

The Importance of Linguistic Markers of Identity and Authenticity in German Gangsta Rap

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1 Introduction

This study investigates the language used by six German Gangsta rappers to establish and maintain their identity and authenticity as rappers, in songs released between 2015 and 2016. Gangsta rap is a subgenre of Hip-Hop that emphasises ‘the rappers’ street credibility in texts describing tough [urban] neighbourhoods, violence, misogyny, and the achievement of material wealth’ (Bower 379). The culture of Gangsta rap attracts overwhelmingly negative mainstream media coverage (Muggs; Roper) and is often accused of corrupting ‘standard’ language (Krummheuer). The lyrical content of the songs is indeed controversial and has been previously covered by many academics (Byrd; Littlejohn and Putnam; Bower; Rollefson), as has the emergence of Hip-Hop in Germany (Elflein; Pennay; Nietzsche and Grünzweig). Other previous research in a German context examines how members of minority ethnic groups use the genre to express identity in a wider European context

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(Bennett; Kautny; Kumpf). More recently, there has been nascent sociocultural research on the development of German Gangsta Rap (GGR) (Littlejohn and Putnam; Bower) but this article does not focus on these themes. Instead, the study examines the lyrics of GGR songs from a sociolinguistic perspective, analysing the lexical and morphosyntactical features, and speech functions¹ that are used by German Gangsta rappers to signify their GGR identity.

The study approaches the language of GGR primarily through the lens of social identity (Tajfel and Turner), examining how the language of GGR is constructed from both the identification with a set of characteristics (both social and linguistic) that overlap to create an ingroup, and the rejection of characteristics that are constructed as belonging to the outgroup(s). For example, the rejection of the establishment and authority is a key theme to the language of Hip-Hop and GGR. Potter (57–58) describes this language as a ‘resistance vernacular’; a source of new linguistic forms and functions that deliberately reject and subvert cultural norms and allow the creation of new identities for its often minority ethnic practitioners which, in GGR, is demonstrated by displaying ‘non-German-ness’ (Byrd 72). For example, many rappers use language originating from a rapper’s ethnic background, such as Turkey or Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, there has been a tendency in popular media to conflate GGR language with the language variety spoken by ethnically Turkish residents (Brown 144–45), referred to as ‘*Türkendeutsch*’ (Androutsopoulos; Tekin and Colliander) or ‘*Kanak Sprak*’ (‘*Kanake*-speech’)² (Zaimoglu), which negatively portrays both rappers and migrants as ‘*asozial*’ (‘anti-social’), ‘monolingual speakers of “incorrect” German’ (Byrd 75–76). This approach is problematic, however. There are overlaps between GGR and German-Turkish migrant cultures and this

¹ Speech functions are ‘genre-typical verbal actions’ (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 5), i.e., sentences or phrases that convey particular aims or express social relationships (in this case, for German Gangsta rappers).

² *Kanake* is a pejorative term referring to Turkish/Middle Eastern migrants to German-speaking countries.

is reflected in some aspects of the language, such as the use of ‘*Kiezdeutsch*’ (‘Hood German’) (Wiese). *Kiezdeutsch* is a multi-ethnolect³ comprising many non-German influences that has developed from the changing multicultural environment in urban areas and is spoken by many young people in German cities, regardless of ethnic background (Wiese 115). Androutsopoulos (39–40) calls the parallel use of German and non-German linguistic features ‘double monolingualism’ and other academics have defined it as ‘codeswitching’ or ‘nonce borrowing’ (Auer; Wiese; Tekin and Colliander). These terms, however, do not sufficiently encapsulate the frequency, density and fluidity of language interchange in GGR. Instead, I argue that the more recent term of ‘translanguaging’, as popularised by García (*Bilingual Education*), is most appropriate (further explained in section 3.2.2). It is also important to distinguish GGR from minority ethnic culture(s), as to do so would imply that all inhabitants in Germany with a migration background live a Gangsta lifestyle. GGR remains an area of music and culture that has not been extensively linguistically analysed due to its relatively recent emergence⁴ and this study aims to address some of the existing gaps in the research.

The study is comprised of three parts: Section 2 is an outline of the social contexts for the development of GGR. Section 3 presents an explanation of the theoretical underpinning and methodology of the investigation, and a justification of particular terminology, such as translanguaging. This section also contains the investigation of the corpus, comprised of lyrics and music of six GGR songs released in 2015 and 2016, and explores the linguistic features that are used in GGR to establish identity and authenticity in three areas: lexis, morphosyntax, and speech functions. The study concludes in section 4 with an explanation of how such linguistic features demonstrate the importance of identity and authenticity for practitioners and followers of GGR, reflecting its unique sociocultural situation.

³ I.e., a language variety comprised of vocabulary from several ethnic sources.

⁴ Androutsopoulos and Scholz (14) claimed that Gangsta rap was ‘virtually absent’ from the German music scene.

2 Hip-Hop in German-Speaking Countries

2.1 *The Origins of Hip-Hop*

Hip-Hop has been a source of linguistic creativity, as well as a music genre, from its creation in the Bronx in the 1970s. This linguistic creativity was used as an outlet for ‘politicised blackness’ (Gilroy xiii) ‘to try and escape poverty and oppression while commenting on it’ (Kelly in Basu and Lemelle xiii). A good example of these conditions is detailed in KRS-One’s 1995 track, *Out for Fame*:⁵

I'm livin' in the city, inner city not a farm
Steady bombin' 'til I get fatigue in my arm

Watchin' for the beast cause many artists, they shot 'em
And beat 'em in the yards, while doin' a top to bottom

The song repurposes words to uniquely pertain to Hip-Hop. The use of this alternative lexis is very common in Hip-Hop, and Alim (‘Hip Hop Nation Language’) even claims that such language forms a ‘Hip-Hop Nation Language’ (HHNL).⁶ In the above excerpt, ‘Bombin’ (spraying graffiti) is important to spread recognition of the rapper as an artist but he must contest with ‘The Beast’ (the police), who assault and kill Hip-Hoppers [read African-Americans] in the ‘[rail]yards’ as they attempt to paint the sides of trains (a ‘top to bottom’). Using such language was an identifier of the artist as an ‘authentic’ Hip-Hopper, for other Hip Hoppers to understand, whilst simultaneously appearing indecipherable to outsiders – an ‘act of identity’ (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 178–82). Potter goes one step further and claims that repurposing language imbues ‘power’ to the Hip-Hoppers, ‘the power to make oppressors tremble’ which also acts as a ‘message of solidarity with other African-

⁵ The impact of this song is far-reaching; even a German Hip-Hop festival is named after it, out4fame.de/.

⁶ HHNL does not fit the traditional academic definitions of a separate language (Bühler; Chomsky), as it is mostly a collection of lexical terms and speech acts originating from African-American English (AAE). For more on HHNL in different contexts outside the USA, see Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook.

American communities' (Potter 14). The attempts to rebalance power and demonstrate 'solidarity' have disseminated, along with the musical structure of Hip-Hop, throughout the world; Hip-Hop no longer just applies to African-Americans in the USA, it has now become a 'transnational, global artform, capable of mobilising diverse, disenfranchised groups' (Potter 10), regardless of ethnicity or country of origin.

2.2 German Gangsta Rap (GGR)

German Gangsta Rap (GGR), a Hip-Hop subgenre valorising the use of drugs, violence, and aggression, emerged in the late 1990s partly as a reaction to frustration at the commercial success of white, privileged rap groups, such as Die Fantastischen Vier, who were favoured by mainstream broadcasters for their uncontroversial, non-political songs (Elflein 258–59), and the increasing marginalisation and stigmatisation of ethnic minorities in Germany (Donaldson 193). For example, there was a rise in right-wing extremism (Kautny 411–12), such as the *Česka* murders, where a group of Neo-Nazis killed 10 people, mainly of Turkish background from 2000 to 2007. Furthermore, Rollefson (230–32) claims the introduction of neo-liberal welfare reforms in the early 2000s (popularly called Hartz IV) was the main factor that created a receptive environment for GGR, as they demonstrated a fundamental 'misunderstanding [of the] issues of poverty [and] racism'. They led to a worsening socioeconomic situation for many ethnic minorities in Germany, which in turn created impoverished 'ethnic enclaves' or 'ghettos'. However, some German academics, such as Berns & Schlobinski (215), did not acknowledge this social shift and argued that a 'ghetto situation [...] does not exist in Germany', which they claimed precluded the authenticity of a native Gangsta Rap scene. The lyrics of many GGR songs at the time disagree and explicitly reference Hartz IV and the unwillingness of authorities to accept the realities of their situation, such as in Eko Fresh's 2006 track with Bushido called 'Gheddo',

Warum guckt sich Peter Hartz nicht meine Strasse an?
15 Jahre Deutscher Rap aber keiner machts wie Eko
Ihr habt alle reiche Eltern und sagt Deutschland hat kein Ghetto

‘Why doesn’t Peter Hartz take a look at my street
 15 years of German rap but no-one does it like Eko
 You’ve all got rich parents and say Germany’s got no Ghetto’

In the title of this track, we see that ‘ghetto’ is phonetically spelled ‘gheddo’, which is an example of consonant lenition, common to Turkish-German pronunciation (Byrd 73). This is a good example of an identity marker from Eko for his Turkish-German neighbours from similar underprivileged areas, as displaying solidarity with the others in your ‘Viertel’ or ‘Hood’ (urban neighbourhood) became an important message in GGR,⁷ especially amongst ethnic minorities (Brown 143–44). Gangsta rappers began to intertwine German with the languages of their local communities within the same speech act in a rap track, instead of the previous German Hip-Hop practice of ethnic minority rappers releasing whole tracks or rapping the chorus of a track in Turkish (Androutsopoulos 39–40). For instance, in one of the tracks that will be explored more fully in the analysis section, Miami Yacine raps the lyrics ‘*Drei Jahre Knast für den Akhi, denn er tickte damals im Range Rover Dope*’ (‘Three years in jail for the brother cos he sold dope in his Range Rover’). By using Turkish (‘*Akhi*’, meaning ‘brother/bro’), he authenticates his upbringing in the multi-ethnic milieu of the Ruhr with its large Turkish migrant population and his status as a rapper by using HHNL (‘Dope’). Byrd (73) states that this frequent switching between lects in GGR goes ‘beyond’ what would be defined as ‘typical codeswitching’ that might be observed amongst bilingual music or conversation, rather it would be more appropriate to describe this complex use of language as translanguaging, which this article will explore after describing the methodology of the linguistic analysis.

⁷ Often whole tracks are devoted to this subject, as we see in Sido’s 2004 track ‘Mein Block’ (My Block), in which he describes the high-rise building where he lives as his world.

3 German Gangsta Rap 2016 Linguistic Analysis

3.1 Selection of the Lyrics for Analysis

This article has assembled six GGR songs that can be classified into two categories of three each, called 'Mainstream' and 'Niche', based on the relative popularity of the music and exposure of the artist, to ensure that the German Gangsta Rap scene is adequately represented for the purposes of initial linguistic analysis. The parameters for selecting the songs for analysis are shown in Table 1:

Song Selection Parameters

1	Uploaded to YouTube by an official source responsible for the creation of the video, for example, a YouTube verified account
2	Video must have either:
	a over 10m views (Mainstream)
	b fewer than 2.5m views & 10,000 likes per day average, indicating a more underground scene (Niche)
3	Video uploaded between April 2015 and September 2016
4	German must be the main language of the song
5	Each song must have a different main artist
6	The main artist must be signed to a record label
7	The track has an entry on www.genius.com , an online lyrics database to provide the lyrics of the songs for analysis
8	The 3 songs with the most comments on their YouTube page from each section were selected for analysis

Notes:

1. For future research, a comparison between unsigned and professional rappers would be interesting, to see if there is greater importance of linguistic identity markers based on the differing target audiences.

Table 1 Song Selection Parameters

Mainstream Tracks

Artist	Song Title	Artist(s) Locale
Ali Bumaye ft. Shindy	Sex ohne Grund	Berlin
Bonez MC & RAF Camora	Palmen aus Plastik	Hamburg/Berlin
Miami Yacine	Kokaina	Ruhr Area

Niche Tracks

Artist	Song Title	Artist(s) Locale
AK Ausserkontrolle	Immer wenn es Nacht wird	Berlin
Capital Bra ft. King Khalil	Fluchtwagen glänzen	Berlin
SXTN	Wir sind friedlich	Berlin

Table 2 Songs for Analysis

3.2 Linguistic Features of GGR

This section provides a short overview of social identity and language before describing the linguistic features and theoretical frameworks that are demonstrated in the construction and authentication of identity in GGR under the following categories: lexis, morphosyntax, and speech functions. The section finishes with an in-depth examination of one of the selected tracks, *Fluchtwagen glänzen* by Capital Bra ft. King Khalil, exploring all linguistic features, especially regarding the use of more than one language in the same speech act.

3.2.1 Language, Social Identity, and Authenticity

The proponents of social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner (34–35), proposed that a person’s identity is created through affiliations to various ingroups and disaffiliations to outgroups, and Bucholtz and Hall (382) stated ‘language is a fundamental resource for identity production’. Therefore, it stands to reason that language may be used to construct ingroups and outgroups, and this study attempts to identify the linguistic features of the GGR ingroup – and also what linguistic features they use to designate others as members of an outgroup. The relationship between language and identity in GGR is also theoretically underpinned by the concepts of gender performance and performativity (Butler), and “ethnifying” (García, ‘Languaging and Ethnifying’), which serve as a

framework for how German Gangsta rappers ‘perform’ their identities (e.g., their ideas of masculinity/femininity or [non-]‘German-ness’), and how they use language that signifies ‘what it is they want to be’ (García, ‘Languaging and Ethnifying’ 519). This language is also used to demonstrate authenticity, which Bucholtz (408) defines as ‘the assertion of one’s own or another’s identity as genuine or credible’. This is especially important in GGR due to the rejection of mainstream German culture, the strong affiliation to the ‘discourses of marginalisation and racial identification’ (Pennycook 102), and the rejection of previously established binaries, such as that of the German/Foreigner. This creates a ‘third space’ (cf. Bhabha) for followers of GGR culture, as many of its members are German citizens yet identify strongly with migrant (e.g., Turkish) culture(s). This hybridity is addressed in many German rap songs (cf. Bennett), such as in the 1992 song, *Fremd im eigenen Land* (‘Foreign in your own nation’) by Advanced Chemistry, who rap the line ‘*Ich habe einen grünen Pass mit einem goldenen Adler drauf*’ (‘I have a green passport with a golden eagle on’), referring to the design of the German passport, whilst criticising those who question their nationality, ‘‘*Gehst du mal später zurück in deine Heimat?*’’ ‘‘*Wohin? Nach Heidelberg?*’’ (‘‘Are you going to go back to where you are from?’’ ‘‘To where? To Heidelberg?’’’).

3.2.2 Lexical Features

An important phenomenon in the lexis of GGR is the use of both German and non-German words in the same speech act. For example, in the line ‘*Bratan, du siehst, hier wird Para verdient*’ (‘Bro, see, here we earn dollar’) from *Fluchtwagen glänzen* by Capital Bra, the rapper uses Russian/Ukrainian (‘*Bratan*’ = ‘Bro/Brother’) and Turkish (‘*Para*’ = ‘Money’) lexical items alongside German in the same utterance. This feature is referred to in this study as ‘translanguaging’ (García *Bilingual Education*; ‘Education, Multilingualism and Translanguaging’), although there are several competing academic concepts such as ‘codeswitching’ (Heller and McClure; Onysko; Gardner-Chloros) and ‘borrowing’ (Poplack, Sankoff, and Miller) that, it has been argued, also

describe this linguistic phenomenon.⁸ However, translanguaging is the most appropriate term to describe the lexical feature of GGR for a number of reasons.

García (*Bilingual Education*, 45) states that translanguaging encompasses and ‘goes beyond what has been termed code-switching [...] although it includes it, as well as other kinds of bilingual language use and bilingual contact’ (i.e., borrowing). Lewis et al. (‘Translanguaging: Origins’), Creese et al. (2016), and Simpson (2016) all agree with Garcia, stating that there are important sociological and sociolinguistic distinctions between the concepts (Lewis et al., ‘Translanguaging: Developing’ 657–59). I have compiled the differences between the three in the following list:

- Translanguaging rejects the traditional view of bilingualism, which rests on the idea of two languages with two separate linguistic systems (an L1 and an L2) (Simpson 15). It ‘celebrates and approves flexibility in language use’ (Lewis et al., ‘Translanguaging: Developing’ 659) and the Derridean permeability of languages, which, according to Creese et al. reveals ‘the complexity of the human repertoire in contexts of multilingualism [...] as people use their semiotic resources to index, voice and comment on social phenomena’ (25).
- Codeswitching and borrowing, on the other hand ‘focus too narrowly on codes which are still too easily interpreted as bounded languages’ (Creese et al. 25) and evince quite a Western-centric view of language as a collection of autonomous monoliths, separated and bound by what Hua et al. call ‘imagined boundaries’ under the concept of the nation-state (9).

⁸ The concept of using two or more languages and/or language varieties in the same speech act has also been given other names, including codemeshing, heteroglossia, metrolingualism, and polylinguaging (Lewis et al., ‘Translanguaging: Origins’ 650), but are generally only used by the academic who coined them (Hua et al. 59–60).

- Translanguaging semantically enshrines the equal status of all languages (García, 'Education' 141) and 'normalises bilingualism' (García, in Makoni and Pennycook xiii), which removes the prejudices and hierarchy that accompany a traditional diglossic linguistic relationship. This, she argues, is far more characteristic of language encounters between multilingual interlocutors (García, *Bilingual Education* 78–79).
- Translanguaging goes beyond the use of language. It allows us to explore more sociological notions of 'translanguaging space' and transnationalism (Creese et al. 5), whereby translanguaging serves as one aspect of cultural hybridity, a linguistic identifying marker for inhabitants of diverse multi-ethnic spaces, especially in diverse, densely populated areas (Creese et al.), thus highlighting the complex nature of the concept of identity.

The use of non-German linguistic resources as equal and normal in GGR is itself an act of linguistic resistance against the monolingual standard in Germany, accepting and promoting the multilingual and multicultural space that GGR occupies. Therefore, the language of GGR should be viewed using 'translanguaging' as a linguistic framework over codeswitching and borrowing, although it includes these concepts, given the inherently transnational, multimodal and sociocultural phenomenon of Hip-Hop and the use of languages and language varieties in GGR as an important 'act of identity' (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 178–82).

One important language variety in GGR is the use of Hip-Hop Nation Language (HHNL) to validate the artist's identity as a rapper, as it authenticates their link to the wider music genre (Cutler 80) and often relates to music-specific terminology or sociocultural phenomena. If the rapper does not fulfil other criteria associated with Hip-Hop, then their use of HHNL may seem absurd or 'appropriating' (Eberhardt and Freeman 307–08). In GGR, this can be seen in the music of Money Boy, an Austrian Gangsta rapper, who despite the congruity of his lyrics and demeanour with the tropes of the Gangsta lifestyle, actually comes from a middle-class background and has a master's degree from the University

of Vienna (Funk). Examples of HHNL in the song collection include the lines from SXTN's *Wir sind friedlich*:

Du bist kein **Gangsta**, nein, weil du **dealst** mit **Dough**⁹
Du bist nicht **real**, du bist nur *Show*¹⁰

'You're no **gangster**, cos you **deal** with **dough**
You're not real, you're only show'

The use of 'standard' English (indicated by italics) emphasises the 'coolness' of the rapper and forms an acrolect vernacular (a prestige variety of language).¹¹ It is also present in Shindy's verse in *Sex ohne Grund*, although he is careful to also use HHNL to reinforce his GGR identity:

Alle meine **Bitches** nennen mich *Daddy*
Chille mit der *Family*
Hoes schicken mir Emojis
Pretty Mo'fucker mit der Roli¹²

'All my **bitches** call me *daddy*
Chill with the *family*
Hoes send me emoji
Pretty motherfucker with the Rolex'

Thirdly, the use of migrant languages such as Turkish or Arabic associate the rapper with his/her local area, which indexes their identity as 'from the street' (Androutsopoulos 281–82), creating their own unique version of the 'resistance vernacular' (Potter 57–58).¹³ This difference to

⁹ 'Dough' has been used as a synonym for 'money' for over two centuries (Kohl), but saw a resurgence in early Hip-Hop.

¹⁰ HHNL words in bold, English italicised.

¹¹ This also shows why it is important to categorise English and HHNL as separate language sources, despite their lexifier/substrate (i.e., Hip-Hop uses English as the basis for most of its vocabulary) relationship, as they serve different linguistic functions for the rapper. To distinguish between the two, I use the online resource therightrhymes.com, an HHNL dictionary built using a corpus of rap songs from 1979 to present.

¹² HHNL words in bold, English italicised.

¹³ Cf. North-African Arabic in French Hip-Hop (Hassa 50–52).

the USA Gangsta Rap scene is explicitly referenced in RAF Camora's verse in *Palmen aus Plastik*, where he raps '*Statt mit Vatos Locos häng' ich ab mit Arabern*' ('Instead of *Vatos Locos* [US-based Latino Gang] I hang out with Arabs').

Mainstream Tracks

Artist	Artist(s) Ethnicity	Linguistic Sources	Example
Ali Bumaye ft. Shindy	Turkish Greek-German	English, HHNL, Italian, Spanish	Alle meine Bitches nennen mich Daddy
Bonez MC & RAF Camora	German Austrian-Italian	Arabic, English, HHNL, Spanish	Statt mit Vatos Locos häng' ich ab mit Arabern
Miami Yacine	Maghrebi	Arabic, English, French, Italian, HHNL, Spanish, Turkish	Ya Haboub mach das Çarşaf ready

Niche Tracks

Artist	Artist(s) Ethnicity	Linguistic Sources	Example
AK Ausserkontrolle	Kurdish Turkish/German	Arabic, English, HHNL, Italian, Turkish	Wir bringen Daule das Fürchten bei
Capital Bra ft. King Khalil	Russian-Ukrainian Lebanese	Arabic, English, HHNL, Russian/Ukrainian, Serbo- Croat, Turkish	Mit Gang-Tattoos, Habibi, und machen eine Menge Flous
SXTN	German Afro-German	English, HHNL	Ihr seid Twopack anstatt Tupac, ihr seid whack

Table 3 Translanguaging Sources in GGR

As we see in Table 3, every song chosen for analysis uses English and HHNL alongside German, with Arabic next most common, followed by Turkish and Spanish, which roughly follows how frequently they appear in the tracks. However, more interesting is the fact that the rappers use languages that do not expectedly correlate with their ethnicity. Even if the rapper in Germany is not of Turkish or Arabic ethnicity, they will still use words from these languages, which provide sociocultural context by replicating the local sounds of the 'street' and confirm the rapper as authentic, as in the Capital Bra example¹⁴ where he uses Turkish despite his Ukrainian heritage. Unlike Money Boy, Capital Bra maintains his credibility as a Gangsta rapper due to his upbringing in Wedding, a disadvantaged area of Berlin, despite not having any minority ethnic

¹⁴ '*Bratan, du siehst, hier wird Para verdient*'.

heritage, which would indicate that one of the key linguistic markers in GGR is socioeconomic status, rather than purely ethnicity.

3.2.3 Morphosyntactical Features

The morphosyntactical features of GGR closely match colloquial speech that even non-Hip-Hop speakers practice, for example word clipping and the use of *weil* as a coordinating conjunction (amongst other phonological and grammatical features) (Fagan 245–52). Features that occur in similar frequencies will not be investigated due to space constraints, instead the article will focus on two high-frequency areas: subject-dropping and sentential syntactic simplicity.

Subject-dropping in German music, regardless of genre, is not uncommon as it allows fewer syllables to be used to convey the desired meaning in a line and helps the song fit the metre, for example in the 2016 pop hit *Musik sein* by Wincent Weiss.

Was für eine Nacht

__ Bin mit 'nem Schädel aufgewacht

__ Gieß' den Kaffee wie in Zeitlupe ins Glas¹⁵

'What a night

__ Woke up with a thick head

__ Pour the coffee, like in slow motion, in the glass'

¹⁵ Missing subject indicated by ' __ '.

Mainstream Tracks

Song	Ø	S Used	Total	Ø%
Sex ohne Grund	7	35	42	17%
Palmen aus Plastik	20	23	43	47%
Kokaina	6	16	22	27%
Total	33	74	107	31%

Niche Tracks

Song	Ø	S Used	Total	Ø%
Immer wenn es Nacht wird	7	18	25	28%
Fluchtwagen glänzen	3	40	43	7%
Wir sind friedlich	6	50	56	11%
Total	16	108	124	13%

Grand Total	49	182	231	21%
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Total Word Count: 2,694

Table 4 Subject-dropping in GGR

German Chart Hits (01.12.2016)

Song	Genre	Ø	S Used	Total	Ø%
Wenn sie tanzt	Pop	16	37	53	30%
Holz	Hip-Hop (Spaßrap)	0	37	37	0%
Musik sein	Pop	6	40	46	13%
Masafaka	Hip-Hop (Conscious Rap)	6	108	114	5%
Stoff und Schnaps	Hip-Hop (Spaßrap)	7	70	77	9%
Keine Maschine	Pop	5	32	37	14%
Total		40	324	364	11%

Total Word Count: 2,412

Table 5 Subject-dropping in German Chart Music (non-GGR)

However, in GGR, as displayed in Table 4, we can see that of the 231 possible subject-verb (or verb-subject) contexts for a subject in the song collection, the subject was dropped 21% of the time,¹⁶ which is roughly

¹⁶ Six songs comprising 2,694 words.

double the amount in non-GGR German-language songs featuring in the charts at the same time (Table 5).¹⁷ Furthermore, the tables also illustrate the sentential syntactic simplicity of GGR as there are far fewer occasions of verb use in GGR songs (231 vs 364), instead comprising of more stand-alone adjectival and noun phrases, rather than major sentences. This is demonstrated in *Immer wenn es nacht wird* by AK Ausserkontrolle, who uses a continued stream of short semantic bursts; each line starting a new speech act (i.e., a separate, contained utterance) as well as containing several within the same line:

Blitzbrecher, die alles Mitnehmen, Babas
 Gas geben, AMG, Wildleder Nappa
 CLS Benz, Chiptuning, drückt Brudi
 500 PS, gib Gummi
 Hektik, Stress, im Fokus, bremms' nich'
 Bestes Flex, hochprozentig

'Lightning-fast burglars, who take everything, mafia bosses
 Open the throttle, engine tuning, bro pushes [drugs]
 500 Horsepower, burn rubber
 Hectic, stress, in focus, never brake
 Best high-grade coke, high-proof'

The expediency afforded by the combination of pronoun-dropping and sentential syntactic simplicity in GGR allow a rapper creative opportunity to impress others with his/her 'flow' (Smitherman, in Alim, *Roc the Mic* viii) and create linguistic patterns that are very different to both mainstream Hip-Hop and vernacular language, despite being comprised of elements from both. This unique linguistic framework allows a Gangsta rapper to densely populate a track with many speech functions, which establish and maintain their authenticity as an artist.

¹⁷ Six songs comprising 2,412 words.

3.2.4. Speech Functions

In this section, the article will first discuss the methodological framework for categorising the speech functions in GGR, adapting research from Androutsopoulos and Scholz. The article will then present quantitative analysis of the GGR track collection.

3.2.4.1 Speech Function Framework

Androutsopoulos and Scholz, drawing on earlier work by Bolte, provide a framework for the analysis of speech functions in European Hip-Hop music, which, although appropriate for the wider genre of German Hip-Hop, must be tailored for German Gangsta Rap. They are as follows:

Speech Functions of European Hip-Hop

Category	Description	Example (translated version from Androutsopoulos & Scholz)
1. Self-referential Speech	Rappers describe their own verbal performance, ranging from literal to metaphoric expressions	'When I appear on the stage I unite my mind with the base to give me volume while I rhyme'
2. Listener-directed Speech	Rap's desired effect on the listeners is presented e.g. to dance or react in a certain way	'So get down on it because what you are about to hear will cut you like a knife'
3. Boasting	Rappers praise and glorify themselves and their crews	'With more stories to tell than the Grimm brothers that's my own Dream Team even more "The Boss" than Springsteen'
4. Dissing	Verbal attack and symbolic humiliation of an opponent	'You're soft like a pillow I'm hard like Thyssen [steel]'
5. Place/time references	Reference to the place/time where/when rapper lives, sometimes naming her/himself	'Now we're in 98 brother my house number hasn't changed'
6. Identification (Naming)	Self-naming of the rapper or the rest of the crew	'They call me Lou X and I'm here to stay'
7. Representing	This is the explicit declaration of self as a local representant of hip-hop culture	'Dortmund represent'

Table 6 Androutsopoulos & Scholz (15) Speech Functions of European Hip-Hop

In the GGR song collection, every example of self-referential speech was a boast, referring to topics such as criminality, drug dealing, violence, sexual prowess, so these categories can be merged. Furthermore, there

is no listener-directed speech, as use of the second person in GGR would be classified in the dissing category, as demonstrated in the opening stanza of *Wir sind friedlich* by SXTN:

Ihr seid Bonzenkids, **ihr** wart noch niemals broke
 Jeder von **euch** denkt, er hätte mieses Coke
Du bist kein Gangster, nein, weil **du** dealst mit Dough
Du bist nicht real, **du** bist nur Show¹⁸

‘Place/time references’ and ‘representing’ are conflated, as GGR artists present their physical locations as proof of their Hip-Hop authenticity rather than explicitly stating whom they represent, as seen in this comparison between AK Ausserkontrolle, rapping in 2016, and Fünf Sterne Deluxe in 1998, taken from Androutsopoulos & Scholz:

AK Ausserkontrolle

AK is' Mafia, Westberlin – Kapstadt [...]
 Sechs fünf, jeder scheiß Bulle kennt uns!

‘AK is mafia, West Berlin – Cape Town [...]
 65,¹⁹ every fucking cop knows us!’

Fünf Sterne Deluxe

Dynamite Deluxe, Doppelkopf, Fünf Sterne, ABees und Eins Zwo
 Sind im Norden verantwortlich für ein hohes Niveau!

‘Dynamite Deluxe, Doppelkopf, Fünf Sterne, ABees and Eins Zwo
 are responsible in the North for a high standard!’

Furthermore, GGR frequently refers not just to the proper name of their locale but to general urban features that represent it, such as ‘*Hochhausblocks*’ (High-rise flats) or ‘*mein Kiez*’ (‘my hood’), which will be included under the ‘Place/Time References’ category. One final difference between Androutsopoulos & Scholz’s matrix and GGR is in the ‘Identification (Naming)’ category. In GGR, not only do they find it

¹⁸ Second-person pronouns in bold.

¹⁹ The old post code for Berlin-Wedding.

important to refer to their crew, they often refer to their community, using familial names such as ‘*Brudi*’, ‘*Akhi*’ or ‘*Bratan*’ (Bro/Brother in colloquial German, Turkish and Russian, respectively) or ‘*Jungs*’ (‘boys’). In doing so, German Gangsta rappers create and ‘appeal to a “symbolic ethnicity” or “defensive ethnicity”’ as Bower (384) states, that serves as an ‘identifying mark’ in opposition to the ‘out-group’ (Tekin and Colliander 56). Therefore, a new GGR-specific matrix has been created:

Speech Functions of German Gangsta Rap

Category	Description	Example
1. Boasting	Rappers praise and glorify themselves and their crews	'Ich bin kein Player, doch ich ficke oft' (‘I’m no player, but I fuck often’)
2. Dissing	Verbal attack and symbolic humiliation of an opponent	'Fick auf dein' Trainingsplan, Hundesohn' (‘Fuck your fitness programm, you son of a bitch’)
3. Place/Time References	Reference to the place/time where/when rapper lives, also to features of neighbourhood	'Immer wenn es Nacht wird, heulen im Block die Sirenen' (‘Every time when it gets dark the sirens wail in the block’)
4. Identification (Naming)	Self-naming of the rapper, the crew, or other ‘in groups’	'Meine Jungs schmuggeln Dope in den Mopeds' (‘My boys smuggle dope in the mopeds’)

Table 7 Updated Speech Function Categories for GGR

3.2.4.2 Quantitative Analysis of Speech Functions in GGR

Table 8 displays the analysis of the song collection for these categories and reveals that the most frequent speech function was ‘Boasting’, making up 46% of all speech functions, followed by ‘Dissing’, whereas the ‘Identification (Naming) category was least frequent with 12%. However, there is a stark contrast between Mainstream and Niche tracks, with the latter using speech functions more than twice as often, and ‘Dissing’ almost six times more frequently. In the Niche collection, the frequent boasts concern success through criminality ‘*Batzen vom Ott-Ticken unterm Kopfkissen*’ (Wads of money from dealing weed under the pillow) from *Fluchtwagen Glänzen*, rather than the finer trappings of wealth, such as ‘*Google-Earth-Blick aus meiner Suite*’ (Google Earth view from my suite) from *Sex ohne Grund*. For less well-known (and less well-off)

Gangsta rappers, they must prove their authenticity by besting their opponents as they encounter Potter's (94–95) Hip-Hop dialectic: the problems of accruing money to escape the ghetto, make the 'big break' and live a luxurious 'white' lifestyle, whilst continuing to promote a ghetto lifestyle and appeal 'directly [to] the hood'. An example of a rapper who did not make this transition was Sido, who formerly rapped in a gold skull mask about the hard ghetto life of his 'Block' in 2004,²⁰ but then departed the world of Gangsta Rap after commercial success, ditching the mask, and singing about the problems of late-stage capitalism on a pop-collaboration album.²¹

Mainstream Tracks

Song	Boasting	Dissing	Place/Time Ref.	Identification	Total
Sex ohne Grund	17	3	1	1	22
Palmen aus Plastik	8	1	10	3	22
Kokaina	32	7	2	5	46
Total	57	11	13	9	90

Niche Tracks

Song	Boasting	Dissing	Place/Time Ref.	Identification	Total
Immer wenn es Nacht wird	33	3	7	9	52
Fluchtwagen glänzen	25	13	25	17	80
Wir sind friedlich	19	46	4	0	69
Total	77	62	36	26	201

Table 8 Frequency of Speech Functions in GGR

3.2.5 Linguistic Analysis of *Fluchtwagen glänzen*

The importance of identity and authenticity and the frequency of related linguistic markers in GGR is particularly well encapsulated in the first verse and hook of *Fluchtwagen glänzen* by Capital Bra, demonstrating the translanguaging, morphosyntactical features and speech functions explored earlier, seen in the annotated lyrics in Figure 1 (Annotation key is Table 9).

²⁰ *Mein Block*, Sido (2004).

²¹ *Astronaut*, Sido ft. Andreas Bourani (2015).

Category	Highlight
Boasting	Bold
Dissing	<u>Underline</u>
Place/Time References	CAPITALISED
Identification (Naming)	Italics
Translanguaging	Highlighted

Table 9 Annotation Key to Figure 1

	Fluchtwagen glänzen, Capital Bra & King Khalil	Getaway Cars Shine, English Translation
	[Verse]	[Verse]
1	<i>Bratans</i> auf Zelle, wollten Batzen auf Schnelle	<i>Brothers</i> in the cells, wanted wads of money too quickly,
2	Wegen Tekttek mit sham sham und Banküberfälle	Due to small-time dealing of cocaine and bank robberies
3	Kriminelle Banden, Flucht vor den Beamten	Criminal gangs, escape from the officials
4	Hier in meiner Stadt gräbt man Tunnel unter Banken	Here in my city, we dig tunnels under banks
5	Bratan, du siehst, hier wird para verdient	Bro, you can see, here we earn dollar
6	Wir flüchten vom Tatort ins HOCHHAUSGEBIET	We flee from the crime scene into our HIGH-RISE ESTATE
7	<i>Bra</i> , es geht um Profit, <u>du Nutte bist nicht meine Liga</u>	<i>Bro</i> , it's about profit, <u>you whore, not my league</u>
8	<u>Der Ukrainer</u> lässt dich rennen wie Di María	<u>The Ukrainian</u> leaves you running like Di María
9	<i>Ich komm' mit 'nem Baba-Clan, mit Kurdis und Arabern</i>	<i>I come with Turkish mafiosi, with Kurds and Arabs</i>
10	<i>Russen, Tschetschenern und Bratans aus Kasachstan</i>	<i>Russians, Chechnyans and brothers from Kazakhstan</i>

11	<i>Igor und Hakan, was los, Bratan?</i>	<i>Igor and Hakan, what's up, brother?</i>
12	Meine Jungs lassen zehn Mädchen ackern	My boys pimp out ten girls
13	Nein, ich hab' kein Abitur, trotzdem trag' ich Jordans-Schuhe	No, I've got no <i>Abitur</i> , despite this I wear Jordans shoes
14	Bra, ich rauche Johnnys pur mit Khalil auf meiner Tour	Bro, I smoke pure joints with Khalil on my tour
15	<u>Wen willst du hier dissen Picco? Heb mal deine Texte auf</u>	<u>Who do you want to dis here Picco? Throw your texts away</u>
16	O Kolleg du weißt Bescheid, ich rede nicht, ich fresse auf	O colleague you know the score, I don't talk, I devour
	[Hook]	[Hook]
17	ZWISCHEN HOCHHAUSBLOCKS jagen uns Cops	Cops hunt us between HIGH-RISE FLATS
18	Wir hau'n Batzen auf Kopf für Spielo und Ott	We haul in wads of money for gambling and weed
19	<u>Bra, ich mach' dich bankrott, geklaut schmeckt am besten</u>	<u>Bro, I'll bankrupt you, stolen tastes best</u>
20	WIR SIND BERLINER, uns're Fluchtwagen glänzen	WE ARE BERLINERS, our getaway cars shine

Figure 1 Fluchtwagen glänzen first verse and hook with English translation

The main artist, Capital Bra, grew up in Ukraine as the child of Russian parents, before moving to eastern Berlin, which immediately provides him with authenticity for his Gangsta Rap as a migrant to a disadvantaged area. As one might expect, his language contains Russian/Ukrainian words such as the use of *bratan* ('bro/brother' but with criminal connotations vis-à-vis 'partner in crime') and *Tektek* ('small-time drug-dealing'). Yet he uses other instances of non-standard German, for example *sham sham* ('snort snort' = cocaine) and *para* ('money', again with criminal connotations), which come from Arabic and

Turkish, respectively, reflecting the ethnic diversity of Berlin²² that is Capital's milieu, which he confirms in his own words in an interview:

Ich bin eher Multi-Kulti. Ich bin unterwegs mit Arabern, Albanern, Türken und Kurden. Wir reden miteinander. (Gutmann)

'I'm more multicultural, really. I hang out with Arabs, Albanians, Turks and Kurds. We talk to each other.'

This is especially apparent in Capital's use of *'bratan'*, which combines the use of non-German with an 'Identification' speech function, doubly reinforcing the notion of his identity and background. He further corroborates this identity by explicitly naming the ethnicities of his associates, which presents a united front of marginalised groups against the German establishment.²³ In the hook, he raps *'Zwischen Hochhausblocks jagen uns Cops'*, which uses HHNL to demonstrate how German Gangsta rappers validate their authenticity by solidifying connections with the transnational, worldwide Gangsta Rap community. *'Cops'* invokes the connotation of the struggle by Pennycook's (102) 'marginalised' against the oppressive establishment throughout Hip-Hop history, especially in conjunction with *'Hochhausblocks'*, which is categorised under 'Place/Time References' and therefore contextualises the rapper in the authentic Gangsta Rap environment of the city (Baldwin 187).

If we refer back to the speech functions illustrated in Figure 1, we see that Capital's boasts all correspond with GGR motifs. For example in the line *'Nein, ich hab' kein Abitur, trotzdem trag' ich Jordans-Schuhe'*, he celebrates the accumulation of wealth, here signified by wearing expensive trainers, despite no official education. This is also present in USA Gangsta Rap, but such braggadocio is distinctly aimed at Germany, as it is in stark contrast to the German values of academic and vocational

²² According to official statistics roughly 28% of inhabitants in Berlin identify as having a migrant background from a range of over 190 countries (Statistisches Bundesamt).

²³ Even if some rappers hold German citizenship, German-ness is still a quality to be rallied against (Bennett 83–84), despite attempts by ethnic Germans, such as Fler, to try and combine German nationality and urban identity as a valid GGR background (Bower 380–81).

qualification (Pilz). The sheer frequency of these linguistic features combine to form a unique language variety that, although recognisable as German, proves difficult to fully comprehend for any speech community outside GGR.

4 Conclusion

From being ‘virtually absent’ (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 14), GGR has now become a staple of the German music charts, with German Gangsta rappers achieving number one albums, such as Bonez MC and RAF Camora, although there have been no number one GGR singles.²⁴ GGR establishes a strong sense of linguistic identity both among members of the rappers’ geographical community and to the transnational, global phenomenon of Hip-Hop, which Alim and Pennycook call Hip-Hop’s ‘glocal linguistics’.

To outsiders, the language of GGR looks limited and basic but upon closer inspection, it is clear that it contains multifaceted linguistic creativity through non-standard language to signify identity and authenticity. Hip-Hop and later Gangsta Rap provides an outlet for dissent and an opportunity for its practitioners, a collection of migrants growing up in a liminal and marginalised ‘hybrid transnational culture’ (Nitzsche and Grünzweig 8), to adapt the ‘resistance’ identity paradigm and apply it to their own sociocultural narratives, creating new identities and methods of authenticating them (and attacking imposters). We see these reflected in the language and linguistic features of GGR: the importance of shared experience “ghetto” or “street” life, the exposure to or the promotion of non-dominant cultures and practices to undermine German hegemony, such as different lexis and phonology, and the desire and willingness to exploit the system for personal (and financial) gain. However, if a rapper is seen to be inauthentic or not ‘real’ (Bower 380), due to a conformist background for instance, they are liable to lyrical attack or ‘dissing’, such as in *Wir sind friedlich* by SXTN, who accuse

²⁴ According to www.offiziellecharts.de.

their silent interlocutor, *‘Du bist nicht real, du bist nur Show’* (‘You’re not real, you’re just show’).

This article examines only one small aspect of how concepts of ethnicity and language interact in the modern world and suggests further research on German Hip-Hop, comparing subgenres through diachronic exploration of the frequency of non-standard language markers such as translanguaging, gendered language and vulgarities, as they have changed alongside the roles and perceptions of ethnicity and identity.

5 Appendix: List of Abbreviations Used in This Article

AAE – African-American English
 HHNL – Hip-Hop Nation language
 HHN – Hip-Hop Nation
 GGR – German Gangsta Rap

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6.1 Music Reference Websites

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Offizielle Deutsche Charts, <https://www.offiziellecharts.de/>

The Right Rhymes: A Hip-Hop Dictionary, <https://www.therightrhymes.com/>

6.2 Songs and Links to Lyrics

Artist	Song	Link to Lyrics ²⁵
AK Ausserkontrolle	Immer wenn es Nacht wird	Ak-ausserkontrolle-immer-wenn-es-nacht-wird-lyrics
Ali Bumaye ft. Shindy	Sex ohne Grund	Ali-bumaye-sex-ohne-grund-lyrics
Bonez MC & RAF Camora	Palmen aus Plastik	Bonez-mc-and-raf-camora-palmen-aus-plastik-lyrics

²⁵ Paste the link after <http://genius.com/>

Capital Bra	Fluchtwagen glänzen	Capital-bra-fluchtwagen-glanzen-lyrics
Miami Yacine	Kokaina	Miami-yacine-kokaina-lyrics
SXTN	Wir sind friedlich	Sxtn-wir-sind-friedlich-lyrics

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