Hop as a mobile matrix. In brief, in that work I described Hip Hop Nation Language as a language variety that relies heavily on the African aspect of Black American appropriations of English; this characterization leans on Brathwaite's (1984: 13) description of "nation languages" in the Caribbean: "English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English." Importantly, unlike other theorists of language use in Hip Hop, I have attempted to break away both from Hip Hop's relation to global Englishes (as in Pennycook 2003, 2007) and from any model that is too tied to fixed ideas of national languages (as in Omoniyi 2008) – really, any model that focuses solely or mostly on linguistic structure – because I am rooting my investigation of language within the "linguistic culture(s)" (Schiffman 1996) of Hip Hop. As articulated in Hip Hop youths' theorizing, *language* refers not only to internal, structural qualities but also to the many discursive and communicative practices (*call and response, battling and freestylin in tha cipa, multilayered totalizing expression, poetics and flow*, etc.), language ideologies (usually resistive), understandings of the role of language in both binding/bonding community and seizing/smothering linguistic opponents, and

⁴ *Globe-hip-hopping* is a play on Ferguson's (2006: 38) term *globe-hopping*, which he uses to emphasize the point that the "movement of capital" does not "cover the globe" but rather "connects discrete points on it." The Hip Hop matrix travels and circulates in a similar manner, yes, but I do not mean to suggest that it covers the world like a global blanket. Rather, it globe-hip-hops through various hoods.

“language as concept” (having to do with broader forms of semiotic expression), including clothing styles, facial expressions, dance styles and body movements, graffiti styles, and so on (see further Alim 2006: 71).

Further, in that earlier work I outlined ten tenets of Hip Hop Nation Language, which collectively recognized the importance of style and aesthetics, language ideologies and processes of identification, and the sociopolitical contexts of language use in Hip Hop, as well as both the regionalization of Hip Hop Nation Language in the United States and the globalization of Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties around the world. Specifically, I noted (Alim 2004b: 394) that Hip Hop Nation Language “is widely spoken across the country, and used/borrowed and adapted/transformed by various ethnic groups inside and outside the US.” I continue to describe the use of language in diverse Hip Hop locales as *Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties*, a term which has created some confusion (for which I am mostly responsible). *Language variety* in my sense – that is, in the Hip Hop sense of “language as concept” above – does not refer to specific dialects or languages *per se* but to the variation between translocal style communities. *Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties* refers to the whole range of possibilities in an approach to language that is as contingent upon Black America’s continued role as a dominant frame of reference as it is on local approaches to language. Again, Hip Hop’s mobile matrix does not mean that various communities swallow Hip Hop whole even as it engulfs them; it means that youth around the world create styles and languages that (re)mix dominant styles and languages (such as the global dominance of Black American Hip Hop or the dominance of French Hip Hop in the Francophone world) in relation to those already present in their repertoires. Thus, rather than the normative use of *Hip Hop Nation Language* to refer specifically to the language of Black American Hip Hop and its remixes, it is preferable to use the global term *Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties* to refer to the use of language in and across specific Hip Hop localities (including the United States). As we shall see below, the language remixes involved in the creation of global Hip Hops cause us to remix the very notion of language.

5. Kinshichoo de freaky daburu no Japanese (“freaky mixed Japanese from Kinshichoo”): Linguistic remixing, agentive languaging, and an “ever free-forming and flowing” language

Looking more closely at linguistic structure, Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties abound with examples of linguistic remixing, giving us yet another reason to put “language” in quotation marks. Above, I described a view of language from within Hip Hop that stresses far more than linguistic structure and internal characteristics. Beyond this, the use of language in global Hip Hop Cultures causes us to de-essentialize languages in the same way that we have de-essentialized identity categories such as race and gender in postmodernity. Several examples serve to make the point.

In the United States, Hip Hop artists have often theorized their language use in terms that challenge both dominant language ideologies and the field of linguistics. Jubwa, of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Soul Plantation, described the use of language in Hip Hop (and in Black American communities) in these terms: “It’s not defined at any state in time, and it’s not in a permanent state. It’s sorta like ... it seems to be limitless ... So, I feel that there’s no limit and there’s no real rules of structure, because

they can be broken and changed at any time. And then a new consensus comes in, and then a new one will come in. And it will always change, and it will always be ever free-forming and flowing and it'll be reflected in the art form" (Unpublished interview, Alim 2000). This "free-forming" language changes "every day!" - highlighting the agency speakers have to create their own languages and pushing our academic notions of language to their limits. This view certainly runs counter to traditional sociolinguistics and highlights the need to take the perspective of speakers more seriously, particularly those involved in linguistic movements such as Hip Hop who often present us with fully elaborated theories of language and its workings.

Such conceptualizations of a "flowing" language also require us to pay closer attention to the circulation of mass-mediated language through music and other forms of popular culture. In an extended interview I had with San Francisco Bay Area Hip Hop legend JT tha Bigga Figga, he theorizes a dialectical relationship between "the language in the streets" and mass-mediated forms of language.

JT: Because you get the language by hangin around. The language, the language in the streets, man, it's like when you go hang out in a certain area ... Like [Hip Hop artist] Master P and them in New Orleans. Now that they're on the map and everybody's tuned into they music, instead of saying "nigga," they say "woadie." Now what is woadie, I couldn't tell you ...

Alim: Yeah. [Laughter]

JT: But everybody say it now only because it's popular now. [Snapping his fingers] So that language in the streets, **it transfers, you feel me?** Some people try to claim, "Well, I made that up!" Beautiful, that's good. But once it gets to the streets it's *everybody's*, you know what I'm saying?

A: How about that "poppin that collar" phrase, man? Where did that come from?

JT: That really come back from the pimp days, really, you know. But in the Rap Era, "Poppin yo collar," now, they just took what was goin on already and put it on tape. Once you put it on tape ... That's what I was saying about, once somebody get it and say it, okay, it's everybody's. It belongs to everybody. So now Snoop and them [i.e., artists from Los Angeles, not the Bay Area] poppin they collar ... (Unpublished interview, Alim 2001)

Through his discussion of Bay Area Hip Hop slang, JT posits a theory of linguistic transfer that relies heavily on the power of mass-mediated forms of language to enable both interregional and intergenerational communication in the United States and presumably the world.

Reflecting further on the "ever free-forming and flowing" quality of language, Haitian, Dominican, and African rappers in the complex multiethnic and multilingual Hip Hop communities in Canada view their linguistic remixes as community-building practices, enabling translinguistic communication through the production of Hip Hop style. As Haitian-Canadian rapper Impossible states in an interview with Sarkar and Allen (2007) regarding style and locality in *le style montrealais*: "I'd define the Montreal style as, it's the only place where you have a cultural mix like that, where you

have a mixture of languages like that, whether it's English, [Haitian] Creole, then French, but all the same a Quebec French" (Sarkar & Allen 2007: 122). The authors show that, through continual linguistic borrowing, Montreal youth involved in Hip Hop carve out a place for themselves in the public sphere while creating a community "based on a mixture of French and English as a common language, but with an ever-present and constantly changing admixture of words and phrases from other sources as its defining feature." Sarkar and Allen note that in the midst of all of this multilingualism, and even in Quebec where the most widely used language in Hip Hop is French, not English, Hip Hop artists use aspects of African American English in their lyrics and everyday speech (2007: 120), confirming the global dimensions of JT tha Bigga Figga's "transfer" theory of linguistic contact and change.

Black American Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties are remixed in numerous scenes around the world, as evidenced in global Hip Hop naming practices such as the German record companies "Yo Mama" and "Put da needle to da groove" or the names of Tanzanian artists "Nigga J," "Ice II," and "G.W.M. Gangstas with Matatizo" (cited in Perullo & Fenn 2003: 23-24), European remixes of Black American rhetorical formulae like "Snoop Doggy Dogg is in the house" (*X ist im Saal* in German, *X (est) dans la place* in French, and *X (está) en la casa* in Spanish; all cited in Androutsopoulos and Scholz, 2003: 474), and the practices of battlin and freestylin in Australia (Maxwell 2003), in Japan (Condry 2006), and in Nigeria (Omoniyi 2008) – and again, all of these examples could be multiplied many times over. In Tanzania, several scholars have written about the mixing of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties with Swahili and other languages. As in the case of Oxmo Puccino in France (discussed above), both Remes (1998) and Perullo and Fenn (2003) discuss Tanzanian Hip Hop artists studying Black American artists, imitating their flow and delivery, and even using similar names to carve out particular styles. Tanzanian artist Ice II, for example, states that he looked up to U.S. rapper Ice-T and modeled his style after him (Perullo & Fenn 2003: 29), while Mr. II reports that he modeled himself after Tupac (an apparently ubiquitous Hip Hop icon in Tanzania) "sounding out the words until he had a sense of the rhyming and flow" (2003: 24).

But what does this self-described imitation mean for the supposed centrality of style in this global style community? If translocal style communities are about comin up with a style nobody can deal with, what are the implications of such imitations of Black American styles for our discussion? Well, as we might have expected, Perullo and Fenn conclude, importantly for this article, "even if rappers borrow from American rap icons," in the end, "they must still show that they are creative and have a *unique style of rapping*" (2003: 29, my emphasis). Higgins (2008), also working in Tanzania, shows us that this unique style of rapping is often done in multiple languages, such as Swahili, Kihuni (a sociolect spoken by self-ascribed *wahuni*, 'hooligans, gangsters'), and African American English, with Higgins focusing on the use of (African American) Hip Hop Nation Language. In all of these works, we see that rappers flex various styles to convey a sense of multiple belongings and allegiances. Black American Hip Hop Nation Language, through various practices, such as battles, rhyme ciphers, shout outs, and naming practices and the use of Black American lexicon, phonology, and syntax is clearly central to these youths' imagining themselves as both local and global agents in the world.

Linguistic remixing in Hip Hop is even more complex, as described in Pennycook's (2003, 2007) analysis of the language of Hip Hop Culture in Japan and

Malaysia. Table 1, for example, comes from Pennycook’s discussion of three songs by Japanese Hip Hop group Rip Slime”:

Table 1. Lyrics by Japanese Hip Hop group Rip Slime (from Pennycook 2003: 515-526)

Lyrics	Transliteration and translation
Yo Bringing That, Yo Bring Your Style 人類最後のフリーキーサイド	<i>Yo Bringing that, Yo Bring your style</i> <i>Jinrui saigo no furikiisaido</i>
‘Bring Your Style’	Yo Bringing That, Yo Bring Your Style The last freaky side of the human race
By the Way Five Guy’s Name (x3) Five Guy’s Name is Rip Slyme 5’ ‘By the Way’	By the Way Five Guy’s Name (x3) Five Guy’s Name is Rip Slyme 5’
錦糸町出 Freaky ダブルのJapanese ‘Tokyo Classic’	<i>Kinshichoo de freaky daburu no Japanese</i> Freaky mixed Japanese from Kinshichoo

In his analysis of “Bring Your Style,” Pennycook (2003: 515-517) discusses the use of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language (such as the globally present indexical *Yo!*) right alongside the Japanese *jinrui saigo no furikiisaido* ‘the last freaky side of the human race’, in what these youth call ‘freaky mixed Japanese’. The Japanese lyric, however, is already mixed, with the first part of the phrase written in Japanese *kanji* and the second part written in both *katakana* (used generally for the transcription of non-Japanese words) and *hiragana* (used mainly for Japanese morphemes and grammatical items). Further, as Pennycook explains, “in *furikiisaido* we have a created, English-based word (*saido* [side] is commonly used, *furikiisaido* [freaky] less so).” This linguistic remixing presents us with important questions about the supposed one-to-one relationship between language and identity, between English for global purposes and Japanese for local purposes, and between “a language” and “a structure.”

Rip Slime is clearly influenced by Black American Hip Hop Nation Language – the name itself builds upon the tradition of creative worldplay in that it exploits the sometimes globally marginalized *r/l* distinction in Japanese English to produce “Lips Rhyme” (Pennycook 2003: 530). But despite this global influence, the use of language by these artists is indexical of multiple cultural affiliations and identifications. As Pennycook concludes, Rip Slime’s uses of multiple forms of Japanese, “Japanese which may locate these rappers as decidedly local (Kinshichoo) or which may signal their sense of cultural mixing,” and multiple forms of English, which “at times explicitly echoes African American English while [at] other times [it] seems more Japanese in its usage” avoids designations of local or global and appears to “flow itself across the boundaries of identity” (2003: 527). The multiplicity of indexicalities brought forth by such complex, multilayered uses of language demands an approach that gives a more central role to linguistic agency on the part of youth, as their appropriations and remixes

of the Hip Hop matrix indicate that these heteroglot language practices are central to their local/global conceptions of self.

Pennycook (2007) reports similar cultural remixes elsewhere in Asia. In a Malaysian nightclub where Black American Hip Hop styles influence the various modes of Hip Hop stylizations, he finds rap duo Too Phat (most certainly a carryover of U.S. Hip Hop names such as *Too Short* and *Too Live Crew*, not to mention the word *phat*), comprised of Joe Flizzow and Malique.⁵ Too Phat's rhyme demonstrates their simultaneously global and local orientation: "Hip Hop be connectin Kuala Lumpur with LB / Hip Hop be rockin up towns laced wit LV / Ain't necessary to roll in ice rimmed M3's and be blingin/ Hip Hop be bringin together emcees."⁶ Pennycook describes the Black American influences on pronunciation (consonant cluster reduction) and syntax (multiple uses of habitual *be*), but complicates the picture by noting that the rappers, "while locating themselves within the linguistic and cultural world of Hip Hop, which links across the globe yet operates as a cultural code, are also locating themselves in Malaysia and positioning themselves in particular ways in relation to Hip Hop Culture" (2003: 3). He goes on to show that other Too Phat lyrics make multiple references to Malaysian locales, foods, traditions, and the Muslim *fajr* prayer, and even potentially exclude a wider audience through the use of Malay mixed with Black American language: "Ya!!! Kau tertarik dengan liriks, baut lu terbalik / Mr. Malique, Joe Flizzow dan T-Bone spit it menarik ... Pertama kali gilang gemilang ku rap Melayu" ('You are attracted to the lyrics, they make you feel good / Mr. Malique, Joe Flizzow and T-Bone spit it out cool ... First time, just brilliant, I am rapping in Malay'). As Pennycook concludes, phrases like *spit it menarik* (Black American *spit it* means 'rap' and *menarik* means 'cool' in Malay) do not always have to be interpreted as cases of "styling the Other" (Rampton 1999). Rather, the use of various codes in the process of the simultaneously localizing and globalizing linguistic remixes in both Japan and Malaysia points to the need for an "anti-foundationalist" view of language, one that questions the status of separate languages as *a priori* objects of analysis, de-essentializes language in the same way other social categories have been de-essentialized, and breaks down any isomorphic conception about the relationship between cultures and languages.

6. When it ain't *mukide kino* ('all gravy') in the "universal family": Contesting local and global stylizations

As I have noted, the linguistic remixing that takes place in Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties around the world, despite its seemingly exclusive nature (if one focuses purely on linguistic structure and narrow notions of mutual intelligibility), most certainly contributes to a shared sense of participants' belonging and the "image of their communion" (Anderson 1991: 6). Again, this is primarily so because the notion of language is constructed so broadly that the central unit of analysis becomes style, allowing mutual intelligibility not through structure alone but more importantly through

⁵ *Flizzow* is based in the Black American practice of inserting the infix *izz* and means *Flow* (a central Hip Hop term). The practice is found in U.S. rapper Jay Hova's song "Izzo (H.O.V.A.)", with lyrics "H to the izz-O, V to the izz-A," as well as in phrases like "Fo shizzle, my nizzle" ('For sure, my nigga').

⁶ *LB* refers to Long Beach, California; *LV* refers to fashion designer Louis Vuitton; *Ice rimmed M3's* refers to a BMW automobile with flashy rims.

similar ideologies of and approaches to language. In fact, in listening to pioneering Hip Hop artist Afrika Bambaataa, interviewed by the research team led by Spady and his colleagues (2006), we get a sense of his theory of the role of language in social movements as he narrates his attempt to form the Universal Zulu Nation, a global Hip Hop aggregate. Bambaataa, as it is often recounted, encouraged rappers from non-English speaking locales to rhyme “in their own language.” When asked directly about this, he recalled:

Everybody tried to rap like Americans. I told them in France, “No, rap in your own language and speak from your own social awareness. Rap about your own problems that are happening in your own country and whatever and talk about what you want to talk about” ... They have a lot of great artists and they are very funky. One time, when we were touring France they didn’t even have the word Funk in their vocabulary... [Bambaataa, speaking with a French accent and “attitude” says,] “That’s not possible. *C’est pas possible.*” So Hip Hop and The Zulu Nation changed a lot of people’s thinking. (Spady *et al.* 2006: 264)

French Hip Hop pioneer Sidney Duteil confirms Bambaataa’s story and adds an interesting nuanced and politicized take on the appropriation of Hip Hop, which is often problematically presented in the research on global Hip Hop Cultures as a neutral process. Duteil, himself Haitian-French, provides an “ethnosensitive” perspective (Baugh: 1983) regarding the appropriation of Hip Hop by recognizing that the marginalization of Black Americans in the United States and the cooptation of Black American culture is anything but neutral. Recalling the early days of Hip Hop in France in the early 1980s, he describes his conversations with Afrika Bambaataa about the production of the first Hip Hop show on French television, “H.I.P.H.O.P.”:

I called them to ask if I could have a show about Hip Hop and if I could call it “H.I.P.H.O.P.” Because, for me, that name, “Hip Hop,” was something that belonged to the United States. It was the name – for a culture – that I didn’t want to appropriate. I didn’t want to appropriate Hip Hop Culture. I wanted to do it *with* them, the Americans. And Bambaataa said, “No problem. I’ll let you know what you should do.”... He said to me, “Sidney, on the TV show, you have to give lessons, courses. The first Hip Hop courses in French.” (Spady *et al.* 2006: 285)

From these formative days of French Hip Hop in the early 1980s, we now have artists all over France, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Germany, in what Androutsopoulos and Sholz (2003: 474) consider to be a “renaissance of vernacular lyrics in Europe.” Despite the fact that this linguistic liberation from Black American cultural dominance still adheres to Black American ideologies of the centrality of style, these emancipatory politics of language sometimes lead to direct tension with U.S. and Black American Hip Hop artists. Whereas Hip Hop artists in scenes such as Morocco (Needleman & Asen 2007), Tanzania, Canada, and Brazil, for example, attempt to identify or bond with Black Americans through the use of language (a glaring example in all of these cases being the use of *nigga* as a global signifier of oppressed, Afro-diasporic people), the over-reliance on Black American Hip Hop language and style can lead to some sharp criticism from

Hip Hop headz at home and abroad. Such criticism reminds us not to paint an overly simplistic picture of global youth affiliation through the use of Hip Hop styles.

There are certainly instances in Wu-Tang Clan member Masta Killa's "universal family" of Hip Hop where particular types of language remixing are fiercely challenged. In other words, sometimes it ain't *mukide kino* 'all good', 'all gravy'.⁷ Specifically, the use of "American"-sounding accents and styles can be problematic in a highly competitive cultural zone that sometimes privileges particular translocalities over others. An excellent example of this is found in Omoniyi's (2008) work on Hip Hop in Nigeria. The level of competition is fierce, as Nigerian freestyle champion Vectortheviper (one half of the Badder Boyz) explains to him in an email:

Yes there are battles in Nigeria, and vector has been undisputed in his battle escapade [sic] forever (ask Channel O). Grafiti in Nigeria is crazy. check the walls of igbosere street close to city hall, lagos island. And in unilag there are tons of Mc's who do nothing but battle every friday. They range from your mama jokes to you yourself. Brutally, people kill each other here. We got game here in Nigeria and i hope u'r proud of where ur from now. holla later.

Again, we see the elements of Hip Hop's global style at play here, including the use of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language (despite the fact that neither of the interlocutors is Black American, as in the interviews with the French artists above). But importantly for my argument, some Nigerian MCs – like 2-Shotz, for example, who raps primarily in Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo – are quite antagonistic to those MCs who choose to spit in "American" styles. To them, in order to keep it real, the use of language in Hip Hop must be consistent with their understanding of "real" language use in Nigeria. As 2-Shotz raps: "You speak *foné* / I choose to speak Pidgin / For all my people to understand me / Dat na the main reason / I rap for my people hear and feel me / If dat no be *keepin it real* / a beg mek somebody explain to me / You no fit yarn *foné* pass American / So I choose to do am Naija style / All the while." [You speak standard English (*foné* is derived from phonetics, meaning posh or RP English) / I choose to speak Pidgin / For all my people to understand me / That is the main reason / I rap so my people can hear and feel me / If that ain't *keepin it real* / Then somebody please tell me what is / You can't speak standard English better than an American / So I choose to do am Naija style / All the while]

For 2-Shotz's sake, we will ignore the fact that his name builds upon (is spelled like and even sounds like) the name of 2-Pac (or Tupac), a huge icon in Nigeria, not to mention the fact that 2-Pac himself made exactly the same argument regarding his use of Black Language (see Spady *et al.* 1999: 565, and many of his records), as well as the fact that he uses Black American Hip Hop terms and draws on Black American Hip Hop tropes. For the sake of this argument, for 2-Shotz, *keepin it real* is about kickin it in a style that you can call your own. As he ridicules other MCs by calling them *foné*, a Nigerian Pidgin term "for a prestigious Standard English variety often used to describe the highly educated or native speaker approximating performance of a non-native speaker" (Omoniyi 2008), he places his globally marginalized "Naija style" in the

⁷ The phrase *mukide kino* is a street Swahili remix of a Black American Hip Hop sentiment used in Tanzanian Hip Hop circles (Higgins 2008).

center of Nigerian Hip Hop while simultaneously pushing other styles to the periphery. Style, yet again, is a hotly contested site of identification.

This battle over style and local and global identification is an ongoing, continuous process in the Global Hip Hop Nation. Australia provides yet another interesting dimension of this struggle, one where issues of style are wrapped up in historical, racial, and cultural politics, reminding us again that the engagement with styles is contingent upon local configurations of politics, language, and culture (see Alim & Pennycook 2007; Spady *et al.* 2006). In Maxwell's (2003) work on Australia, although he does not focus on language, it is clear that Black American styles have a strong presence in Sydney, with some artists fetishizing Blackness to the point of craving Black self-embodiment ("When I was getting into it all, I was um, I'd wish that I was black because then I could rap," says one rapper quoted by Maxwell [2003: 66]). While much more can be said about this issue, for our purposes here it will suffice to note that one Australian artist, Monkimuk, responded to this "outside" Black American influence by coining the term *yo yo* to refer to any artist who blatantly, uncreatively, and inauthentically imitates Black American Hip Hop styles (Pennycook 2007: 114).

In addition to these international cultural politics, a seemingly very local set of cultural political struggles are being waged over the use of different "regio-racial" styles of Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties in Australia. As we witness through the comments of Aboriginal Australian Hip Hop artist Wire MC, this very local struggle is linked to the transnational politics of Blackness. The normative status of Blackness in American Hip Hop crosses borders to Australia as well, where some White Australians' attempts to colonize Hip Hop Culture are met with exasperation by some Black MCs (as if colonizing Black territory wasn't enough). As Wire MC describes the situation:

As for the whole Aussie accent thing, man, I have a struggle going on with that one personally. First, I don't talk *ocker* [term for a stereotypical white Australian male]. I talk how I'm talkin'... I don't say "g'day mate." I say, "how you going brother." That's what I say ... But on a more personal outlook, it's like wait a minute. Hip hop comes from a black background. I live in a country where it was a penal system before it was a colony, as we were told – or forced – to assimilate us. And this is just a personal thing, but I find now through hip hop, having white boys come up to me and saying "you know, maybe you should rap a bit more Aussie." And I'm like "What?! Are you trying to colonize me again dude?! Stop it. Stop it." (Pennycook & Mitchell 2008)

In their attempts to distance Hip Hop from Blackness (Maxwell 2003), some White MCs may be identifying more with a national identity as Australian, while other, Black MCs may be aligning themselves with a transnational Black identity in a kind of "race trafficking" (Roth-Gordon 2008) that creates "connective marginalities" (Osumare 2007: 11) in Hip Hop. In Wire MC's case, he refuses to style the Aussie other to define himself. Rather, he chooses to style the Black American other (with whom he feels kinship) to define himself as a transnational Black man.

In all of these cases, language use, within the broad rubric of a social semiosis of style (Irvine 2001), is theorized in ways that complicate our notions of "a language" and requires a framework that considers the multiple and varied levels of identification, the use of style as glocal distinctiveness, and the competitive and contested nature of style

as found throughout the numerous translocal style communities that constitute the Global Hip Hop Nation.

7. “I been all around the world, Japan to Amsterdam”: How Hip Hop youth theorizing can lead us towards a linguistic anthropology of globalization

In this article, I have addressed issues that lie at the complex intersection of language, Hip Hop Culture, and the processes of globalization and localization. Within the last two decades, Hip Hop Cultures have become primary sites of identification for youth “all around the world, Japan to Amsterdam” (as U.S. rapper Kurupt once put it), shaping youth styles, languages, ideologies, and both physical and political stances. The translocalizing process of Hip Hop, returning to French rapper Oxmo Puccino’s observations in the epigraph of this article, allows youth to “feel the streets” (metaphorically, to understand a particular consciousness) of once distant localities. Perhaps most importantly, Hip Hop has helped develop young people’s imaginations (understood as creative, agentive social action), giving them a range of possible subjectivities that extend beyond those available in their immediate surroundings. It is my hope that Hip Hop can help linguistic anthropologists develop our imaginations as well, to look beyond local communities and language as its used in specific field sites and to begin, through ethnographies of popular culture and mass-mediated language, to theorize a linguistic anthropology of globalization.

In Oxmo Puccino’s comments, one of the most obvious linguistic points to make is his use of features of Black American Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties (including *my boy’s boombox*, street-conscious metaphors of the “street” as “something you live,” the use of *street* as an adjective, the use of *you know what I’m sayin’?* and other variations along with accompanying nasalization, and the use of *raw with it* ‘hardcore, unadulterated’, a form with several variations like *sick with it* and *crazy with it*). Like Oxmo and the multitude of other artists referenced in this article, Hip Hop artists manipulate, (re)appropriate, and sometimes (re)create stylistic resources through a process of stylistic remixing to construct themselves as members of the Global Hip Hop Nation. Following Pennycook (2007), the radical recontextualizations and (re)creative uses of stylistic and semiotic resources mark an era of “global linguistic flows” (Alim *et al.* 2008) in which cultural and linguistic material travels around the world to produce not global languages but rather global and translocal styles. These styles and stylizations operate in a system of glocal distinctiveness, a system which functions not on shared linguistic norms but on stylistic commonalities and contrasts that pay equal attention to the local and the global. Youth all around the world have engaged Hip Hop and created their own Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties and communicate with each other through the prism of style – a diversity of styles as *lingua franca*, if you will – to form a global style community. Unity within the Global Hip Hop Nation does more than merely tolerate diversity, it demands it.

I have argued that style (as both a noun and a verb) is the central rubric through which to read Hip Hop Cultures. Beyond internal, structural notions of language, or even multimodal conceptualizations, style conveys an ideologically mediated and motivated phenomenon that cuts across all levels of communication. In this way, my use of style extends Jacquemet’s (2005: 264) transidiomatic practices, as well as the productive reworking of the notion of the speech community by Spitulnik (1996), by

allowing us to integrate such insights and expand them to work at a level above language – that is, at a level of analysis that privileges speakers’ theories about language and informs our own theorizing. Along similar lines, Blommaert (2003: 608), following Hymes (1996) and Silverstein (1998), rightly suggests that for a global level of analysis we need to “move from Languages to language varieties and repertoires” because “it is not abstract Language” that is globalized but rather “specific speech forms, genres, styles, and forms of literacy practice.” This is certainly the case with Hip Hop. Its rhyming practices have altered poetic genres across the globe: Hip Hop artists in Japan have restructured Japanese in order to rhyme and flow (Condry 2006; Davis & Tsujimura 2008), and they, along with artists in Korea (Pennycook 2007: 128) and Italy (Androutsopoulos & Scholz 2003: 474-475), have produced poetic structures such as the back-to-back chain rhymes and bridge rhymes similar to those described in Black American Hip Hop (Alim 2006).

Pushing Blommaert’s argument even further, as we have seen in the case of Hip Hop, a language variety in the Hip Hop sense of “language as concept” does not refer to specific dialects or languages or styles *per se*; it refers to the variation between translocal style communities within the Global Hip Hop Nation style community. Hip Hop Nation Language Varieties refers to the whole range of possibilities to an “approach to language” that relies equally upon Black America’s continued role as a key frame of reference and on local approaches to language. The multiple indexicalities brought forth by such complex, multilayered uses of language necessitates a linguistic anthropology of globalization that gives a more central role to linguistic agency on the part of youth as they appropriate and remix the Hip Hop matrix. Youth around the world have created styles and languages that (re)mix dominant styles and languages in relation to those already present in their repertoires. It is the creation of these languages through agentive languaging that best describes globalization – not just language entering into and moving across various localities, but language created out of translocalities.

Finally, in theorizing language and globalization, I have tried to argue that language does not move around the world as a solo traveler. Rather, it travels within what I have called *mobile matrices* – sets of styles, aesthetics, knowledges, and ideologies that move in and out of localities and cross-cut modalities. As these matrices travel around the globe, people from diverse contexts engage them in their entirety but selectively adopt, adapt and/or reject varying aspects. This idea that languages-in-motion are travelling within mobile cultural matrices ironically requires linguistic anthropologists to pay even more attention to the local than ever before. For in order to read events (trans)locally, we will need more in-depth ethnographies, because globalization not only depends upon local arrangements but it also rearranges, reorders, and restructures those arrangements (Blommaert 2003; Alim & Pennycook 2007).

Given that linguistic anthropologists of globalization are operating at a time when borders have gained a “paradoxical centrality” (Clifford 1997: 7) and anthropology in general continues to dismantle concepts like “field sites” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997), linguistic anthropologists themselves have begun to interrogate the notion of the local speech community. As Hill (1999: 544) suggests, it is likely that such units of analysis are “artifacts of a particular kind of consciousness, heavily imbricated with wider modernist understandings about human organization, that saw this as a system of relatively bounded cells in a complex hierarchy between the local (entities like the ‘tribe’) and the global (entities like ‘world systems’).” As we have seen in this article, Hip Hop youth’s global consciousness and their theories about the

interrelatedness of style, language, and globalization offer us new ways of imagining our world, ways that ground current theories of global flows (Appadurai 1996). Thus, it is hoped that in-depth ethnographic explorations of Global Hip Hop Culture(s), and popular culture and mass-mediated and mass-circulated language more generally, will help us bring forth new understandings of linguistic and cultural processes in this global era.

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