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Rappers and Linguistic Variation

A study of non-standard language in
selected francophone rap tracks



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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of non-standard language, more specifically non-standard vocabulary (i.e. slang, *verlan*, colloquialisms, vulgarities, foreign borrowings, and abbreviations), in a corpus of selected francophone rap tracks in order both to quantify its use and to investigate what determines its variation, focusing on the impact of diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants. The methodology relies on a lexicographic analysis to produce quantitative results which are then analysed qualitatively by means of extract analyses and semi-structured interviews with francophone rappers. To answer the research questions, the thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents the aforementioned methodology and the overall quantitative results from the thesis, while also introducing the notion of variation, which is then tackled in the last four chapters. The second chapter investigates diachronic determinants from two perspectives: different generations of rappers (1990/1991, 2001 and 2011) and one artist throughout his career (Akhenaton in 1991, 2011 and 2011). The third chapter looks at diatopic determinants, analysing the impact of ethnic and spatial origins. Three ethnic origins are compared (rappers of French, Algerian and Senegalese origin), together with three cities (Marseille, Paris and Brussels) and three departments (Hauts-de-Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne). The fourth chapter focuses on gender determinants, with a comparison of male versus female rappers that also takes broader gender performativity into account. Finally, the fifth chapter examines the impact of diaphasic determinants. It analyses three rap genres (*jazz/poetic*, *ego trip* and *knowledge rap*), which then form the foundation for qualitative discussions of the effect of aesthetics, figures of speech, themes and performance. In conclusion, the contribution to knowledge of this work is the observation that the main determinant of high use of non-standard vocabulary is the performance of modern *ego trip*. The other determinants do not impact non-standard

vocabulary to the same extent quantitatively or systematically, due to the complexity of the contextual and fluid identity performances involved with these determinants.

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Introduction

1. Research questions

Over the last twenty-five years, French rap has enjoyed increasing success in France and the French-speaking world. For example, only four French rap albums were released in 1991 against 185 in 2014, two of which made it to the top-ten list of the bestselling albums of the year (see Coantiec, 2014; Rap2france, 2014; and Rapgenius, 2014).¹ For many young French-speaking people, rappers have a much more central place in their lives than classic French literature. The impact of French rappers is especially strong on language use. French rap artists use cryptic and vulgar words with influences from American rap and various cultures. Such words sometimes cross over to the general population and find their ways into movies, books and even conventional dictionaries (see e.g. Rey and Rey-Debove, 2011, *s.v.* *breakdance, clash, D.J., rap, sample, scratch, smurf*, etc.). In this context, Jean-Jacques Nattiez (in Martin, 2010a, p.15) remarks that rap music can and in fact “must” be the object of serious scientific research.

To this end, this thesis examines the use of non-standard language (NSL) in a corpus of selected francophone rap tracks in order both to quantify its use and to investigate what determines its variation, focusing on the impact of diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants. The approach developed in this work is mostly sociolinguistic with elements of lexicography and cultural studies, although other approaches will play a role in the various chapters when they are relevant, such as speech act theory, feminism

¹ Black M was in fifth position and Maître Gims in eighth on *Le Figaro*'s top-ten list of the bestselling albums of 2014. Black M sold 329,000 copies of his album *Les Yeux plus gros que le monde* and Maître Grims 290,000 copies of *Subliminal*, compared to Stromae who won by selling 688,000 copies of *Racine carrée* (Coantiec, 2014).

or queer linguistics. This research is sociolinguistic in its focus on specific low-register sociolects of French rap and on variation within these sociolects. Then it relies on lexicography in its analysis of the vocabulary and its classification into different NSL categories, which required semantic and etymological research.² Finally, it belongs to cultural studies as well because it takes into account the cultural practices of French rap in their relationship to power and identity performance to see how these elements determine NSL use in the corpus.

To be more precise, the approach that was selected for this study is based on a lexicographic analysis of NSL in the corpus to produce quantitative data which will then be analysed qualitatively by relying, among other methods, on extract analyses, interviews and literature reviews in order to understand what determines NSL variation in the corpus (see chapter 1 for the complete description of the methodology). Although it would have been interesting to look at all levels of NSL use, such as non-standard grammar, syntax or pronunciation, it would not have been possible to discuss so many different results within a single thesis. These other types of non-standard uses will still play a role in the various chapters of the thesis but they did not form the basis of the linguistic analysis. A decision was made to limit the research to vocabulary, since the variety of words used by rappers and their fluctuation enables a discussion of the determinants of NSL variation.

At this point, it becomes clear that the term ‘determinant’ is essential to this research. So it is important to understand its meaning in the context of this thesis. The word determinant can have several definitions. If pushed to its limits, it can refer to deterministic views, such as biological determinism. According to this belief, genes are

² In fact, the lexicographic analysis of the corpus could probably be the basis of a dictionary of French rap due to the size of the database and the extensive semantic and etymological work.

the determinants of our bodies and minds. They determine everything about our individuality, from physical traits to personality. In reality, it is never this extreme, especially when it comes to culture. However, cultural phenomena are not random, they come into being due to outside forces that help to shape them. If we take the example of jazz, finding its determinants would mean tracing back the elements that contributed to the emergence of that cultural form. This is what Alan Turley (1995, p.107) did regarding the “social determinants of the standardization of jazz in New Orleans”. In his study, he paraphrases his search for the determinants of jazz with a question: “What was different about New Orleans, from any other city in the South, that led to the association and standardization of jazz in New Orleans?” (Turley, 1995, pp.107-108). We can see that finding the determinants of a phenomenon amounts to studying the significant differences about that phenomenon in a specific time and place that determined its present condition. In the case of jazz in New Orleans, Turley (1995, p.108) isolates the history and character of the city, its ecological development, its varied racial communities, its past as a French outpost, and its unique political make-up.

From this, we understand that determinants are more than simple effects. They structure and set out patterns in a direct way for cultural forms to emerge. As such, they are present in all cultural forms, which is apparent from the number of papers looking at the determinants of specific phenomena, such as Yan Li *et al.* (2012, p.421) who studied the determinants of children and adolescents’ popularity among their peers or Jörg Rössel and Sebastian Weingartner (2015, p.43) who researched the determinants of public cultural expenditure. It also applies to scientific fields. For example, Silke Schmidt and Mick Power (2006, p.96) looked at the source of variation in determinants of health. French rap is no exception to this decisive action of determinants. There must necessarily be determinants that shaped language use in the corpus. The specific forms of NSL used

by these rappers could not emerge in just any culture or context. Researching the determinants of NSL use in the corpus will therefore amount to answering the following question: what are the cultural forces that set in motion and determine the patterns of NSL use that we observe in the corpus?

As was mentioned earlier, the approach of this thesis contains both quantitative and qualitative elements. Such reliance on a mixed methodology has become widely-accepted nowadays. Quantitative and qualitative approaches can in fact be complementary (Poznia, 2015, p.113; Penman-Aguilar *et al.*, 2014, p.96) because, once combined, “they cast a much wider net for capturing a broad spectrum of variables” (Thamhain, 2014, p.4). Indeed, when these two approaches work together, they strengthen each other and produce “findings that are greater than the sum of the parts” (Woolley, 2009, p.7), which helps to form “a complete and profound picture of the research phenomenon” (Siddiqui and Fitzgerald, 2014, p.137). It could be argued that such a combination might compromise both methodological paradigms, but this is not usually the case because each approach focuses on different elements of the research (see Carroll and Rothe, 2010). Even when this combination of methodologies leads to contradictions, some researchers such as Johnson *et al.* (2007, p.115) argue that such outcomes still produce a “superior explanation”.

In this research, the use of these two approaches was sequential, since the qualitative analysis depends to a great extent on the quantitative data. As the quantitative data will be analysed qualitatively, this study will not rely on statistical significance tests and null hypotheses. The decision not to include such methods was taken early in the research after much thoughtful consideration, not because these methods are criticised by some researchers who believe their results to be unreliable or even invalid (see e.g. Trafimow, 2014; Trafimow and Rice, 2009; Trafimow, 2006; Schmidt and Hunter 1997; Cohen

1994; Carver 1993; Rozeboom, 1960), but because using such methods of analysis would not have achieved what this study intended to accomplish. As the research questions will show, the most important question of this research is *why* as opposed to *what*. To be able to understand what determines NSL language use in a corpus, quantitative analyses that rely on significance tests are far from sufficient in and of themselves. This is because NSL use depends largely on complex and contextualised issues of identity performance combined with many other factors, such as cultural heritage, aesthetics, gender or social class, which are best addressed qualitatively. For example, if the quantitative data was to reveal that rappers from one city use a specific type of NSL category more than their counterparts from other cities, doing a statistical significance analysis would not explain at all why this is the case. A much more promising approach would be to analyse the context of the track, the content of the lyrics, or the rapper's biography and origins.

Now that these broader intellectual issues have been discussed, we can turn to the actual research questions of the thesis. The first research question concerns the methodology: to what extent, if any, does a linguistic analysis of selected francophone rap tracks complement or enhance other approaches and disciplines and to what extent is this analysis dependent on these other approaches? Indeed, carrying out linguistic studies can be interesting and revealing in and of itself but it has arguably a limited reach. Such studies reveal their full potential once they cast light on previously answered or as yet unanswered questions from other disciplines and when other disciplines help to clarify such linguistic findings. The literature review presented in the first part of this introduction already offered a first glimpse of the important research questions and how linguistics can complement them or be complemented by them.

The second research question is about the determinants of NSL in the corpus. More specifically, how do diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants impact

NSL? These four separate headings, which will form four separate chapters in the thesis, will cover most possible determinants, from the effect of time to the impact of ethnic origins (for definitions of the determinants in relation to the corpus and the methodology, see chapter 1). The only crucial determining factor that does not feature in this list is social class (i.e. diastratic determinants). As Agnieszka Kielkiewicz-Janowiak points out (2012, p.311), assigning social classes to people can be problematic, especially because such notions depend completely on the society being studied. Social classes in France, for instance, can scarcely be compared to those in India where castes played and continue to play a crucial role. This issue is very relevant to the study of rap artists because it is not always possible to pinpoint their origins due to a lack of trustworthy biographical information. Nevertheless, it is clear, from the little biographical information that is available online and in their tracks, that a majority of French rappers appear to belong to somewhat lower class sections of the population. Therefore, it would be almost impossible to create a corpus comparing lower-, middle- and upper-class rappers. Social class will, however, be taken into account in the analysis, and especially in chapter 2.

The study of the role of determinants will rely on the investigation of a third research question: to what extent do the rappers from the corpus use NSL, i.e. slang, *verlan*, colloquial words, vulgar words, foreign borrowings, abbreviations, and their combinations (see the methodology in chapter 1 for a definition of NSL and of these categories)? Indeed, to be able to measure variation in the corpus, it is necessary to have first completed the analysis of the whole corpus. This third question will also allow us to look at the form that this NSL takes in the corpus and how it is used by these rappers. Lastly, this study will also try to see what the significance of this varying NSL use is in terms of identity, recognition and aesthetics, because these concepts are fundamental for the artists in rap music, as we will see on many occasions.

2. Literature review

In order to carry out such research, one of the first prerequisites is to understand the rich and complex history of French rap, especially in relation to American ghettos. Indeed, although rap music originates in Jamaica, the main rap influence in France has always been the United States, which illustrates how intricate the transatlantic cultural relationships between these two countries can be. In 1976, new kinds of urban parties became popular in the Bronx in New York: the *block parties* (Cachin, 1996, p.14). Members of the community would close a street with barriers and security guards and throw parties using electricity from street lights. This is how the fundamentals of rap music were born: talking to a crowd using rhymes against a musical background of rhythmic *beats* produced by a DJ. One of the most influential people behind these block parties was Afrika Bambaataa, who founded the Zulu Nation, a hip hop³ organisation that went on to have a major influence on the development of French rap (Cachin, 1996, p.14). Most of these early rappers were influenced by traditional black music, funk, soul and even gospel (Cachin 1996, p.20). The 1980s only saw this trend increase with the arrival of many famous artists such as Grandmaster Flash, The Furious Five, Def Jam, or Public Enemy. By the end of the 1980s, the success of rap music was no longer limited to New York and many famous rappers emerged from the west coast of the country. These artists started a new trend that became very economically profitable: *gangsta rap* (Cachin, 1996, pp.51-53). At a time when rap music started to be popular in France, artists like the N.W.A. or Snoop Dogg began to use coarse language, violence and allusions to crime in their albums. The earliest albums of rap did contain coarse language, in the form of the

³ Hip hop is a cultural movement that contains primarily four related disciplines: rap music, DJing, drawing graffiti, and break-dancing. Rap music is therefore part of the wider hip hop movement.

“dozens”⁴ for instance, with sometimes sexual or scatological themes (Ncimusic, 2010, n.p.), but they did not normally focus on criminality.

In France, Cachin (1996, p.68) points out that it is through the media that modern rap music became known, even though rap culture was also introduced by the Zulu Nation, predominantly through break-dance (Prévos, 1996, p.715). At first, DJs and rappers’ role was to accompany the dancers; they were considered to be secondary. From 1981 onwards, thanks to President François Mitterrand’s legalisation of private radio stations, new French radio channels, such as Radio Nova, started to broadcast American rap, as we will see, but also shows like *Rapper Dapper Snapper* on Radio 7 or *Ben NY Show* on RDH (see Piolet, 2015, for more on this topic). Consequently, American rap was increasingly imported throughout the decade. Inspired by these American tracks, some rappers started to perform in French, first in Paris and then in the rest of the country (Blondeau, 2008, p.19).

At the time, rap music was not nearly as successful as it is today. It became popular only with the creation of the television programme *Hip Hop* hosted by Sidney on TF1 in 1984 (Béthune, 2003, p.182). Cachin (1996, p.69) explains that this programme precipitated the emergence of two famous spaces for French rap music: the wasteland of La Chapelle and, as mentioned earlier, the radio channel *Radio Nova*. The former proposed an imitation of a New York party every Sunday with graffers,⁵ break-dancers, rappers and DJs, while *Radio Nova* was the first radio channel to play rap music on the air. During most of the 1980s, the influence of the Zulu Nation and its founder, Afrika Bambaataa,

⁴ A game of verbal insults, usually targeting the opponent’s mother.

⁵ Graffers are people who write artistic messages, i.e. graffiti, on walls and other private properties, legally or illegally.

was strong on the genre. But this influence diminished progressively from 1987 (Prévos, 1996, p.715).

In 1990, French rap experienced increased success with the release of the first rap compilation album, *Rapattitude*. Later the same year, M6 created the television programme *Rapline*, the purpose of which was to present the news about American and French rap every night. Also in 1990, MC Solaar and IAM made their first appearance on the French scene and their commercial success was nearly immediate. Perrier (2010, p.15) argues that MC Solaar, IAM and NTM can be considered as the “founding fathers” and even the “pillars” of modern French rap. Their artistic influence on the genre in the 1990s was indeed widespread. Their success reached the whole country and in the early 1990s French rap became a prominent music style, as can be attested by the 400,000 copies sold of MC Solaar’s album *Qui sème le vent récolte le tempo* (Hammou, 2009, p.4).⁶

In the early 1990s, the two major French rap cities were Paris and Marseille, which will feature in chapter 4, but also Angers, Toulouse, Lyon, Strasbourg, Nice and Orléans (Vicherat, 2003, p.24). Cachin (1996, p.74) observes that a new genre of rap music started to emerge at the time. This trend would become known in France as *rap hardcore*. It is a form of rap music that criticises leading institutions and political figures. The main representative of this *rap hardcore* at the time was NTM, but also Assassin, Ministère A.M.E.R. and Democrate D. Yet, given the great diversity that emerged in French rap in the 1990s, it would be overly simplistic to divide bands between *hardcore* and *non-hardcore* (Vicherat, 2003, p.20).

⁶ By comparison, Mylène Farmer sold 1,800,000 copies of her album *L'autre...* that same year, which represents the third best sale in France ever (see Mylène.net, 2015). From this, we understand that MC Solaar’s album was indeed a commercial success.

Since the early 1990s, French rap has become very commercially successful. Numerous new French rappers emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Nowadays, Dee Nasty and MC Solaar are no longer leading the genre, although NTM have managed to maintain their iconic status. The new rappers at the top of the industry are now artists such as Sinik, Alibi Montana, Sefyu, 1995, Youssoupha, Orelsan, Sexion d'Assault, Booba, Rhoff, La Fouine, Keny Arkana, and many others, most of whom are included in various sections of the linguistic analysis of this thesis.

Given this widespread commercial success, it should come as no surprise that French rap is the source of a wide array of books and articles, ranging from sociology and anthropology to musicology and literary analyses. Furthermore, many sociolinguistic articles were published about the hip hop movement in other countries. These studies will feature in the rest of the thesis when they relate to the analysis. Instead, the literature review that follows below will focus on accounts of the various approaches to French rap music. Although the approaches presented in this review will be treated as separate and independent entities for clarity, the authors concerned often discuss many different approaches within a same book or article and it is difficult to find a book that focuses on a single approach.

Out of all the different approaches to French rap, linguistics is arguably the most important for this thesis. Yet, it is the approach for which the least material was available. Most researchers focus on the sociological or historical aspects of the movement and only briefly address linguistic questions. Nevertheless, some researchers have focused solely on linguistics. Valéry Debov (2008) has written a dictionary of *verlan* in French rap entitled *Code verlanique du rap français (sur la créativité déviante dans le sociolecte des jeunes des cités)*. To create this dictionary, he analysed a corpus of 113 French rap tracks and offered a translation of *verlan* words into standard French, together with information

about the frequency of their use and their common synonyms. This author is not the only one to have focused exclusively on *verlan* in French rap. Kelsey Westphal (2012, p.169) has researched the use of *verlan* in Parisian rap with the aim of seeing “beyond this reductionist view of the slang practice and its speakers”, referring to the tendency to “see *verlan* as a linguistic symptom of the ‘social insecurity’ emphasized by mainstream media coverage of riots and gang behaviour in the suburbs”. With this goal in mind, he interviewed various individuals, ranging from rappers and middle-class youth to employees and university professors. After analysing his interviews, he found three essential uses of *verlan* in French rap and Parisian *banlieues*: a “means of self-representation”, “a means of discussing taboo concepts”, and “a means of introducing semantic and formal evolution into the French language” (Westphal, 2012, p.168).

One author in particular stood out in the literature review by her prolific writings on the linguistics of francophone rap: Mela Sarkar (see e.g. Low *et al.*, 2009; Sarkar, 2008a/b; Sarkar and Allen, 2007; Sarkar *et. al*, 2007; or Sarkar, 2006). Although her primary focus is on Quebec francophone rap, which does not feature at all in this thesis, she is a part of this review because of the impact she has had on a topic that is so closely related to this research. Only one of her papers will be presented in this introduction, since some of her other major writings also feature in chapter 1 and many of them focus on the same topic, i.e. code-switching. In her 2008 article entitled “‘Still Reppin’ Por Mi Gente’: The Transformative Power of Language Mixing in Quebec Hip Hop”, Sarkar investigated code-switching and its impact in Quebec rap. To this end, and similarly to the qualitative approach developed in this thesis, she analysed interviews with Quebec rappers and reviewed the academic literature on hip hop, with a focus on the history of hip hop in Quebec and the United States. Some of her important conclusions will be mentioned below.

In addition to these writings, only two more articles were found that tackled language in French rap in a more quantitative manner. The most recent one was written by Skye Paine in 2012. In his study, he investigates the use of *français* (standard French), *langue du bled* (defined as “language of the home country” of the artist, i.e. foreign borrowings other than English), *argot* (French slang) and *slang* (defined as English borrowings) in a corpus of 72 tracks from two Parisian bands (Suprême NTM and Afro Jazz) and two Marseille bands (Freeman and Fonky Family) from 1997 to 1999 (Paine, 2012, p.57). His conclusion is that only 4% of his corpus is non standard (i.e. *langage du bled*, *argot* and *slang*). He observes that their *français* is sometimes “very elegant” with uses of *ne* in *ne...pas* or subjunctives (p.52), that their *langage du bled* is either universal (shared by all other artists) or specific (much less common borrowings) (p.57), that their *argot* is “decidedly regional” (p.59), and that English borrowings are very common, making up 26% of all non-standard uses (p.62). He also noticed that Marseille rappers tend to use more Arabic, possibly due to the higher presence of people of North-African origins in the city, and almost no *verlan*, which is a very relevant observation in the context of this research (Paine, 2012, pp.58-59). Next, Samira Hassa (2010) studied the use of Arabic, English and *verlan* in context to define their functions in French rap. She analysed a corpus of four albums (57 tracks) by rappers who were nominated for the 2003 *Victoires de la Musique*. Some of her results and conclusions will be presented in the upcoming discussion of the linguistic features of French rap.

Although the number of papers that focus on the linguistics of French rap only is relatively limited, many researchers have mentioned some of its linguistic features in their books and articles. For example, Pecqueux (2009, p.48) describes how, from the late 1980s until around 1997, French rappers had a tendency to pronounce all the syllables, unlike their American counterparts or any native speaker in a normal conversational context, whereas

contemporary rappers do not usually do so. This insight is particularly important for this research project, as it relates to the diachronic and diaphasic determinants of non-standard French. Martin (2010a, p.45) adds that the language of French rappers is not a simple copy of the way young people speak in the *banlieues*. It can be defined as a reinvention of French, created with parts of many different types of French, such as the languages from the *banlieues*, youth and the media, with often some *verlan*, English or Arabic.

According to Martin (2010a, pp.97-99), French rappers do not generally speak that differently from the general population. Diam's, for example, who was the most famous female rapper in the early 2000s, uses a very varied vocabulary that is mostly characterised by standard and colloquial language. She also uses some abbreviations, many of them being everyday acronyms like SMS, MMS or MSN. This tendency applies to most rappers, as the linguistic corpus of this thesis exemplifies, although it is very common to come across truncations as well. Moreover, French rappers use vulgar language in their lyrics too, sometimes in a ritualistic way (Boucher, 1998, p.178), like in *ego trip*⁷ in which insulting the competition is part of the game and constitutes one of the rituals of the genre. Nevertheless, Martin (2010a, p.98) argues that vulgar language is typically limited, giving the example of Diam's who uses only two or three occurrences per track on average.

Rappers use a lot of standard and colloquial words, but slang plays a significant role in the vocabulary of the rappers as well. What is often unclear in the literature, however, is the definition of slang. On the one hand, Boucher (1998, pp.173-174) gives it a very broad meaning, encompassing historical slang, the vocabulary specific to the *banlieues*, *verlan*

⁷ In the *ego trip* rap genre, artists try to present themselves as the most talented rappers, usually by performing complex rhyming patterns with memorable punchlines and by insulting their competitors. This rap genre will be more thoroughly defined in the methodology of chapter 1.

and words borrowed from foreign languages. On the other hand, Pecqueux (2009, p.48) argues that rappers borrow mostly from long-established slang and regional slang but also sometimes contribute to the appearance of new slang such as “ouais gros” (Mafia K’1 Fry) or “en mode” (Rohff). Given this complexity, chapter 1 will provide a comprehensive definition of slang in the context of this research. What is more, Boucher (1998, pp.176-178) reports that the use of such slang can have several functions. The first is cryptic: the rappers use slang so that only a specific audience will understand what they say. The use of slang can also be seen as a game: rappers are constantly playing with words to impress their audience. Another function is the affirmation of belonging to a certain group. The use of a particular type of slang then becomes a marker of identity for the artists, which is linked to a desire to distinguish oneself from the rest of the population.

One of the most famous types of slang used by rappers, the youth of the *banlieues* and now even the general population, is *verlan*. Hassa (2010, p.59) remarks that *verlan* is not equally used in all regions of France and that it is most common around Paris, whereas Marseille rappers “hardly use it”, as we saw earlier and as Paine (2012, p.59) also reported. Then French rappers who use it do not do so randomly, they normally use it to express certain social realities and their frustrations (Hassa, 2010, p.60). Consequently, *verlan* is generally used when referring to stories of the *banlieue*, unemployment, delinquency or racial tensions. In such contexts, common *verlan* words are *ivé (vie)*, *du-per (perdu)*, *beu-her (herbe)* or *keufs (flics)*. *Verlan* being also a strong identity marker, it is commonly used to reinforce links between members of a group who then call each other *refré/reuf* (frère, ‘brother’) or *reus* (soeur, ‘sister’) (Hassa, 2010, p.60). It is interesting to note that researchers have already focused on some of the determinants of the use of *verlan*, one of the research questions of this thesis.

As far as foreign languages are concerned, researchers (e.g. Hassa, 2010; or Sarkar 2008a/b and 2006) do not necessarily focus on the importance of one language over others. What frequently interests sociolinguists is the relationship between languages within one track or in a particular context. One of the phenomena that they analyse is code-switching, which must be distinguished from code-mixing (Hassa, 2010, p.47). Code-switching refers to the “insertion of constituents between sentence boundaries” whereas code-mixing is the “alternation of codes within the same sentence” (Hassa, 2010, p.47), which must also be differentiated from borrowings. Although a borrowing can be understood to be a word or expression inserted into another code, many researchers ultimately believe that the two cannot necessarily be distinguished and it is typically in terms of code-switching that the impact of foreign languages on French rap is studied.

The two most influential languages in francophone rap are English and Arabic, but many other languages are used. In her study, Sarkar (2008a, p.145) observed that Quebec francophone rappers sometimes mix up to nine different languages in the same track. English remains, however, the most important language by far, due to the influence of the American origins of rap music. Hassa (2010, p.49) confirms this in the Metropolitan French context and argues that, despite the fact that most French pupils learn British English at school, it is American English, and more precisely African American English, that is used in rap music. Because of this influence of the United States, French rap lyrics typically contain many references to Hollywood, Harlem (e.g. French rapper Harlem) or American TV shows (Hassa, 2010, p.56). Code-switching into English can be seen as an acknowledgement of the wider hip hop movement around the world, even though rappers often try to localise it as well to emphasise their own suburban identities (Hassa, 2010, p.57). Similarly to *verlan*, the use of English is not random and tends to be restricted to certain concepts, such as violence, power and the degradation of women, with words such

as *bitch, fuck, fucking, kicker, shooter, dead or gang* (Hassa, 2010, p.57). Hassa (2010, p.58) considers that using English allows the rappers to transcend common French taboos by hiding offensive words behind the veil of a foreign language.

Most of the time, the Arabic used in French rap comes from Moroccan, Tunisian or Algerian dialectal varieties (Hassa, 2010, p.49). In the analysis carried out by Hassa (2010, p.50), it was observed that all the rappers from her corpus used at least some Arabic in their tracks, which is rarely the case with other musical genres like pop music. In her opinion, the use of Arabic by rappers reflects an identification with North Africa. She goes on to say that it is not easy to find differences in the use of Arabic between artists from Marseille and Paris (Hassa, 2010, p.51). Some artists from Marseille use many Arabic borrowings while others from Paris do not and vice versa. Arabic is used the most when talking about Islam and Muslim cultural practices, with common words being *hallal, ibliss* (evil) and *sheitane* (devil) (Hassa, 2010, p.52). However, Arabic is certainly not limited to these contexts and its use varies between artists.

Much more than linguistics, researching the history of the movement is probably the most common approach in the literature on French rap. Most books and essays written on rap music focus at least partially on the historical account of its origins and development, which was summarised earlier in this introduction (see e.g. Perrier, 2010; Blum, 2009; Hammou, 2009; Boucher, 1998; Cachin, 1996; Prévos, 1996; etc.). These researchers usually try to tell a complete and coherent story of the origins and the evolution of the rap movement by looking at some of its earliest tracks, at biographies of prominent artists, at interviews with rappers, or at newspaper articles. This information is fundamental for this research because it plays a central role in the diachronic linguistic analysis of this thesis. For instance, it would be difficult to interpret the prevalence of English throughout the

corpus without understanding and acknowledging the central role of the United States in the spread of hip hop culture around the world.

Tracing the precise origins of rap music is often the first task that such researchers try to accomplish (see e.g. Blum, 2009; Béthune, 2003; or Cachin, 1996). Even though the USA plays a predominant role in the history of rap music, most researchers point to Jamaica as the birth place of this genre, contrary to popular belief (see e.g. Blum, 2009; Boucher, 1998; or Cachin, 1996). Cachin (1996, pp.16-18) shares this opinion and describes how many of the early successful American rappers had Jamaican origins, such as Grandmaster Flash or DJ Kool Herc. The practice of rapping to a *beat* comes from the Jamaican sound systems, a type of mobile discotheque. As early as the 1960s, Jamaican DJs performed with an MC, i.e. a *Master of Ceremony* (a term now synonymous with rapper), in these sound systems and played vinyl 45s to entertain a crowd. Some of these artists started recording their performances and this eventually led to the international success of “Cocaine in my Brain” in 1976 by the Jamaican artist Dillinger.

After studying its Jamaican origins, many researchers focus on the role of the United States in the development of rap music (see e.g. Béthune, 2003; Vicherat, 2003; Boucher, 1998; Cachin, 1996; or Prévos, 1996), which they unanimously consider to be essential. However, since this research analyses language use in selected francophone rap tracks, most of the literature reviewed emphasised the history of rap in France, mostly in the 1990s (see e.g. Perrier, 2010; Hammou, 2009; Béthune, 2003; Vicherat, 2003; Boucher, 1998; Cachin, 1996; or Prévos, 1996). Indeed, very little work is available on the history of French rap since the 2000s. Among other topics, these researchers study the link between the development of French rap and the spread of hip hop culture in France (e.g. Prévos, 1996, p.715), the role of specialised radio stations, newspapers and websites (e.g. Béthune, 2003, p.182), the emergence of French rap amid the importation of American

rap (e.g. Blondeau, 2008, p.19; or Béthune, 2003, p.182), the impact of the earliest French rappers (Perrier, 2010, p.15) or the rise of modern rap genres (e.g. Cachin, 1996, p.74). Some researchers also try to trace the origins of French rap much further. For example, Boucher (1998, pp.97-98) asserts that it originates from the middle ages, as *troubadours* used to produce songs with a political overtone in the 12th and 13th centuries. Furthermore, Prévos (1996, p.715) studied word play and phonetic combinations in certain songs of the late 14th-century repertoire and found that they contained numerous alliterations, onomatopoeia and linguistic jokes, similarly to modern French rap.

French rap is not only a linguistic and historical phenomenon, it also affects society and social behaviours in various ways, from the impact of the rap bands themselves to the illegal downloading of their tracks online (Martin, 2010a, p.37). Consequently, sociological approaches are, according to Sberna (2002, p.9), one of the three main approaches to French rap music, the other two being historical and morphological (text and music). Indeed, since the introduction of rap music and the hip hop movement in France in the early 1980s, numerous authors have carried out sociological studies of French rap (see e.g. Martin, 2010b; Pecqueux, 2007; Hammou, 2005; or Sberna, 2002).

The first researchers to show interest in the emerging French hip hop culture were Christian Bachmann and Luc Basier (1985) who wrote the first academic article on the subject in French called “Junior s’entraîne très fort: ou le smurf comme mobilisation symbolique”. In their article, these two authors analysed and interpreted social and linguistic interactions during a live break-dancing performance by drawing on ethnography and anthropology. Since then, as Pecqueux (2007, p.29) explains, many researchers have continued their work and kept their focus on the evolution and on the sociological meanings of the movement in France. The focus of these researchers is rarely

limited to rap music and also includes hip hop culture. These authors try to present a nuanced depiction of the rappers and their audience. Indeed, many books and articles focus completely or partially on various common myths regarding French rap (see e.g. Martin, 2010a; Molinero 2009; Pecqueux, 2009 and 2007; Boucher, 1998). By analysing lyrics, carrying out biographical research and conducting interviews, such researchers try to dispel these pervading myths, such as French rap should be regarded as commercial music (Martin, 2010a, p.27), all rap artists come from the *banlieues* (Molinero, 2009, p.62), rappers use only vulgar words (Pecqueux, 2009, p.41), or rap artists talk about hatred and themselves only (Pecqueux, 2009, p.67 and p.105). For example, Pecqueux (2009, p.41) addresses the myth that French rappers use only vulgar and incorrect French by explaining how rap music has a lot in common with poetry. Pecqueux (2009, p.53) compares this myth to another widespread, yet incorrect, belief that anyone could become a rapper. In reality all rap tracks require practice and formal knowledge of the *beat*, the *flow* and rhymes.

Many of these stereotypical beliefs can be traced to the fact that French rap originates from disadvantaged multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. In this sense, as Laurent Béru puts it, we can say: “Art post-ségrégation aux États-Unis, le rap est un art postcolonial en France” (Béru, 2009, p.61). Indeed, French rap is a product, chronologically, of colonialism, as a large proportion of rappers, but certainly not all of them, have parents or grandparents who immigrated to France from former French colonies (Béru, 2009, pp.66-67). Accordingly, French rappers nowadays experience the consequences of this colonial history, such as racism, segregation or economic inequality, which are all legacies of that era. This puts these artists and their peers of immigrant origin⁸ in a situation where they

⁸ Throughout the thesis, the term “of immigrant origin” will be used to refer to artists whose parents or grandparents immigrated to France or who immigrated themselves to France, as children or adults.

are “residents and in many cases citizens of France while appearing to many among the majority population to belong elsewhere” (Hargreaves and McKinney, 1997, p.4), which leads a lot of artists to denounce the injustices of which they are the victims. Many remind their audience that, although they carry French passports, they are in many ways second-class citizens (Béru, 2009, pp.62-63).

What many rappers do not mention, however, is that they may be much more accepted than other artists of immigrant origin in other cultural spheres. For instance, Alec Hargreaves (2003, p.147) explains that writers from former French colonies have struggled much more to be recognized in mainstream society. In reality, according to Hargreaves (2003, p.147), “the barriers have been less rigid” in popular music, in cinema, and especially in French rap that is very multi-ethnic compared to its American counterpart. Hargreaves (2003, p.153) describes how the “spectacular rise” of French rap “is not simply an accident”. It can be explained by its American origins and “the greater openness of younger audiences in France, compared with older generations, towards transnational phenomena” (Hargreaves, 2003, p.153). Nevertheless, not all French rappers enjoy the same level of acceptance. Laurent Béru (2009, p.63) observed how many French rappers are either perceived as “*bons non-Blancs*” or “*mauvais non-Blancs*”, with the former supposedly being good because they spread positive messages of hope for their peers in *banlieues*, whereas the latter are allegedly bad because they encourage their peers to revolt.

The postcolonial legacy of French rap can also be seen in a much more positive light. Many rap artists grew up in contexts of cultural hybridity, which can have a positive impact on their creativity and how they apprehend their art. This cultural hybridity challenges in many ways the notion of fixed identities, as the manner in which the artists end up using their ethnically-diverse backgrounds in their raps relates to issues of identity

performance. Since identity plays such a crucial role in this music genre, many researchers have focused on this aspect of the movement in some of their work (see e.g. Marc Martínez, 2011; Martin, 2010b; Pecqueux, 2007; Sberna, 2002; or Boucher, 1998). As Marc Martínez (2011, p.2) explains, identity is “both performance and story”. Part of identity performance relates to how we try to resemble others or differentiate ourselves from them (Sberna, 2002, p.57; Boucher, 1998, p.191). As a result, identity performance can be both individual and collective (Martin, 2010b, p.260; Boucher, 1998, p.31). Indeed, identity can be described as “the process by which a subject symbolically positions himself or herself in a specific community” (Marc Martínez, 2011, p.2). It is built around many different factors, such as physical appearance, common beliefs and memories, aesthetics, ideologies, or socio-economic position (Marc Martínez, 2011, p.2). One very important factor in the performance of identity in the context of this thesis is musical taste because music “contributes to the narrativization” of time, place, traditions, and cultural heritage (Marc Martínez, 2011, p.2).

Given the importance of music in relation to identity, it makes sense to find that several articles focus on this crucial topic. For example, Isabelle Marc Martínez (2011) tries to see how the French rap movement contributes to shaping rappers’ identity performances, by analysing lyrics and taking into account the interaction between identity and music, historical discourses and narratives, the production and reception of rap, and the relation between rap, capitalism and mainstream culture, which are all issues underpinning this research as well. Marc Martínez (2011, p.1) argues that rap artists “all over the world develop strategies to subvert mainstream values and to replace them by new de-localized, contesting identities via intermedial and intertextual processes”. In other words, rappers perform their identity by rebelling against the values of society and embracing marginal, and often immigrant, ideals (Sberna, 2002, p.57).

Béatrice Sberna (2002) also addressed in her book how rappers' identities are performed, while presenting a sociology of rap in Marseille and giving a socio-economic and musical history of the city. To draw her conclusions, she analysed interviews with 26 people who were connected to the rap movement in Marseille, such as rap bands, impresarios, rappers' relatives, or concert organisers. These interviews were mostly recorded, but she also carried out a few written interviews, together with concert recordings. Sberna (2002, pp.68-69) describes how the ways in which rappers develop marginal behaviours can be varied. They depend on a variety of social factors, which once combined, can create dangerous, anti-social and even criminal conducts. For example, two of these factors are poverty and a lack of social mobility. This situation can then lead to educational failure, often provoked by a sense of disillusionment with the educational system and a desire for rebellion. It is indeed a common theme in rappers' tracks to describe how they are rejected by the rest of society, not allowed to get good jobs or equal educational opportunities (Sberna, 2002, pp.68-69).

Boucher (1998, p.179) explains that these inequalities lead to collective and subversive identity performances. A common strategy to subvert mainstream values and legitimise this rebellious identity performance is to use new historical discourses and narratives that differ from the official ones (Marc Martínez, 2011, p.5). Many rappers feel that the commonly-accepted historical narratives in France "have forgotten the lower socioeconomic communities where rappers belong" (Marc Martínez, 2011, p.2). As a result, they base their identity on a new history which they recreate, allowing them to take control of it, make it work to their advantage and appropriate it. Although this new identity performance is often utopian and idealised (Boucher, 1998, p.306), rap artists still work hard to spread their vision and they see music as a perfect medium for this purpose. Marc Martínez (2011, p.2) reports that because contemporary music is "a cultural product

and practice with symbolic and ideological content”, it can help to shape their identity. Yet, the more success, fame and money that they acquire, the further they get from this rebellious identity performance, since the temptation to sign with a major record company and to become rich can often bring a premature end to the defence of these ideals.

Denis-Constant Martin also focuses on concepts of identity in his book (2010a) and article (2010b) that use notions of musicology, political sociology and literary analysis to study Diam’s’ 2006 album *Dans ma bulle* in order to understand how rap lyrics should be interpreted and what their social impact is. Through his textual analysis and interpretation of lyrics, in relation to French value systems, the author suggests that rap should be seen as a “social revealer” rather than a simple “expression of rebellion”, since rap “brings new values and representations into public debate and stimulates discussion around them” (Martin, 2010b, p.257). His research also shows how rap artists can define themselves by the values that they promote. Many of these values originate from the early hip hop movement and the Zulu Nation. One such example is the emphasis on respect (Martin, 2010b, p.260). This respect can be aimed at the people whom some artists believe they represent, e.g. the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods who have chaotic relationships with school and few job opportunities, but also at their parents or the place where they come from. In addition, Martin (2010b, p.260) mentions that work, equality and criticism of far Right parties are shared values among French rappers. To this list, Pecqueux (2007, p.111) adds the desire to spread the truth, which is accompanied by self-irony. In this effort always to be truthful, some artists even share their doubts and failures, ignoring the risks involved in admitting their weaknesses publicly. What is more, these values are not stable; they are in a constant state of slow but continuous change. Martin (2010b, p.264) explains that young people “do not think they adhere to a hotchpotch of irreconcilable values”; in fact they “view themselves as engaged in a process of value transformation,

which amounts to re-organising and re-signifying value systems”.

Martin (2010a, p.33) also asserts that another important factor in shaping the artists’ identity performances is their geographical origins, and more specifically the *département* or city from where they come. French rappers frequently refer to them in their tracks and form alliances with their competitors based on these origins. This practice is especially common among Ile-de-France artists. The band Mafia K’1 Fry, for instance, is exclusively made up of rappers from Val-de-Marne (94). This is how many rappers perform the identity of their bands and they constantly try to legitimise it by comparing their city or *département* to others. This tendency is not limited to the Ile-de-France. Brussels rappers, for example, know that people normally associate French-speaking rap with France and so they try hard to promote their city, as in the track “BX Vibes Remix” (Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*) from our linguistic corpus.

This importance of the rappers’ origins then relates to an influential concept in French rap: authenticity. Authenticity is far from being a simple notion and its definition varies from one discipline to another (Nuttall and Tinson, 2011, p.1009). In sociolinguistics, authenticity has always played a crucial role because this field of study focuses on “real” language, which can be defined as “language produced in authentic contexts by authentic speakers” (Bucholtz, 2003, pp.398-399). However, this definition immediately faces problems of essentialism because such authenticity must be “determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group” (Bucholtz, 2003, p.400). In reality, as Benedict Anderson points out (2006, p.6), such groups are “imagined”, as most group members will never meet, hear or even see their fellow members, especially in larger communities. Furthermore, language and authenticity can appear to be “mutually hostile” (Coupland, 2003, p.417), as the

performance of language is deeply social and contextual. Indeed, one individual may act “authentically” in certain contexts and not in others because “the authenticity of talk is not an all or none matter” (Van Leeuwen, 2001, pp.395-396).

Despite these shortcomings, sociolinguists have still used this concept of authenticity usefully to carry out research by relying on more or less defined characteristics of an “authentic speaker”. According to Mary Bucholtz (2003, pp.404-407), four characteristics or “ideologies” can be drawn. Firstly, an authentic speaker must be isolated, i.e. “removed from and unaffected by other influences” (Bucholtz, 2003, p.404). Secondly, the language being studied must seem unremarkable and common to the speaker, with conversation often being considered to be the most authentic form of language use (Bucholtz, 2003, pp.405-406). Thirdly, the linguist as observer constitutes an obstacle to authenticity, as his or her mere presence represents an interference (Bucholtz, 2003, pp.406). Finally, for a speaker to be authentic, there must necessarily be an authoritative figure, usually the linguist, who gives his “seal of approval” and recognises him or her as authentic (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.393; see also see also Bucholtz, 2003, pp.406-407).

From these definitions, it becomes readily apparent that language in French rap would not be considered authentic according to sociolinguistic standards because it is predominantly an artistic performance. This raises the question of whether such an artistic performance can be seen as the manifestation of authentic speech (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.394). This may or may not be the case depending on whether the artist would speak in the same manner in his daily life (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.395). However, whether or not such language use should be considered authentic does not prevent French rappers and their audience from using the term meaningfully. In the context of the rap movement, being authentic can be understood as acting genuinely, being real, according to who you

are and your origins. In other words, for a rapper to be considered authentic, no contrast must exist between the performance of his music and his real life. For example, it is considered inappropriate by French rappers to speak like a *banlieusard* if you do not come from the *banlieues* or to talk about taking part in crime and drug dealing if you have always obeyed the law. Artists who do not follow this recommendation are often called “fake” by fans and other rappers, a tendency which exerts a strong influence on identity performance and language use in the genre.

Furthermore, gender plays an important role in identity performance in French rap, as gender inequalities are very pronounced. The number of women among commercially successful rappers is quite small: only around 5%. This is a figure found after retracing the discography of French rap from 1989 until 2011. One out of twenty albums in this time period was performed by a woman. This figure alone is revealing about the state of the rap industry and the place of women. Although female rappers are the exception rather than the rule in French rap, Martin (2010a, p.40) comments that women have always been an integral part of hip hop culture even before Sylvia Robinson organised the production of *Rapper's Delight*. For example, Ms Melodie performed in the band Boogie Down Productions in the late 1980s. From the beginning, women in rap music were motivated by a desire to contest male domination, in the industry and in the general population, but also to assert their femininity. For instance, Sberna (2002, p.215) gives an interesting account of the current situation in Marseille. She describes how no women in her study were DJs or music designers. She also notes that women, in male rappers' productions, tend to play either the role of the mother or the enchantress. As far as fame and success are concerned, only one Marseille female rapper managed to become known in the whole country and beyond, Keny Arkana, as opposed to many male solo rappers and bands,

including IAM, Fonky family, Psy4 de la Rime, or El Matador.⁹ Given the importance of this topic, chapter 4 will be devoted to the link between language use and gender, with a focus on the differences between male and female rappers in a context of broader gender performance.

Although most of the research is focused on the rap artists themselves, some authors write about the audience as well as the social networks of French rap. When it comes to the audience, Stéphanie Molinero (2009) tried for instance to describe who listens to French rap and why in her book, *Les publics du rap: une enquête sociologique*, by carrying out a survey based on written questionnaires and live interviews with people who listen to French rap whom she met at concerts or in specialised shops. She makes an interesting remark which ties in with the previous topic: men constitute two thirds of the French rap audience (Molinero, 2009, p.14). She also observes that more than half of the listeners (whether male or female) were younger than 24 years old, with one third being between 15 and 19. It could be tempting to conclude that rap music is a genre that interests mostly young people, but this would be forgetting that almost half of the audience is older than 25. Molinero (2009, p.15) adds that half of the listeners are students, which is quite understandable given the previous remarks. When it comes to working people, she found that most listeners are either *ouvriers* or *employés*. In her conclusion, she explains that the audience of French rap is more masculine, rather young, and mostly comprising students and individuals with little education (“Bac” or less) and belonging to the social categories of *ouvriers* and *employés*.

As far as the social networks of French rap are concerned, Karim Hammou (2005) studied

⁹ El Matador is one of the interviewees of this research. He is from Marseille and started rapping in 1999.

the correlations between the controversy around the 1999 *Victoires de la Musique*¹⁰ and the existence of such a “social network of rap”. To conduct this study, he relied on four years of ethnographic research. He used analyses of newspaper articles and semi-directed interviews with around twenty artists and ten professionals of the music industry, including journalists and radio hosts. In addition, Hammou (2009, p.77) proposed to analyse the rappers’ social networks by looking at the prevalence of *featurings*¹¹ in French rap. To summarise Hammou’s findings, social and professional networks between French rap artists started in the early 1990s via *featurings* and only became common after 1997. This practice stabilised from 1997 until 2004 and has remained very influential in the genre ever since. In his concluding remarks, Hammou (2005, p.179) explains that it is most useful to talk about micro-social networks in this context as opposed to big social networks. Moreover, the social networks of French rap are part of wider social networks within the music industry in France and the rest of the world.

Boucher (1998, p.245) also insists that French rap has a high social dimension. Many famous and successful French rap bands started as groups of friends who used to rap as a hobby. Slowly, after many individual and collective pressures, these groups of friends become actual bands and, after many more encouragements and interactions with local crowds, they eventually gain nation-wide fame. Boucher (1998, p.245) adds that another common way for artists to be introduced to French rap is by frequenting groups who are involved with disciplines that relate to rap music, such as graffiti or break-dancing.

¹⁰ In 1999, Manau won in the brand new rap/groove category, even though they were competing against MC Solaar, Stomy Bugsy, Ärsenik, and NTM. This led to controversy because many critics and rappers did not consider Manau to be a rap band.

¹¹ Featuring: when a rapper or a rap band invites another artist or band to perform in one of their tracks, a very common phenomenon in rap music.

Up to now, most of the approaches have focused on French rap artists or French rap as a movement, but several researchers also look more closely at the lyrics of French rap. Some researchers analyse the content of these lyrics and investigate the numerous themes that appear in rappers' tracks (see e.g. Béthune, 2003; Vicherat, 2003; or Boucher, 1998). For example, Béthune (2003, p.188) asserts that French rap artists tend to have a conflicting relationship with school, which often features in their lyrics. On the one hand, some rappers criticise it constantly and point out all of its weaknesses. On the other hand, others insist that their audience should neither leave school nor imitate their favourite artists but instead pursue higher education. In this context of Metropolitan French rap and the *école laïque*, these criticisms of the educational system are often linked to a wider disapproval of the policies of the nation and political figures. Vicherat (2003, p.87) argues that rappers do not think that politicians properly represent the French population, and even less so the inhabitants of the *banlieues*. Sometimes, their apprehensions are caused by real lack of empathy from politicians. For instance, the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy who was at the time Ministry of the Interior, declared on October 19 2005 that a particular *cité* needed to be cleaned with a Kärcher¹² (“on va nettoyer au Kärcher la cité”), which did not help improve his popularity within those communities. Béthune (2003, p.197) adds that the artists mainly focus on the Far Right parties, and more specifically the Front National, since many rappers have immigrant origins.

Other researchers are more interested in the poetic elements of French rap (see e.g. Barret, 2008; Béthune, 2003; or Liu, 1997). For example, Liu (1997) studied what makes MC Solaar's work poetic and original by performing textual analyses and relying on biographical elements, while also carrying out comparisons with American rap and taking

¹² A brand of high-pressure cleaner

into account the genesis of rap and its connection to the city and technology. She describes how French rap is closely related to poetry, by discussing some of MC Solaar's lyrics:

Solaar has expanded the possibilities of rap and stretched the possibilities of French syntax. He inherits from Public Enemy and Baudelaire at the same time and his work allows us to see that in the poetics of popular music, poetry itself might be revitalized. (Liu, 1997, p.332)

This is an opinion shared by Béthune (2003, p.16) who adds that rap music struggles to be assimilated to poetry because it transgresses traditional poetic features. He believes that the reason why rap is not readily seen as poetry is because society classifies it as entertainment and considers entertainment and poetry to be forever irreconcilable. In reality, they are not mutually incompatible. Rap has very strong poetic components that can be found both in the formal poetic techniques used and in the search for beautiful and memorable word choices, which raises important questions about what the poetic and aesthetic mean in the context of this cultural movement (see chapter 5 for more on these notions and the methodology in chapter 1 for a definition of *poetic rap*).

In this regard, Julien Barret (2008) has written a very complete book on the topic of rhymes and sound echoes in French rap. In his study, he tries to see how and to what extent such rhymes and sound echoes are used in French rap, and especially in *ego trip* tracks, how they affect meaning and relate to one another, and how they borrow from traditional French literature and oral poetry. He conducts this research by carrying out thorough lyrical analyses with terminology borrowed from poetry analysis and musicology. Barret (2008, p.44) explains that rap artists play with the French language and shape it in many different ways. A first example is the way in which they modify spelling in their stage names and in the names of their tracks (Barret, 2008, p.45), such as the artists Joey Starr, B2OBA or ROH2F. One of the most famous examples of such word play is the title "L'NMIACcd'HTCK72KPDP" by MC Solaar (1994, *Prose Combat*),

which is a seemingly meaningless combination of letters that actually reads as *l'ennemi a cessé d'acheter ces cassettes de cape et d'épée* (Barret, 2008, p.46). Beyond word play, rhymes constitute the way in which rappers play with language the most, they are the implicit “rule” of the game (Barret, 2008, p.48). Rappers must prove themselves with their ability to create the most outstanding rhymes, and this is particularly true in *ego trip* rap in which rappers literally “boxe[nt] avec les mots” (Ärsenic, 1998, *Quelques gouttes suffisent*, “Boxe avec les mots”).

Barret (2008, p.93) goes on to say that French rappers’ use of formal rhyme techniques is in many ways identical to classical French poetry. For example, they like to produce antanaclases. The principle of this practice is to take two homonyms or two identical words and to assign two different meanings to them based on the context, such as MC Solaar’s famous line “J’étais le mâle et la femelle fait mal” (MC Solaar, 1994: *Prose Combat*, “Séquelles”). We can see in this example that, although *mâle* and *mal* sound nearly identical, they have two completely different meanings. The opposite example would be the syllepse, which is also a common stylistic device in French rap (Barret, 2008, p.96). Rappers take one noun and assign two possible meanings to it, such as Svinkels’s “*Les keufs ont des consignes, normal avec tout ce qu’ils boivent*” (Svinkels, 1997, *Police*, “Alcootest”). In this example, *consignes* can refer to both “orders” and “deposits”. These are but two examples and a complete analysis of rhymes and figures of speech in relation to NSL in the corpus will be presented in chapter 5.

This study of the poetic elements of French rap can be linked to broader discussions of the aesthetics of the movement (see e.g. Béthune, 2004; or Béthune, 2003). In one of his books (2004), Christian Béthune attempts to describe the aesthetic experience of French rap by tracing its history, comparing it to other musical genres, describing its musical elements and common terminology, addressing its common myths, delimiting its usual

themes, and researching its culture. He suggests that researchers focus too much on sociological analyses of French rap and often disregard the aesthetic interest (Béthune, 2004, p.22). Just like any aesthetic phenomenon, French rap uses symbolism which cannot be reduced to its sociological meaning. When focusing solely on sociological questions, researchers do not do justice to this art, which goes beyond revelations of chaotic social backgrounds. Focusing on aesthetics does not mean rejecting the social realities that characterise many rap artists, but rather it acknowledges the fact that sociological issues alone do not explain the wide success and creativity of French rap. Béthune (2004, p.23) adds that French rap brings aesthetics into question because of its marginality.

The aesthetic marginality of French rap is especially present in its musical elements. Béthune (2004, p.62) argues that rap bridges the gap between music and noise. A lot of the common musical terminology, like tonality or melody, cannot always be applied to rap successfully, which could lead to the conclusion that rap is not musical. But this is exactly where the new aesthetics of the genre begin. Rap artists define themselves by the marginality of their music and many artists feature on the covers of their albums with samplers and other electronic equipment as a statement of their affiliation to this new culture. Consequently, as you might expect, part of the literature on French rap focuses on musical analyses. For example, Antoine Hennion (2005) carried out a comparative analysis of rap music and techno¹³. His aim was to see how all the elements of these two music genres combine to produce a coherent whole, with an emphasis on the bodily, musical, scenic and ideological elements. To achieve this goal, the author summarised two different interventions at a conference, one on rap and the other one on techno, which focused on textual and musical analyses based on live performances at the event, to

¹³ Techno can be described as a type of electronic dance music.

summarise the most important elements of both performances. He concludes by comparing the artists' tacit understanding of what it means to produce music.

Martin (2010a, p.65) also focused on the musical aspect of French rap and argues that it is often underestimated, if not completely neglected. Yet, as Martin (2010a, p.65) adds, there must be an excellent relationship between music and text to create a successful track. In the formal study of music in rap, some researchers (e.g. Rossi, 2012; or Fagyal, 2007) focus on the technicalities and discuss how most French rap tracks are built according to a four-time rhythm bar (music rhythm). The main and strongest *beat* is the first while the third is less strong than the first but stronger than the second and fourth (Rossi, 2012, p.116). This basic structure is usually repeated four times for a total of sixteen *beats* per line. Yet, this does not mean that each line contains sixteen syllables nor that the linguistic line corresponds to the metric line. Indeed, rappers insert silences (silent *beats*) and do not always begin to rap on the first strong *beat* or end their sentences on the sixteenth *beat*, hence the varying lengths of the lines in most rap tracks (Rossi, 2012, p.118).

So far, the literature review has revealed that researchers have written about French rap since its appearance in France and that most books and articles focus on historical, sociological, linguistic, poetic, aesthetic and/or musical approaches, with linguistics being one of the disciplines covered the least. An important purpose of this review was to identify and analyse the main research questions from the literature on French rap, to see how this research can relate to them but also how these disciplines can enhance this thesis. When looking at the research questions and the conclusions from the linguistic approaches, it becomes evident that few studies offered a complete description of language in French rap. Consequently, the analysis of language use in the corpus from this study will clearly fill in this gap in knowledge from the literature.

Furthermore, many authors focus on the most common stereotypes and myths surrounding French rap. One of those myths is that all rappers use a lot of slang, vulgarities and *verlan*. Most researchers provided answers to this question based on limited linguistic analyses. The linguistic approach of this thesis, since it relies on a very wide corpus that takes diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants¹⁴ into account, will provide a much more precise, nuanced and accurate answer to this question that could then become the basis of further sociological interpretations.

Another fundamental sociological question relates the study of rappers' identity performances. Rappers can perform their identity by choosing certain styles of clothes, rap genres or themes, to name a few, but also, and possibly more importantly, in the conscious and unconscious uses of language. Most sociological descriptions of identity in French rap take language into account, but their reports often rely on general, sometimes stereotypical, explanations. A linguistic analysis looking at French rap from its beginnings would allow researchers to gain invaluable information, which could lead to newer understandings of identity performance.

When trying to tell the history of French rap, researchers focus on important events in the evolution of the genre but they often fail to look at the language changes that accompanied them. A detailed analysis of the development of standard and non-standard languages since the first albums of French rap could bring nuance into the historical accounts already produced. An important factor in the history of French rap is its differentiation from its American counterpart. Most researchers agree that French rap separated itself in many ways from American rap, but they fail to look in detail at the linguistic consequences of this distancing. How has French rappers' use of (African American) English evolved

¹⁴ They determine how a language varies across time, geographic origins, genders, and styles/registers, respectively.

in the last twenty years? What meanings do they assign to such borrowings? Can they be attributed to conscious decisions taken by the rappers? These three examples of questions show how linguistics could contribute to an improved historical understanding of the rap movement. Furthermore, it can be observed from the historical summaries of French rap that many of these accounts focus on the origins of French rap and do not develop it much beyond the end of the 1990s. In consequence, the analyses of the diachronic determinants of NSL could potentially contribute to a more recent history of French rap.

These examples already begin to show how a linguistic study such as the one that will be developed in this thesis can relate to other disciplines. Only a few research questions were interpreted in this optic, but this exercise can be repeated for nearly all of the important research questions handled in the literature on French rap. In most instances, linguistics is either lacking or only briefly mentioned, although it could really enter into dialogue with these other disciplines and offer additional insights.

3. Chapter outline

In order to answer the research questions, the thesis will be structured according to the main sections of the corpus: diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic variation, to which an overview of the corpus as a whole will be added. This approach allows the researcher to focus on one determinant at a time initially and then to bring all the results together in a general conclusion. These five chapters will have the following content:

Chapter I: “En mode crime lyrical”, or a general overview of the corpus will present the global results from the whole corpus. It will start with a discussion of non-standard versus standard language in relation to the research questions and language registers, in addition to an examination of its research potential. The goal of this chapter is to present the global quantitative results of the analysis and to define and describe NSL in the

corpus, as a form of general introduction to the linguistic determinants of the corpus. It will present the complete methodology, which includes the selection of the artists and their tracks, the definition of the categories of NSL, the process behind the analysis of the corpus, the choice of reference materials, and the description of the type of interviews used in the research. Then the chapter will move to the quantitative results of the corpus as a whole, with detailed results for all categories of NSL, foreign borrowings and grammatical categories, as well as a qualitative discussion of NSL use articulated around track extracts and quotations from interviews.

Chapter II: “NTM, Solaar, IAM, c’est de l’antiquité”, or an analysis of diachronic determinants will analyse different generations of rappers and also a single artist throughout his career. Internal and external determinants will be tackled to see if variation in the corpus should be attributed to progressive generational changes or other external factors, such as temporary linguistic fads. This will lead to discussions of the impact of the beginnings of French rap, when this music genre was not yet accepted in France, in comparison to the wide acceptance and success of French rap nowadays. The effect of life experiences will also be taken into consideration to observe how much vocabulary can change throughout an individual’s life as he or she goes through various life-changing events. These discussions will be linked to the effects of strong- and weak-ties relationships on language change as well as the impact of increasing fame, changes in social class and the advent of the internet.

Chapter III: “Hauts-de-Seine, majeur en l’air sur la piste”, or an analysis of diatopic determinants will focus on the impact of ethnic and geographic origins. Central to this chapter will be the notions of identity performance and narratives, space, social relations, and regional and global flows of people. It will be important to see how individuals react to these various diatopic determinants, whether they embrace or reject them. This chapter

will look at the variety of foreign borrowings used, especially in relation to multicultural communities and, of course, immigration and flows of people. In addition to this, notions of power relations and authenticity will be essential in this discussion, in connection with audiences. Furthermore, conflicts and differences between cities and *départements* will be explored, in correlation with identity performance and various historical and socio-cultural determinants. Moreover, the analysis will try to differentiate ethnic from geographical determinants, since it is not always possible, in the creation of the corpus, to limit oneself to only one determinant.

Chapter IV: “Cessez de bousculer l’exclue à la gueule masculine”, or an analysis of gender determinants will initially focus only on male versus female rappers but the qualitative discussion will take more complex notions into account, such as gender performativity, queer linguistics or androgyny. In this chapter, the extensive literature on the differences between men and women with regard to language use will be reviewed. Universalistic and binary discourses will be dissected in contrast with individual differences and other determinants like culture, geographical origins, age or social class. Moreover, the qualitative discussion will focus on unequal gender power relations in a male-dominated heterosexist industry, in which hyper-masculinity is often the norm. We will observe how male and female artists react to and perpetuate these stereotypical gender manifestations both in their lyrics and videos. Some of the NSL use will also be analysed in terms of speech acts to try and determine what the artists want to accomplish by using specific terms in certain contexts.

Chapter V: “Mon rap prend de la protéine”, or an analysis of diaphasic determinants will examine the impact of rap genres. The linguistic analysis will focus on three different French rap genres that will be the foundation of a qualitative discussion that will look at

the effect of aesthetics, figures of speech, rhymes, themes, and performance. First, the link between various poetic elements, figures of speech, sound echoes, word plays and NSL will be explored, with a special emphasis on the impact of these poetic devices on meaning. Afterwards, the discussion will move to an analysis of themes and their performance in lyrics and videos. This will lead to an investigation of the differences between the written text and the oral performance. Lastly, the chapter will turn to the connection between NSL and gestures. It is well known that rappers make all sorts of gestures with their hands and their bodies and this analysis will try to see whether they are meaningful and determinant.

Now that the main research questions, the literature review and the chapter outline have been addressed, the actual analysis will begin in chapter 1 that will look more closely at the methodology and describe to what extent the rappers used NSL in the corpus. The answers to this initial research question will then pave the way for the rest of the analysis and the discussion of the determinants of NSL use.

Chapter I:

“En mode crime lyrical”, or a general overview of the corpus

1. Introduction

As was outlined in the introduction, the aim of this PhD research is to investigate the use of non-standard language (NSL) in a corpus of selected francophone rap tracks. Before unveiling the analysis, it is essential to explain why NSL is worthy of research and how it relates to standard language (SL). The first step towards addressing these issues is to posit a definition of SL and NSL. According to Finegan (2007, p.14), SL is a variety of language that people use to communicate with one another in public spheres. All SLs start as dialects that eventually undergo a process of standardisation during which grammar, syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation are fixed. The choice of the dialect is not, however, arbitrary, but rather the result of complex power relations. Those with the most economic and cultural capital have the ability to impose their personal hierarchy of tastes, which includes linguistic preferences, as legitimate, while relegating any other variants to the realms of the illegitimate and the popular (see e.g. Bourdieu 1984a, 1990 or 1991). By doing so, they alienate people who do not have access to such cultural capital and they reinforce their own power, as they already possess the necessary cultural knowledge and linguistic skills for social and economic advancement. SLs are born when such linguistic cultural hierarchies are given an official legal status.

The French language is a good illustration of this phenomenon. Standard French originates from a dialectal variety favoured most notably by the royal family and its court in the region of Paris in the 9th century (Leclerc, 2015, n.p.). This dialect enjoyed much

prestige and legitimacy but it was propelled to the status of standard language only when King François I declared it the official language of the nation in article 111 of the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539 (Legifrance, 2015, n.p.). Following Charles IX's creation of the *Académie du Palais* in 1570 and later Cardinal Richelieu's establishment of the *Académie française* in 1635, numerous grammarians started to work on the language to allow it to replace and surpass Latin as *lingua franca* in the nation (Vanneste, 2009, p.67). Furthermore, the acceptance of this dialect over others was made possible at the time, among other factors, by the influence of Protestantism, and its rejection of Rome and therefore Latin, the development of printing, and the creation of numerous *Collèges* that used French as medium of instruction, including the *Collège des Lecteurs royaux* (Vanneste, 2009, p.67).

However, one of the most crucial moments in the history of France that led to the creation of standard French as we know it today was the French Revolution. As Renée Balibar declared:

Il n'est pas possible d'aborder l'histoire du français au XIXe siècle, si on ne dispose pas d'une conception générale des interventions politiques et idéologiques de la Révolution française dans le domaine de la langue. (Balibar, 1974, p.87)

In the aftermath of 1789, members of the bourgeoisie, and most notably the *Jacobins*, initiated significant changes to the linguistic and educational policies of the nation (Balibar, 1974, p.88). Many of the pre-revolution institutions (such as the royal court or the *salons aristocratiques*) that used to control and monitor, to some extent, language and literature were either destroyed or their influence was abolished by the bourgeoisie (Balibar, 1974, p.59). Their desire was not to unify the linguistic habits of the *Ancien Régime* but actually to destroy them and to replace them by a *français élémentaire national*, which would form a basis for equal linguistic exchanges and be taught across

the nation in schools (Balibar, 1974, p.143-145). However, members of the common people did not possess the necessary intellectual and linguistic skills nor the required influence to elaborate and lead these political and linguistic plans (Balibar, 1974, pp.88-89).

As a result, the bourgeoisie, who had made language learning a priority under the *Ancien Régime* for the power they could gain from it, could push their own linguistic agenda to ensure that they maintained their privileges and their influence in the country (Balibar, 1974, pp.88-89). Although the revolutionaries had favoured equal access to school, only the “*écoles centrales de départements*”, which were created for children of the bourgeoisie, were organised in practice, and it took almost a century for primary schools to be actually available to the rest of the population, thanks to laws such as the *lois Jules Ferry* in 1881 and 1882 (Balibar, 1974, pp.88-90). Even when most of the French population gained access to education, the bourgeoisie still maintained its grip on language by belittling primary schools and by putting secondary schools, which most French citizens were too poor to attend, on a pedestal (Balibar, 1974, p.96). These secondary schools also gave a central place to literature in their curriculum, which strongly influenced the linguistic ideals of the bourgeoisie as well as language policies in France at the time (Balibar, 1974, p.96).

This represents one way of looking at SL. This definition, however, is not complete enough for the purpose of this research. If this logic is followed fully, then colloquial words, and even some slang words, could be regarded as standard. Indeed, these types of words can be found in all dictionaries that normally delimit SL versus NSL. This is why another layer must be added to this first definition: the formality of language. The way SL is envisioned in this research relates also to the type of language that can be used in

formal settings. Seen in this manner, SL is not simply the standardised language shared by a population, but also the grammar, syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary that would not sound inappropriate in formal settings. As this thesis focuses mostly on vocabulary, this problematic will be illustrated with some standard versus non-standard French vocabulary. Under the first definition of SL, both *maison* and *baraque* would be accepted as standard French whereas *house* or *casa* would be rejected. A big difference still remains between *maison* and *baraque*. The former could be used in a formal context whereas the latter could not. So the best way to understand the meaning of SL versus NSL in this research is in terms of language registers.

The term language register is usually understood as being a “general cover term for all language varieties associated with different situations and purposes” (Biber, 1994, p.32). This term encompasses a wide variety of linguistic phenomena, as registers can vary phonologically, grammatically or morpho-syntactically (to name a few), although only lexical variation is relevant to this research (Brizuela *et al.*, 1999, p.130). When it comes to the French context, *niveau de langue* is sometimes mistaken for *registre de langue*, although these two terms refer to different concepts and need to be distinguished. *Niveau de langue* refers to the speaker’s knowledge of the language whereas *registre de langue*, just like language register in English, relates to the context of the language exchange and its impact on the linguistic output (Grevisse and Goosse, 2011, p.23). Then, not all linguists agree on how to divide these language registers (see e.g. Kalmbach, 2012; Grevisse and Goosse, 2011; Bouthier *et al.*, 1994; or Boni *et al.*, 1992). For instance, Grevisse and Goosse (2011, p.24) talk about *registre très familier*, *familier* (or *courant*), *soigné* (or *soutenu*), and *littéraire* while Kalmbach (2012, p.584) mentions *langue parlée*, *courante*, *écrite* and *soutenue*. In this research, none of these labels work perfectly because they overlap to some extent with the categories of NSL that will be presented in

the methodology. For example, Grevisse's classification contains the word *familier* twice whereas it is a specific NSL category in this study (colloquial). It would therefore not work as a generic term to encompass all NSL categories. In addition, Kalmbach's use of *langue parlée* is also problematic in this thesis because all rap lyrics are spoken.

Instead, the following three labels will be used: lower, neutral and higher. Both neutral and higher registers will be regarded as standard while the lower register will be seen as non standard. The neutral register is neither high nor low and contains words like *maison*, *voiture*, or *téléphone*. These words are perfectly acceptable in any setting and this is the reason why they are called "neutral" in this research. The higher register includes words that are more formal, technical or poetic like *demeure*, *oxidation* or *alexandrin*. At the other end of the spectrum, the lower register is made up of colloquial, vulgar and slang words such as *gamin*, *connard* or *taf*. Numerous concepts can be expressed using these three registers, e.g. *boulot* (low), *travail* (neutral) and *tâche* (high) or *piquer* (low), *voler* (neutral) and *dérober* (high). This description should be enough for the purpose of distinguishing between SL and NSL in the framework of this research, although one last element needs to be clarified.

The last aspect of NSL in French rap that needs to be addressed is its similarity to the *français contemporain des cités* (FCC), which is how some researchers (see e.g. El-Kolli, 2013; Liogier, 2002; or Goudaillier, 1998) qualify the way young people speak in the *banlieues*, typically around Paris. *FCC* is a type of slang that can be said to be both similar to and different from traditional slang (Liogier, 2002, p.42). As is the case with traditional slang, *FCC* is used in closed sociological milieus, often related to illegal activities, to speak about themes like crime, drugs, prison, police, or sex (Liogier, 2002, p.42). Both traditional slang and *FCC* have a strong symbolic function, such as reinforcing the

connection between members and excluding non-members (Liogier, 2002, p.42), and permit numerous lexical creations, via such methods as abbreviations, suffixations, metaphors, or borrowings (see e.g. El-Kolli, 2013; Valdman, 2000; or Goudaillier, 1998). The two most significant differences between traditional slang and *FCC* concern the borrowings from foreign languages and the use of *verlan*. Although both types of slang use borrowings, *FCC* tends to rely much more on English and to use a much higher number of foreign languages (Goudaillier, 1998, p.18). Furthermore, *verlan* plays a central role in *FCC*, whereas it is much rarer in traditional slang.

NSL in *FCC* is important in this research because, as El Matador explains in the following quotation, many rappers have roots in the French *banlieues* and rap in a way that reflects these roots:

Tu te dis forcément que si tu vis dans une cité et que ta vie est ter ter [i.e. from the *banlieue*], ben ton langage [in rap lyrics] va être ter ter aussi. (El Matador, 2013)

This correlation will be apparent in the qualitative descriptions of the corpus in this chapter, since many NSL words that will be described are very similar and sometimes identical to what *FCC* researchers have studied. However, NSL in this corpus is not completely identical to *FCC*. Although many of the selected rappers come from Parisian *banlieues*, it is far from being the case with all artists from the corpus, whereas research on *FCC* is usually limited to Paris. What is more, not all rappers come from the *banlieues* or rap in a way that identifies them as such. French rappers are also placed in very different situations from regular inhabitants of the *banlieues* because their language use is part of an artistic performance. Accordingly, *FCC* is useful in the context of this research but these two types of NSL should not be confused or used interchangeably.

Next, to explain why NSL warrants research interest, it is necessary to enquire into the meaning and purpose of sociolinguistics, since this research is in many ways fundamentally sociolinguistic (cf. introduction). Sociolinguistics is the study of the effects of society and its norms on language and vice versa. Unlike prescriptive grammarians, sociolinguists recognise that variation is inherent to any language and that its effects are meaningful. Most people do not follow the rules of standard language in all circumstances. In many instances, they voluntarily or involuntarily choose to use non-standard registers of language and this choice alone can tell researchers a lot about the speaker's perception of their linguistic context and their understanding of social norms. As such, NSL is vital for understanding the full scope of linguistic capabilities. In fact, one of the modern founding fathers of sociolinguistics, William Labov, even wrote a book titled *The Study of Non-standard English* in 1969. In this book, Labov makes a case for the importance of understanding and acknowledging non-standard variations at school to provide better teaching for the pupils. So, as we can see, NSL has been tied to sociolinguistics since its very beginning. The use of NSL is worthy of research precisely because it is neither arbitrary nor devoid of meaning and effect.

The first step towards analysing NSL in the corpus begins in this chapter, which aims to provide an overview of NSL use without focusing as much on variation. In other words, the aim of this first chapter is to quantify, define, describe and illustrate NSL use by the rappers as an introduction to the subject and a general overview of the corpus. As such, it will mostly attempt to answer the first research question: to what extent is NSL used in the corpus? These quantitative results will not offer definite answers in and of themselves but they will pave the way for the qualitative analyses of the determinants of NSL in the upcoming chapters, since it is essential to describe how NSL is characterised globally before starting to describe how its use varies. However, before moving on to the

quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the corpus, it is first important to describe the methodology thoroughly.

2. Methodology

This section will focus on the methodology used to select the corpus, to analyse the tracks and to conduct the interviews. However, before addressing these methodological issues, it is first essential to describe the object of the linguistic analysis precisely. The basis of this study is an analysis of rap tracks. This raises a crucial narratological question about authorship: whose language is really being analysed? Several distinctions from narrative theory must be explored to answer this question. Most notably, it is essential to differentiate between the author, the narrator, the narratee and the reader (or listener in this context) (see Rimmon-Kenan, 2005, p.89). The listener is the actual person who listens to the track while the narratee is “the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed” in the track (Rimmon-Kenan, 2005, p.89), i.e. the narratee is a figure constructed in and by the text. These two notions are part of this research, since all rap tracks have an intended audience, but they are not as important and problematic as the former two. Indeed, it is more essential to understand the difference between the author and the narrator in this analysis. In addition to these two notions, according to certain narrative theories such as Seymour Chatman’s (1978, p.151) diagram based on Wayne Booth’s (1961) views of narration, another entity could be added: the implied author. This concept is not, however, useful in this thesis. Firstly, rap tracks are oral productions traditionally written by the artists themselves and the author is therefore much more explicit (Walsh, 1997, p.18). Secondly, the implied author is not universally accepted, which applies to the implied reader as well. For instance, it is rejected by Gérard Genette (1988, p.145) who thinks that there is “no room anywhere for a third agent that would be neither the narrator nor the real author”.

For these reasons, this methodology will focus only on the author and the narrator. The author is the artist who performs the track, which is quite straightforward, but defining the narrator is more complicated. According to Richard Walsh (1997, p.12), “the narrator is always either a character who narrates, or the author”. This means that the narrator can be distinct from the author or the same person. Sometimes the narrator is very explicitly the author and sometimes it is clearly not the case, with all other possibilities forming a continuum between these two extremes. It can therefore be said that the subject whose language is being analysed in this research is always the narrator, who may or may not coincide with the author. It will become clear further in this methodology that certain linguistic determinants focus more explicitly on the author (e.g. diatopic) and others much less (e.g. diaphasic). Yet, in the end, this research looks only at how these determinants impact the narrator’s linguistic performance.

Now that this narratological question has been addressed, the next part will deal with the different categories of NSL, their choice, their definitions and their delimitations, as well as the bibliography used in the analysis. The second part will describe the long and complex selection process for the corpus and how the tracks relate to one another and complement each other in relation to the four main determinants of NSL (diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic). Particular attention will also be devoted to justifying some of the more difficult and questionable early choices.

To start with, it must be acknowledged that analysing NSL words in such a quantitative manner means that somewhat artificial categories have to be created. When carrying out such a classification, the biggest obstacle is subjectivity, a term that is complex and needs to be defined in relation to this research. Although subjectivity also relates to the perceiving subject, as opposed to the perceived object (objectivity) in philosophy or to

the expression of subjective feelings and emotions in literature and art (Zhengyuan, 2012, p.105), this term will be understood as having one's perception distorted by emotion or personal bias, while objectivity will be defined as the opposite, i.e. undistorted by such biases (adapted from Collins, 2015, s.v. objective). Subjectivity must always be taken into consideration in linguistics because it is "inherent in all kinds of language usage" (Zhengyuan, 2012, p.106). Indeed, some researchers such as Zhengyuan (2012, p.106) even maintain that "once objectivity enters into the realm of human perception and understanding, it is no longer objective". Subjectivity is even more problematic in this type of analysis because classifications of objects "arise from cultural, physiological, and psychological perspectives and thus are context-dependent" (Fran, 2014, p.5). This applies to individuals from different cultures but even to an isolated researcher. His or her perception, and therefore the resulting classification, may vary from day to day or even moment to moment.

To reduce this subjectivity, the analysis relied on clear guidelines as well as dictionaries as reference sources, and especially the *Petit Robert* (Rey and Rey-Debove, 2011). This is not, however, because dictionaries offer perfect objectivity. In fact, researchers have known for a long time that there is very little objectivity in dictionaries and that they are "potentially one of the most dangerous carriers of cultural bias and prejudice" (Gershuny, 1975, p.938). For example, Lee Gershuny (1975, p.938) found in one of his studies that women and black people featured much more often than white men in dictionary examples containing negative connotations, such as sex-role stereotypes or racial prejudices. However, the advantage of dictionaries is that they counter the researcher's inconsistencies and prevent them from applying labels however they please, which is bound to change when very large corpuses are analysed over the course of several weeks.

It may be impossible to remove subjectivity from categorisations because it is inherent to them, but inconsistencies should at least be eliminated.

As was just mentioned, the main dictionary used was the *Petit Robert de la langue française* (2011, CD-ROM). Only this dictionary served as a point of reference in order to minimise inconsistencies in the quantitative data, which could have resulted from the use of several dictionaries as main references. The *Petit Robert* was chosen because it contains clear categorising labels (e.g. *argot*, *familier*, *péjoratif*, etc.), the high quality of its CD-ROM version allows for faster research, and it is one of the most widely used dictionaries in France. However, this decision to rely on the *Petit Robert* in this way did not mean that other dictionaries were not used. On the contrary, given the nature of this research, it was often necessary to consult other dictionaries to double-check the meaning of difficult words or to find words that did not feature at all in the *Petit Robert*. In these cases, the following dictionaries were used: *Le Dictionnaire de la zone* (Tengour, 2013), *Comment tu tchatches* (Goudaillier, 1998) and *Le Dictionnaire de l'argot* (Colin and Leclère, 1994). When the words could not be found in any dictionary, as is often the case with modern suburban slang, then the internet and online forums were used, which included online dictionaries such as *larousse.fr* or *reverse.net*, as well as direct questions to rap artists and other researchers in the field of French rap and *FCC*. Since the internet is not necessarily a consistently reliable source of information, identical definitions had to be found from several different sources before being selected. Furthermore, these definitions had to make sense in the context of the rap lyrics. As a result, some definitions were rejected even when numerous sources offered the same explanation because they did not prove to be satisfactory to explain the context of the sentences uttered by the rappers.

These reference sources were used to define the NSL words and to classify them into the various categories used in this research, which were selected after reviewing the literature on language in French rap (Westphal, 2012; Hassa, 2010; Martin, 2010a/b; Pecqueux, 2009; Debov, 2008) and *FCC* (El-Kolli, 2013; Liogier, 2002 ; Valdman, 2000; Goudaillier, 1998), as well as carrying out preliminary analyses to see what types of NSL could be found in French rap. From this initial review and analysis, the following categories were selected: foreign borrowings (1), colloquial and vulgar words (2), slang (3), abbreviations (4), *verlan* (5), and any combination of these categories. Once they were selected, the next step was to define them precisely.

(1) Words were counted as borrowings from foreign languages if:

- a. They were labelled as such in the *Petit Robert* (e.g. *anglicisme*).
- b. If a word from another language was used when a French alternative exists (e.g. *gun* for *fusil*).

If a word had a foreign etymology but was not recognised as a borrowing by the *Petit Robert*, then it did not count as a borrowing (e.g. *golf*). The only exception is the word *rap*: it was not counted as English because of its lack of equivalent in French and because of its prevalence.

(2) Words were considered colloquial or vulgar if they were labelled as such in the *Petit Robert* (e.g. *familier*, *insulte*, *vulgaire*, *péjoratif* or *méprisant*). Even when a word was etymologically from another language, if the *Petit Robert* considered it to be colloquial, then the colloquial aspect of the word was foregrounded. In some instances, the *Petit Robert* considered some words to be both colloquial and another category (e.g.: *abréviation*). In such cases, the colloquial label was ignored because most NSL words are, to some extent, colloquial as well.

Furthermore, it is also important to distinguish between vulgar words in this research and “taboo” as traditionally understood in sociolinguistics. Taboos have been the topic of extensive sociolinguistic research because they “may play a vital role in understanding social and cultural values” (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013, p.36). Indeed, studying taboo words allows researchers to gain insight into social, metaphysical and religious norms and beliefs (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013, p.36; Qanbar, 2011, p.87). Certain words and phrases can be considered as linguistic taboos if it is socially unacceptable to pronounce them at all (except sometimes for some privileged speakers) and/or if they should be replaced by euphemisms because doing otherwise would provoke shame and embarrassment for the speaker and possibly a sense of shock from the hearer(s) (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013, p.36; Gao, 2013, p.2310; Qanbar, 2011, pp.87-88; Steiner 1967, p.143). This concept of taboo is often correlated to that of “face”, i.e. “the social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize” (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013, p.37). Since they do not wish to lose face and to be perceived in a negative manner, most “rational members of society” will respect taboos to present themselves as respectful and polite individuals (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013, p.37). Some of the most well-known types of taboo relate to sex, excretions, bodily functions, or private body parts (Gao, 2013, p.2310). From this, we understand that most vulgar words in this research fit the definition of taboo. Nevertheless, the two terms are not synonymous. In reality, taboo is a wide concept that is not limited to vulgar words. Depending on the culture, it also includes death, blasphemy, illness, age, income, etc. (Gao, 2013, p.2310). In most instances, the previous types of taboo words would not be marked as vulgar in this research, which is why the term vulgar will be used instead throughout the thesis.

(3) Slang words were problematic because the meaning of slang can be quite broad. In a restricted sense, slang can refer to any word with the label “slang” in the dictionary, but

in a broad sense it can encompass any word used in a cryptic manner for the majority of the population, like borrowings, *verlan* or suburban slang. In this analysis, a different approach was adopted. The following types of words were all counted as slang:

- a. words labelled as *argot* in the *Petit Robert*.
- b. those not present in the *Petit Robert*, but found in one of the other specialised dictionaries with no information about their origin if it could not be verified otherwise.
- c. terms not found in the dictionary although their meaning could be found online without any information regarding the etymology.

Any word that could not be defined (i.e. their definition was ‘unknown’ in the database) automatically fell into this category. This decision was taken after considering the fact that the number of unknown words was relatively small and did not warrant extensive etymological research. In most instances, the origin of unknown words is clearly undocumented modern suburban slang. Any mistakes would be rare and quantitatively unimportant.

(4) All apocopes, aphereses, initialisms and acronyms were counted as abbreviations. For some time, it proved to be difficult to decide whether or not to include acronyms and initialisms referring to official organisations (e.g. *OTAN*, *ONU*, *BRP*, *BAC*), which are common everyday utterances, often better known in their abbreviated forms rather than unabbreviated. The main argument in favour of restricting them is that using such abbreviations is the norm rather than the exception and is accepted in formal writing. However, in the end, such words were counted as abbreviations. The main problem when adopting the above restriction was that drawing the line became difficult. No clear

definition of acceptable versus unacceptable abbreviations could be used and there was a great risk of sometimes accepting one word and later on rejecting a similar one.

(5) Words were counted as *verlan* if they were formed according to the rules of *verlan*. These rules will be explained in more detail later in the chapter. In most instances, it was easy to notice that the order of syllables had been inverted. In some cases, however, these words could be easily mistaken for modern suburban slang, especially when combined with abbreviations or double *verlan*. This is why the etymology of words was emphasised.

After establishing clear guidelines for the analysis, the next step was to select the corpus. As one of the objectives of this research is to produce quantitative data, a large sample of tracks and artists from France and Belgium were selected: 136 tracks from more than 60 different rappers for a total of 68,024 words analysed. To allow an investigation of the main determinants of NSL, the corpus was divided into four main sections. These four sections deal with the diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants, respectively.

The section of the corpus on diachronic determinants looks at the effect of time on the use of NSL. Two possible determinants were taken into consideration: firstly, how the use of language changed between rappers in 1990/1991, 2001 and 2011, and, secondly, how an individual rapper's language evolved during his career. For the first determinant, seven tracks were chosen for each time period for a total of twenty-one tracks. Whenever possible, these seven tracks came from seven different artists. The first time period (1990/1991) encompasses two years because there were too few rap artists at the time to allow for proper research. A special effort was made to represent different styles as well as the most famous and successful artists at the time. To minimise the effect of the other determinants (diatopic, gender and diaphasic) all the artists were men from the Ile-de-

France region. As far as possible, all the chosen artists had started their career or became famous around that time period. Most were in their twenties (or almost) when they released the analysed tracks. For example, the corpus contains tracks from Joey Starr who was 24 in 1991, Rhoff who was 24 in 2001 and Sultan who was 24 in 2011. The youngest rapper is Still Fresh who was 17 at the time and the oldest is Youssoupha who was 32.

Focusing on several artists from different decades does not describe how language changed with time in a single artist. This is why the second part of this diachronic section focuses on Akhenaton from IAM throughout his career. Akhenaton was an excellent example because his band IAM is often considered to be one of the first French rap bands and certainly one of the most influential. Although he was already rapping in 1989, he is still active to this day and he has witnessed the evolution of the whole movement. It will be revealing to see how this immersion in the rap scene for such a long time affected the way he speaks. In total, twelve tracks from three different albums were selected, representing three years: 1991, 2001 and 2011. The number of tracks selected differs from one year to another because in some cases he raps alone, whereas in other cases he shares the microphone with Shurik'n¹⁵ or Faf Larage,¹⁶ so that more tracks had to be incorporated to have the equivalent of three full tracks as far as word count is concerned.

The diatopic determinant is by far the most complex one in this corpus because its meaning is very broad. It was decided here that three main diatopic determinants would be explored: the impact of the cities, *départements* and ethnic origins. To minimise the effect of time, which plays a major role in the use of NSL, only tracks after 2005 were

¹⁵ Shurik'n is one of the interviewees of this research. He is one of the two male rappers from Marseille band IAM who released their first tape in 1989.

¹⁶ Faf Larage is Shurik'n's brother, another famous rapper from Marseille.

accepted. This also applies to the sections of the corpus on gender and diaphasic determinants.

When it comes to the effect of ethnicity, three different (national) origins were chosen: Algerian, French and Senegalese. The study of this determinant is by far the most questionable and controversial of this research. First, if ethnicity is one of the parameters of the study, there is the issue that researchers might, as a result, unavoidably start to look for examples to prove its relevance, therefore influencing the results of the research. However, the methodology of this thesis, with its reliance on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, will greatly reduce this problem because the basis of the analysis will be “dry” quantitative results, and not cherry-picked examples. Secondly, it can also be argued that all, or at least most, of these French artists carry a French passport and were born in France. Creating artificial categories based on ethnicity could be perceived as discrimination or even racism. The most problematic ethnicity to define is actually the French one, precisely because most French rappers do carry a French passport. Moreover, does having “pure” French origins even mean anything at all? Such questions and concerns are difficult to answer. Nevertheless, it is equally problematic to deny that the artists’ ethnic origins, and especially ethnic identity performances, play a role in NSL use in the corpus.

So it was almost unavoidable: ethnicity had to be included in the analysis. Yet, the researcher is left with the seemingly unfeasible goal of studying the impact of indefinable ethnic origins. As no ideal solution exists and given the importance of ethnic determinants, somewhat artificial categories were created based on the artists’ recent ancestors and ethnic background. For the artists described as “of French origin”, only rappers with no recent links to immigration were selected. As far as the artists described

as “of Algerian origin”, the rappers who were chosen clearly had immigrant parents or grandparents, except for Sinik who had only one Algerian parent. The artists described as “of Senegalese origin” posed more of a problem because it was difficult to find artists with two Senegalese parents. As a result, half of the artists who were chosen had one Senegalese parent. It must also be noted that no artist in this section of the corpus is a Belgian rapper.

Choosing artists who came from specific cities was much easier. Three cities were selected: Marseille, Brussels, and Paris. For both Marseille and Brussels, ten tracks in total were chosen. These came from eight different artists/bands, allowing for a wide variety of rappers to be analysed. As there is no special section on Paris in the corpus, the city will be represented by the mean results from the three *départements* analysed in the section of the corpus on *départements*. This decision was taken because it would have been redundant to have a special section for Paris when in fact the majority of the corpus is constituted of artists from the Ile-de-France region. Furthermore, most rap artists usually considered to be “Parisian” actually come from one of Ile-de-France *départements* in *la petite couronne* around the city of Paris as opposed to the city centre.

The choice of focusing on Paris and Marseille can seem obvious because of the importance of these two cities since the beginning of French rap, but it is less evident when it comes to Brussels. The main selection criteria were geographic proximity and the size of the rap movements in the selected cities. French-speaking rappers who live in Quebec or in some French-speaking countries of Africa and Oceania had to be rejected because such artists live in socio-cultural and linguistic contexts that are too different from the rest of the French rappers in the corpus, which could have resulted in artificially strong differences found in the diatopic section compared to the other determinants.

Brussels was preferred instead of other cities in France because of the size and the importance of its rap movement. The large selection of rappers who have been active in the last couple of years made Brussels an ideal candidate for the corpus, as a large variety of artists was needed to produce meaningful quantitative results.

However, adding Brussels meant that the analysis was no longer *franco-français*. The presence of Belgium may not seem significant in the corpus, as it is only 10 tracks out of 137, but to these must be added the six interviews with Belgian artists that are central to the qualitative analysis. This fact should certainly be taken into consideration when reviewing the results presented in this thesis, but it does not constitute an incoherence or a problem. Due to the geographic proximity and cultural similarity between Wallonia and France, most Belgian rappers have been strongly influenced by French rap, which has been imported into Belgium since the beginning of the genre. As francophones, Belgian rappers are knowledgeable about French rap, especially since nearly all famous and very successful francophone rappers are French, and it is not rare for them to perform alongside French rappers in videos and tracks. Furthermore, most of the interview questions focused on their understanding and perception of French rap in general and not on the specificities of francophone Belgian rap.

Then, for the next subsection of the corpus, three French *départements* were selected: Hauts-de-Seine (92), Seine-Saint-Denis (93) and Val-de-Marne (94) with seven different tracks for each. This study focuses on the impact of *départements* because numerous rappers constantly refer to them in their tracks and, as a result, these *départements* often play a substantial role in identity performance. Consequently, it would not be surprising if, from one *département* to the next, strong variations were found with regards to NSL use. The Ile-de-France region was chosen because it is the stage of the strongest inter-

departmental competition, probably due to the fact that so many French rappers come from this region. Finally, neighbouring *départements* were selected to ensure that this diatopic investigation is carried out on a different geographical scale than the analysis of the role of cities.

The next section of the corpus focuses on gender. Gender plays an important role in the study of language. The potential existence of differences between men and women's linguistic outputs and speech patterns has sparked extensive debate between scholars (see for example Mcelhinny, 2007; Cameron, 2006; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003; or Livia and Hall, 1997). In order to investigate whether or not gender determines the use of language, twenty tracks by eight different female artists were analysed and compared to most tracks from male artists in the rest of the corpus after 2005, except for the diachronic section. Minus the few female tracks found in these sections, the compilation of male tracks includes the parts of the corpus on Brussels and Marseille, on French, Algerian and Senegalese origins, on Hauts-de-Seine (92), Seine-Saint-Denis (93) and Val-de-Marne (94) and on *poetic/jazz*, *ego trip* and *knowledge rap* (which are defined further in this methodology). The selection of female rappers includes all of the major and most successful artists of the last twenty years. The reason why the corpus is limited to twenty tracks is because analysing more tracks from female artists would have created a bias when presenting the actual overview of NSL in the corpus. In fact, the corpus is already biased towards women, as 20 tracks out of 136 account for around 15%, whereas only around 5% of the tracks in the last twenty years were performed by female artists. So it was a case of minimising the bias to be as representative as possible of the French rap industry.

The quantitative data focuses on male versus female artists only, but the approach undertaken in the rest of the chapter will be much more qualitative, looking at broader gender determinants that are not necessarily limited to questions of potential binary oppositions between men and women. Indeed, the quantitative results will lead to a qualitative discussion of gender determinants, which will take into account notions of performativity and hyper-masculinity, to name but a few. Several extracts from tracks and videos will be used to allow this discussion to take place.

The last, diaphasic section of the corpus focuses on the effect of rap genres. Three major genres were taken into consideration: *poetic/jazz*, *ego trip* and *knowledge*. Dividing tracks and artists according to predefined genres turned out to be more difficult than expected. Most rappers do not fall into simple categories and often mix genres within one album or even one track. However, the impact of the genre could not be ignored either because it plays such an important role, especially in the case of *ego trip*, which seems to contain a lot more slang, borrowings, *verlan* and vulgar words. Accordingly, an effort was made to select tracks that adhered as closely as possible to these genres. For each genre, seven tracks were chosen in total, which came from four to six different artists. First, however, these three genres had to be defined and delimited.

Ego trip is literally a “trip of the ego”, i.e. an egocentric display of abilities (Barret, 2008, p.18), as in the following extract:

Le son est sauvage comme moi
En extérieur à domicile
La défaite est inadmissible
Sauvage comme l’air de mon père
(Busta Flex, 2006, *La pièce maîtresse*, “Sauvage”)

The *ego trip* rappers boast about their lyrical prowess, but also about their personal achievements, material possessions, physical strength, legal and illegal businesses, and

success with women. What is more, their tracks rarely have a narrative thread and are usually a series of punchlines.

Ego trip is often opposed to *knowledge rap* (also called *message rap* in English or *rap engagé* in French), as illustrated in the next extract:

Commissariat d'Aubervilliers, déposition
C'est Marie Leblanc qui porte plainte pour agression
Contre une demi-douzaine de méditerranéens
Sanguinaires, maghrébins qui n'avaient rien de caucasiens
(Médine, 2008, *Arabian Panther*, "RER D")

The above extract contains many common characteristics of this genre. Indeed, *knowledge* artists tend to focus on the content of lyrics and usually convey a critique of societal issues, such as racism, life in the *banlieues* or inequalities (Shusterman, 1992, p.222).

The last rap genre that will feature in the analysis is *poetic* or *jazz rap*, which is well exemplified in this extract:

Ma tête dans la molécule harmonique
J'écris lorsque les mots s'y percutent
Infini est mon aperçu
Etrange mélange de douceur
Quelque chose d'herculéenne
(Oxmo Puccino, 2010, *L'arme de paix*, "Véridique")

Defining this genre is much more difficult because its characteristics are less clear. First, as its second name suggests, this genre borrows from jazz codes (Williams, 2010, p.436). Williams (2010, p.443) explains that the "musical elements that have been identified as jazz codes include a walking acoustic bass, saxophones, trumpet with Harmon mute, and jazz guitar, to name a few". Second, even though this is how it is usually called, the term *poetic* may not be the most adequate word to describe it because it applies to all forms of rap, as we will see in chapter 5. What is normally understood by poetic in this context is

not the presence of numerous rhymes and figures of speech, but rather the desire on the part of the artists to create tracks that focus on the expression of feelings and beauty. Of course, not all tracks will neatly fit into such predefined categories and some tracks that are predominantly *poetic/jazz* may contain elements of *knowledge* or *ego trip* rap and vice versa.

Once the corpus was selected, the analysis of the tracks had to be planned. During the selection process for the tracks, special attention was devoted to choosing tracks with a video clip available online, to allow for some research into the visual aspect of the tracks. The first step in the analysis was to transcribe all the tracks with the help of material found on the internet while trying to be as consistent as possible regarding the spelling of slang, abbreviations and *verlan*. Every track was then analysed word after word and any instance of NSL was reported into an Excel file containing eleven columns: an increasing number,¹⁷ an identity code,¹⁸ the NSL word,¹⁹ a number,²⁰ the category,²¹ the word class,²² a standard English translation, a standard French translation, a direct quotation, and a reference. This Excel file contains 4072 entries. Finally, after the tracks were analysed, all the results were then computed into other Excel documents representing quantitative summaries of the main determinants. Two numbers were in the documents: the actual number of words for each category in all the tracks, as well as a percentage of the total word count.

¹⁷ This number corresponds to the position of the word in the excel document in increasing order. It allows the researcher to go back to the original order of the document at any time.

¹⁸ This identity code is made up of a letter and a series of two number. Each track was allocated a different code. For example, the first track is a.1.1..

¹⁹ This corresponds to the actual NSL word found in the track. The word is put in the singular in most instances with a determinant in order to distinguish between the genders of words.

²⁰ This number refers to the amount of words contained within the NSL expression. In most instances, this number is one but sometimes it can be as high as seven. It allows for a more accurate sum of all NSL words in the tracks.

²¹ Colloquial words, vulgar words, abbreviation, slang, *verlan* or borrowings.

²² The grammatical class of the word (noun, verb, adjective, etc.).

The percentages used in the analysis are based on the mean results. Working with the mean can be problematic for several reasons. If one paragraph in a single track contains numerous NSL words whereas the rest of the track hardly contains any, the mean can then give a false representation of the actual use of NSL in the track. Similarly, if all the tracks in one subcategory of the corpus contain many NSL words, whereas one single track contains none at all, the final mean will be impacted negatively. These limitations are inherent to the use of statistical means and must be taken into consideration when examining the quantitative results. Despite these limitations, the mean was selected because, in most instances, the NSL words were spaced equally throughout the tracks and the subcategories often yielded similar results from one track to the next for each subsection of the corpus.

After carrying out the linguistic analysis, ten rap artists were interviewed to bring some nuance and insights into the qualitative analyses. There were four French rappers (Black Barbie, Disiz, El Matador, and Shurik'n) and six Belgian rappers (L. Sinistros, Scylla, Semji, Akro, Whoopy Jones, and Florence Henrotte).²³ Four interviews were conducted in person (L. Sinistros, Semji, Whoopy Jones, and Florence Henrotte), four by telephone (Black Barbie, El Matador, Shurik'n, and Scylla) and two by email (Disiz and Akro). These interviews were semi-structured and based on a questionnaire (available in Appendix I) that started with a very concrete question about one of their tracks, then moved to general questions about NSL in French rap, and eventually a series of questions relating to the linguistic determinants. This semi-structured approach with broad, open

²³ Black Barbie is a female rapper from the Ile-de-France region who released her first solo album in 2008; Disiz (la Peste) is a male rapper from Evry who started rapping in the late 1990s; for El Matador and Shurik'n, see previous footnotes; L. Sinistros is a former rapper from Ciney who used to rap in the 2000s; Scylla is a male rapper from Brussels who started his career in 2002; Semji is a male rapper from Namur who got into rap in the 2000s; Akro is a male rapper from Liège who belongs to Starflam and who began to rap in the early 1990s; Whoopy Jones is a male rapper from Dinant who started rapping in the late 2000s; Florence Henrotte is a female rapper from Liège who began to perform in concerts in the 2010s.

questions allowed the interviewer to ensure that the artist did not leave the topic completely while still letting him or her stray from the questionnaire momentarily if he or she felt inspired to do so. Before the beginning of the interview, these rappers received a brief explanation of the goals of the research and most importantly a clear definition of NSL in the context of the thesis. These interviews were not systematically analysed linguistically and quantitatively. Instead, their content was sorted to bring out potential linguistic determinants, which then served as initial clues to be developed in the qualitative analysis. Throughout the thesis, interview extracts will be quoted, not as answers from experts with unquestioned authority, but rather as illustrations of particular arguments or as introductory quotations into particular notions relating to the main determinants of NSL use. These interview extracts will be expanded upon and/or criticised when relevant.

3. Quantitative results and overview of the corpus

This section will present the quantitative results from the entire corpus (see Appendix II 1. for tables with full results) together with more qualitative descriptions. The first figure of great importance is the total of 7.33% of NSL words in the whole corpus. This result shows that almost 93% of French rappers' vocabulary is standard and that they do not use as many NSL words as might have been expected, although this observation also needs to be nuanced. Indeed, it means that, if we were to look at this number only and set aside variation, one out of every thirteen words in the corpus on average would be non-standard. In other words, there would be almost one NSL word in every sentence throughout the whole corpus.

However, this NSL is not necessarily cryptic. In reality, colloquial language is the most used category in the corpus. It amounts to 2.73% of the total word count, which represents

37.3% of all NSL words. This observation serves as a good reminder that the rappers do not use slang and *verlan* exclusively. A lot of their vocabulary belongs to everyday language, which they might emphasise slightly more than normal native speakers. Even in tracks that contain many slang words, the importance of colloquial words cannot be underestimated. The following extract from Tandem shows how prevalent these words can be in the corpus:

J'manque de protéines j'aime trop **l'fric**
A Auber c'est trop torride
Car à tous moments tu peux t'retrouver **l'cul** sur l'gril
Sans blague combien **d'blacks** va falloir que j'descende pour avoir 100
plaques
Tout s'complice en communauté, ta **parano** augmente
D'nos jours avant **d'tremper** dans quelque trafic que ce soit
Vérifie bien qu'y ait pas les caméras d'Zone Interdite derrière toi
Prémédite bien tes **coups foireux**
(...)
C'est pour les **halls**
Les mères qui prennent le **trom**
Les **mômes** qui **s'crament** trop tôt
On **a trop les crocs** le monde est **stone** (Stone!!!)
Ma gueule, c'est trop facile de nous juger
Mais qui s'y plaît dans les cités à part les jeunes dissipés
(Tandem, 2005, *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*, "Le monde est stone")

In this extract, all NSL words were underlined and the colloquial words were put in bold, a strategy used throughout this section and adapted for every category.²⁴ The extract exemplifies how, in many tracks, colloquial words represent the majority of NSL words used. This extract also gives insights into usual collocations and the types of words used. We can see that these words refer to money (e.g. *fric*), sex (e.g. *cul*), illegal business (e.g. *tremper*, *coups foireux*, *se cramer*) and everyday words (*mômes*, *avoir les crocs*). These categories are already very representative of the most important uses of colloquial words in the corpus, but other major categories were found as well, such as body parts (e.g.

²⁴ This strategy will also be carried out throughout the thesis. NSL words in the extracts from the corpus will be underlined and occasionally put in bold when one category of NSL needs to be highlighted.

*gueule*²⁵), mockery (e.g. *glandeur*), family and relatives (e.g. *frangin*) or fundamental needs (e.g. *avoir la dalle*).

Contrary to colloquial words, vulgar words were much rarer in the corpus. They add up to only 0.7% of the corpus and 9.1% of all NSL words. This percentage is low despite many prejudices and myths surrounding vulgarity in French rap (Pecqueux, 2009, p.41). Only one out of every 151 words is vulgar, making this category relatively rare. Nevertheless, their importance in the corpus is not to be minimised, as can be illustrated in the following extract from Convok on Scylla's album *Immersion* (2009):

Ah **putain** que j'aime ce trou, j'suis pas venu faire le clown
Ma ville sait se lever moi j'suis là pour qu'elle reste debout
Cherche pas, je suis un **putain de** radical
C'est notre terrain, pour le reste du monde il est impraticable
C-O je lève le drapeau de ta ville en feu
Mon rap fait du bruit comme un **putain de** Magnum sans silencieux
J'rap pour qui en veut, clash on t'plie en deux
Cette vibe n'est pas faite pour les **grosses pétasses** ni les petites en feu
(Convok in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes Remix")

This extract is interesting because it contains several vulgar words that are in fact repetitions of the same word with slightly different meanings. The word *putain*, which is arguably one of the most common vulgar words used by both rappers and the general population, is not used, in this extract, as a noun with the meaning of 'prostitute'. It is first used as an interjection and then in an adjectival group. The interjection illustrates strong emotional reactions or shock while *putain de* does not have a real meaning and simply places vulgar emphasis on the following noun. The last vulgar word of the extract is the insult *grosse pétasse*. This choice of word is very telling about the rappers' attitude to language and life. First of all, they tend to use derogatory and misogynistic terms when speaking to both men and women, a phenomenon that will be explored in chapter 4.

²⁵ "*Ma Gueule*" in this extract is not colloquial language but slang for "my friend".

Second, and this applies to the general population too, they enjoy adding words like *gros* or *sale* before their insults to emphasise them. This is a tendency that is reflected throughout the corpus with collocations such as *sale bâtard*, *sale conne*, *sale môme*, or *sale porc*. Just as for colloquialisms, some general categories of vulgar words can be drawn from the corpus: direct insults (e.g. *connard*), interjections (e.g. *bordel*), sexuality (e.g. *couille*) and scatology (e.g. *chier*).

Some of the typical categories of vulgar words from the corpus also contain English borrowings, such as *bitch*, *fuck*, *motherfucker* or *sucker*. This is to be expected, given the prevalence of foreign borrowings in the corpus. Foreign borrowings were the second most important category, with 2.06% of the corpus and 28.1% of all NSL words having been borrowed from another language. It must be noted, however, that not all of these languages from this analysis are recognised as official standard languages. Some of the words were actually borrowed from dialects (e.g. Chti, Wallonian or Provençal). They could have formed a different category, but this might have needlessly overcomplicated the analysis for only a few words. Similarly, dialectal versions of Arabic were not distinguished. Such differences would be very relevant if the analysis focused only on Arabic but, in this study, Arabic is only a subcategory of foreign borrowings.

As illustrated by the previous examples, the chosen borrowings frequently relate to misogynistic insults and sexual references, notions that will be discussed in chapter 4, but also to violence, business, crime or partying (Hassa, 2010, pp.56-59). Naturally, one other very common use of English concerns the technical vocabulary specific to rap music, such as the words in the following extract from Akhenaton:

Chaque jour qui passe, le stress me laisse hélas guère de place mec
J'suis las des guerres de classe, mic à la main j'm'évade
Hors d'mon corps, limites physiques, surnage comme une vague
Emporte avec un beat physique et comme une dague stab

Quand j'aime j'fais le vide, puis mon stylo danse, selon mon humeur
Lyrics denses! démagogie l'corps, ma bouche, sa tumeur
(Akhenaton, 2001, *Sol invictus*, "Chaque jour")

Specific hip hop and rap music terminology like *mic*, *beat* or *lyrics* are very common in the corpus. Two main explanations can be put forward for the presence of these words. First, it can be argued that many of them do not have standard equivalents in French, so that the English ones are necessary, as Shurik'n remarked during his interview:

On utilise beaucoup d'anglais quand on parle de hip hop oui. Parce que pour nous, c'est incontournable et il n'y a pas d'équivalent en français tout simplement. (Shurik'n, 2013)

Shurik'n's explanation is true for some words like *flow* or *ego trip* but it is not always the case. *Lyrics* for instance could very well be replaced by *paroles*, and the same might be said, to a certain extent, for *beat* and *rythme*. Second, French rappers, such as Shurik'n, are simply heavily influenced by American rappers whom they try to imitate:

(...) il faut comprendre aussi que nous nos influences sont purement américaines à la base. C'est-à-dire que nous quand on a rencontré le rap en France, il n'y avait pas de prédécesseurs, il n'y avait aucune référence. Donc nos références, nous, elles ont été dès le début américaines et elles le sont restées jusqu'à maintenant. (Shurik'n, 2013)

Indeed, French rap may have developed its own approach to the genre, but American rap has been one of the main sources of inspiration for many French rappers, especially some of the earliest French rap bands like IAM. In fact, this is probably the main reason why these words are so common.

Although English is widely used in the corpus (81.41% of all borrowings) and in French rap in general, it is certainly not the only foreign language that is quantitatively significant. Arabic also has a central role (12.25% of all borrowings). Perhaps more so than English, Arabic can be useful when investigating the major determinants of language

use in rap music because its presence, just like *verlan*, varies greatly from one subsection of the corpus to the next (from 0% to 36.36% of the borrowings). The presence of Arabic in rap music and hip hop is predictable because Islam has been present in the hip hop movement since its foundation, going back as far as Afrika Bambaata and his connection with the Nation of Islam (Alim, 2006, p.25), as exemplified in the next extract by Sultan:

Quoi qu'il arrive
Allah dans ma foi
(...)
C'est l'Islam qui m'apprend
Je suis moi-même tu comprends
(Sultan, 2009, *La sul'tendance*, "Quoi qu'il arrive")

Given this presence of Islam but also of rappers of North-African origin, it is not surprising for a researcher like Hassa (2010, pp.50-56) to report that all rap artists in her study used Arabic. Although Arabic is well represented in Hassa's corpus, the same cannot be said about this research. Numerous artists did not, in fact, use any Arabic at all, as only 46 out of 136 tracks contained Arabic borrowings. Nevertheless, it is still a third of all artists and some of them do use a lot of it, such as El Matador:

J'écris mon album dans la même planque que Oussama
Pendant que le Ku Klux Klan recherche à buter Barack Obama
J'attends ma chance comme quand j'étais tout seul à y croire dans ma chambre
Comment taper le sprint final quand on te met une balle dans la jambe?
Si tu réussis hamdoulah, bsahtek, bsahtek, bsahtek
Si tu marronnes et que tu as le seum, hechem, hechem, hechem!
Moi et le rap, inséparables comme le viagra et Larry Flint
C'est pour mieux mettre des coups d'boules que ma rime a la calvitie
Popopopo! J'recharge mes cordes vocales
J'suis en mode crime lyrical,
C'est pour tous les waled houma
(El Matador, 2009, *Au clair du bitumen*, "Pète sa mère")

The above extract contains five different Arabic borrowings, including *hamdoulah* that is of particular interest. This word, which is an abbreviation of *alhamdulillah* (Babylon,

2015, s.v. Alhamdulillah), means “all praise be to God” but it has generally taken the meaning of “thanks”. According to Hassa (2010, pp.50-56), Arabic is associated, in French rap, with the following contexts: cultural practices from North Africa, religion, and more specifically Islam, self-descriptions and nostalgia. The previous use of *hamdoulah* illustrates how El Matador carries over into his lyrics the cultural habit of saying “all praise be to God” to express his thanks. The corpus contains other such examples, but the use of Arabic within it is not limited to Hassa’s contexts. There is also a clear desire on the part of artists, in some cases, to use Arabic in a cryptic manner and as an identity marker to assert their North African origin. Indeed, the uses of *bsahtek* (to your health, it’s good, or congratulations) and *hechem* (it’s shameful), for example, do not exactly relate to Hassa’s contexts. They rather represent identity performances, which will be developed in chapter 3.

In the previous track extracts, the artists were using either English or Arabic only but, in reality, one of the outstanding characteristics of French rap is the large number of different foreign languages that are often used in close succession (see Appendix II 1. for a list of all 16 different languages found in the corpus). This feature is well represented in the corpus, as is illustrated in this extract from Sexion d’Assaut:

Wesh boy quoi d’neuf depuis Wati By Night? (ARABIC/ENGLISH)
 Fais pas d’gestes brusques, sur ma droite y’a Bajnite
 Oui y’a du ons’ ya des petits ta race **night**, (ENGLISH)
 Oui je suis présent et chaud bouillant si mes gars s’fight, (ENGLISH)
 Joue pas d’piano, je suis un Diallo « ho »
 Comme le dit Allo « ho », cette année est à nous,
Wesh qui t’a dit qu’on était rassasiés? (ARABIC)
 Demande à [name unclear] si ça ce n’est que [word unclear] « ouh! »
 Mais qui t’a dit qu’y en avait des comme Black M,
 Qui est l’rageux qui t’a dit qu’il fallait surtout pas m’maquer?
 Qui t’as dit qu’on roulait en gros carrosses,
 Ici c’est la **hass** qui pilote et si t’es auch’ vamos, (ARABIC/SPANISH)
 (Sexion d’Assaut, 2011, *Les chroniques du 75 vol.2*, “Qui t’a dit?”)

The extract shows how the rapper used seven borrowings from three different languages within only 114 words. This observation confirms Sarkar's remark that it is acceptable to mix codes in lyrics on a wide scale (2008a, p.144).

This switch between languages is central to NSL use in the corpus. It is also a major area of research in sociolinguistics and studies in global hip hop and rap music. Many sociolinguists have focused on code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing (see e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2010; Hassa, 2010; Sarkar, 2006; or Billiez, 1998). Rap music is not spontaneous language and, as a result, the use of foreign languages is affected (Androutsopoulos, 2010, p.21). Sarkar and Winer (2006, p.178) describe how code-switching in conversation is completely different in songs. The lyrics are intended for large audiences and the artists make conscious efforts to choose certain words over others. As a consequence, there is often a significance behind the choice of words and language in songs (Bennett, 1999, p.82). Choosing not to speak French can be a way to rebel against culturally imposed norms, but also a form of linguistic engagement with such norms, while embracing counter-cultural, border-crossing hip hop culture (Low *et al.*, 2009, p.67). However, the use of several languages in rap can ultimately reflect the multicultural origins of the artists (Low *et al.*, 2009, p.67), which will be tackled in chapter 3.

So far, most instances of foreign words in the previous extracts have been borrowings, but it is also possible to use actual code-switching within the same stanza. Rocca, for example, uses code-switching with Spanish in one of his tracks:

J'en envoie une à tous mes gars
Con amor, mi pana, se la dedico desde esta tierra lejana
Echo y derecho gana
Marijuana, cocaïne, crack ici tout se mélange
(Rocca, 2001, *Elevacion*, "C'est mon monde")

In this track, Rocca suddenly switches to Spanish for two whole lines. However, Androutsopoulos (2010, p.33) argues that such code-switching by one rapper is quite rare. This corpus agrees with this observation, as borrowings represent by far the most frequent use of foreign languages. Indeed, extracts such as Rocca's are very rare in the corpus.

Contrary to foreign borrowings, French rappers do not use as much slang. Only 1.14% of the corpus and 15.5% of all NSL words belonged to this category. Once more, this puts the importance of slang into perspective, especially as many of these slang words can in fact be found in dictionaries and/or could be described as being part of everyday French (e.g. *taffer*, *taulard*, *nan*, etc.). The easiest of these words in the corpus to understand are long-established slang words. Some of these words date as far back as the 17th century or sometimes earlier, such as *daron* (father), *taf* (work), *taule* (prison), *oseille* (money) or *tune* (money) (Fattier, 2003, p.14; Goudaillier, 1998, p.22), a phenomenon that El Matador described during his interview:

Les mecs de Paris intramuros, tu vas aller dans des coins où ils ont le langage du titi parisien. C'est des trucs qui remontent à la limite à la Renaissance. L'époque de Jean Valjean et des *Misérables*. Il y a des mots qui sont restés et des gens qui les utilisent encore. (El Matador, 2013)

El Matador's observation certainly applies to the corpus as well, since this tendency is shared by most rappers in this analysis, as exemplified by these two extracts from La Fouine and Enigmatik:

Appelle-moi Meek Mill
Youguette fais pas ta hallal, t'as touché le bout d'mon...
Si tu mens à ta **daronne**, sache que tu mens à tout l'monde
(La Fouine, 2011, *Capitale du crime vol.3*, "Jalousie")

Que dire de plus à part c'que j't'ai déjà dit!
Chaque jour qui se suit, la même routine je poursuis
J'persiste dans les études à la fac
C'est pas forcément un passeport pour un **taf**
(Enigmatik, 2007, *Un nouveau soufflé*, "Ici ou ailleurs")

The type of slang illustrated by these two extracts is very common throughout the whole corpus. This could be expected because a lot of the long-established French slang has become everyday colloquial language. The word *taf*, for instance, has turned into a fairly common word. Some long-established slang words have even lost their slang connotations to become colloquial language, such as *flic*. *Flic* used to be a slang word from the nineteenth century depicting a police chief and believed to have originated from the German word *Fliege* ('fly') (Rey and Rey-Debove, 2011, s.v. *flic*). It is now part of everyday vocabulary. However, not all slang words are used so liberally by the general population, even long-established slang words. In the previous extract, for instance, *daronne* is much less common than a word such as *flic*. This word is by no means limited to *FCC* or French rap, but it is not very common outside these spheres.

Then, it should still be acknowledged that quite a few of the slang words could not be found in conventional dictionaries. Such words most certainly contribute to problems of understanding, as they are recent and fairly cryptic for the non-initiated and help propagate the myth that French rap contains large amounts of slang. A few notable examples are *bollos* (a weak person), *calculer* (to understand), *cambuter* (to exchange), *charbonner* (to work hard for little money), *kenner* (to have sexual intercourse) or *fomblard* (coward), to name but a few. The next extract from the corpus illustrates this tendency well:

J'perds le contrôle devant tes **cassosseries**
Fresh c'est d'la frappe au point que les **bollos** crient.
(...)
75 c'est ici que les **gueush** cohabitent avec les riches.
(Still Fresh, 2011, *Mes rêves*, "J'perds le contrôle")

This extract is revealing, not only because it contains three uncommon and cryptic slang words, but also because it exemplifies one of the biggest problems faced by linguists

when analysing rap tracks: dealing with hard-to-understand words. The meaning of the third word, *gueush*, is unknown. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to struggle to assign a meaning and etymology to some of the most recent and cryptic slang.

Fortunately, some of these cryptic words, although certainly not all, can be deciphered once researchers understand how they are formed. For example, many recent slang words contain non-standard resuffixations (Goudaillier, 1998, p.17). This linguistic process consists in modifying the end of words, often after having abbreviated them. For example, *frère* becomes *frérot* in colloquial language. In the following example, Amy and Bushy use such a non-standard resuffixation:

Confond pas elles et ta clique
De grosses lèvres
Mes zoulettes sont **foulecks**
Sur Skyblog ou iFile
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, “Zoulettes”)

The resuffixation from this extract (*fouleck*: crazy) appears four times in the corpus. This word is a combination of *fou* and *-leck*. There are two interesting observations that can be made from analysing this word and its context. The first one is that the suffix *-eck* is not standard in the French language, which adds a clear cryptic layer to the word. Second, Amy and Bushy chose not to use the common feminine version of *fouleck*, *foulette*, although it appears five times in another track of the corpus (see Diam’s, 2006, *Dans ma bulle*, “La boulette”). This could be explained by a desire to make it rhyme with the other words in the stanza (*clique* and *mec*), a possibility that will be researched in chapter 5. Other common examples of resuffixations that were found in the corpus are: *dalleux* (hungry person), *marronner* (to be upset), *mythonner* (to tell lies) and *poto* (friend).

These non-standard resuffixations, however, are less common in the corpus than another type of slang that can also be deconstructed: *verlan*. Although more common than

resuffixations, *verlan* was nevertheless the least used category: 0.38% of the whole corpus and 5.2% of all NSL words. This is an unexpected result because some researchers such as Goudaillier (1998, p.3) point out that a synonym of *FCC* is *verlan*. If *verlan* can be used to refer to the way youths from suburbs speak, then one would assume that it is used a lot in rap. This research on rap music contradicts this idea but it certainly does not mean that its interest is limited. *Verlan* is also the category with the widest variation from one subsection of the corpus to another (from 0% to 3.06%), making it an important area of study to investigate what determines the use of NSL.

Before delving into its use in the corpus, a short description of *verlan* is needed. *Verlan* is not a modern phenomenon. Sloutsky and Black (2008, p.314) traced its origins back as far as the 12th century with mentions of *Bonbour* instead of *Bourbon*. Sloutsky and Black (2008, p.314) even attribute the origins of Voltaire's name to *verlan*. His native village was Airvault, which becomes Vault-air in *verlan*. The premise behind *verlan* is that the order of syllables is switched in what might seem to be a random fashion. In reality, as described by Antoine (1998, pp.51-67), the phenomenon is very complex and the formation of *verlan* depends on precise morphological rules. The way in which words are split varies, for instance, if a word has one or more syllables, if it ends with a vowel or a consonant, if the second syllable begins with a vowel or not, or if the word has semi-vowels. The following extract from Sniper in the corpus illustrates this complexity:

Zarbé, J'passe à l'action, hassa, le **per-sni** est dans la baraque,
 Ca farte pour moi jtawé
 J'passe de studio en promo, j'suis le gosse beau sur des photos
 Rap de **tess**, Tuni, Blacki et Aketo
 (...)
 C'est en 1996, âgé de 17 ans, que j'ai eu cette en-
 -vie de prendre mon **iep**, prendre mon mike
 Sur des sons pétants, au début j'n'étais qu'un incompetent
 (...)
 J'suis définitivement mort dans le **pe-ra** comme un gueshtar

J'tape excessif, j'rentre dans zoula et le sky en she-fla
J'me remémore l'époque où j'ai ché-fla sur les gue-ta
Le choc fut de ye-ta pour que j'm'en remette pas
J'regrette pas d'être un des plus chir-dé, demande à Cherba.
(Sniper, 2001, *Du rire aux larmes*, "Sniper processus")

This track stands out as the most concentrated in *verlan* of the whole corpus. These few lines suffice to illustrate the complexity of this cryptic language. It can be combined with any other NSL category, such as the English word *sniper* in the extract (*per-sni*), making it hard to recognise and to understand at times. It can also be abbreviated, such as *tess* (*cité*). What is more, monosyllabic words such as *piéd* do not follow the rule and the syllable gets split: *yep*. Sometimes, extra schwas are added to allow monosyllabic words ending with consonants to be split, increasing the confusion (e.g. *she-fla* instead of *flash*). The use of *verlan*, however, is not widespread in the corpus. In fact, 69 of the 136 tracks of this corpus do not contain any *verlan* at all and only 27 tracks contain more than three occurrences per track. Nevertheless, when *verlan* words are used, they contribute to the difficulty to understand some of the tracks from the corpus. This is especially true when such words are abbreviated, because this creates monosyllabic words that have little to no connection to their original spelling and pronunciation.

This tendency to abbreviate *verlan* words extends to all types of words in the corpus. The quantitative data shows that 0.9% of the words from the corpus are abbreviated, which represents 12.3% of all NSL words. The presence of abbreviations was predictable, since most native speakers tend to use abbreviations too. The main problem caused by abbreviations is that they can easily be combined with other categories. When such combinations affect vulgar or colloquial words, they rarely make understanding difficult but when they are associated with slang, *verlan* or foreign languages, they often turn this straightforward category into the most problematic. Finding the etymology of abbreviated words can be very challenging and causes researchers to jump to early conclusions based

on an incorrect understanding. This tendency to combine abbreviations with other categories is reflected in the 0.53% of the corpus that belongs to combinations between categories, since abbreviations were the most common combined category.

As explained in the methodology, all acronyms and initialisms were included in the research to avoid excessive subjectivity in the analysis. Some of these acronyms, such as *PC*, *OVNI*, *CAPAC*, or *ANPE*, are quite standard. However, many examples of clearly non-standard initialisms and acronyms abound in the corpus, such as in the following extract from Lady Laistee:

Plus près des femmes de la rue, plus près des belles du parloir
Même pour ses femmes de dealers qui passent au droit de savoir.
Pour celle qui roule en **BM** coté passager [...]
Pour celles qui roulent avec un baggy sous la jupe
(Lady Laistee, 2005, *second soufflé*, “Corda”)

The word *BM* is a good illustration of an initialism that would not be acceptable in formal language. Interestingly, this word turns out to be the abbreviation of an abbreviation. Other examples of clearly non-standard abbreviations in the corpus are *a.k.a* (also known as), *BS* (bullshit), *BX* (Brussels) or *DJ* (disc-jockey).

Within the category of abbreviations, the most common practice in the corpus is the use of truncations. Truncations are words that have been partly suppressed (El-Kolli, 2013, p.127; Valdman, 2000, pp.1182-1183). The suppression can either affect the beginning of the word in the case of aphereses, such as *blème* (*problème*), *teille* (*bouteille*) or *Tiag* (*Santiago*), or the end of the word in the case of apocopes, such as *biz* (*business*), *mat'* (*matin*) or *périph* (*périphérique*). In the corpus, apocopes are much more frequent than aphereses. Not only are aphereses rare, they can also be attributed to abbreviated *verlan*, as in the next extract from A6mil:

Espère la fuite de nos failles le temps d'un moment
Le mensonge a hypnotisé ma **zik** pour mieux l'enfiler
Pour moi le doute est mort la certitude l'a tué
Ma musique elle est la classe, la classe ouvrière
(A6mil, 2011, *L'agonie du silence*, "Un bic et deux feuilles")

What is the etymology of *zik* in this track? It can be the apocope of the *verlan zik-mu* (music) or the aphereses of *musique*. As a result, it becomes difficult to count the cases of true aphereses in the corpus and this has also an impact on the number of *verlan* words counted.

Finally, the last analysis focused on the grammatical classes of the NSL words. The main grammatical categories of the corpus comprised nouns (51.76%), combinations (22.63%), verbs (13.03%), adjectives (6.61%), interjections (5.03%), adverbs (0.36%), prepositions (0.18%), pronouns (0.1%) and numbers (0.02%). The first observation that we can make is that the majority of NSL words come from nouns. Then combinations are the second most common word class. This category contains expressions such as *foutre à la porte*, which form a whole but also cannot be treated as single grammatical classes, except perhaps as a phrase. Most of the words in this category contain a combination of nouns and verbs often with a preposition and determinant. Secondly, it can be noticed that the other grammatical classes play a very insignificant role in the corpus and it can therefore be concluded that rappers do not use these categories much as a source of NSL.

In this chapter, the whole corpus was presented on many occasions as if it were a homogenous entity. The reality is, however, that there is great variation between artists due to the complexity of possible determinants, as L. Sinistros remarked in his interview:

C'est toujours un effet de masse, un effet de style, un effet de société, un effet du monde dans lequel on évolue. Une personne n'en est pas une autre non plus, on ne dit pas les même choses. Y en a qui ont des facilités, d'autres pas. On ne vient pas tous du même endroit. (L. Sinistros, 2013)

In this quotation, L. Sinistros mentions many of the possible determinants of language use for French rappers, such as styles, talent, socio-cultural habits, individual differences, or geographical origins. These will be discussed in the rest of this chapter and the thesis. It makes sense, when so many different outside determinants converge to impact NSL use in lyrics, for the corpus to contain strong dichotomies, such as between Guizmo and 13Hor in the next two extracts:

L'équipe est affranchie tu connais les bails: du rhum et des tasses
Et Nekfeu a p't'être niqué ta frangine
J'aime kicker tard en ville
Mec signer ça rend libre
J'ai plus l'impression qu' ma destinée part en vrille
Ves-qui les darme-gen vite quand j'ai des barrettes
Sans gêne et à l'aise
Traîne weed et sky dans l'bide
J reste illégal dans le biz
Mais pas pour longtemps
Stress, deal et accent street c'est l'parcours qu'on prend
(Guizmo, 2011, *Normal*, "Normal"; total NSL in the track: 19.10%)

Une date dont vous enseignerez avec fierté
La signification à vos enfants pour que ceux-ci
A leur tour fasse connaître à leurs fils
Leurs petit-fils, l'histoire glorieuse de notre lutte
Pour la liberté car cette indépendance du Congo
Si elle est proclamée aujourd'hui dans l'entente
Avec la Belgique, pays ami avec qui nous traitons
D'égal à égal
Nul Congolais digne de ce nom, ne pourra jamais oublier
Cependant, c'est par la lutte qu'elle a été conquise
(13Hor, 2010, *Cris du cœur*, "1960 gravé dans nos cœurs"; total NSL in the track: 0%)

Both extracts have practically the same number of words but the prevalence of NSL varies greatly. Guizmo's extract contains 17 NSL words whereas 13Hor's did not use any. This means that nearly one out of every four words used by Guizmo is not standard whereas 13Hor spoke in flawless standard language. This difference does not stop at these two short extracts, it extends to the full tracks. The difference between the two artists is remarkable. 13Hor did not use a single NSL word in the whole track whereas, on average,

one out of every five words from Guizmo was not standard. Although it is not exactly the focus of this research, it can also be observed that this linguistic dichotomy extends to grammar and syntax: 13Hor uses more complex sentence structures with the use of *dont*, the subjunctive and *nul*. In addition, both tracks are very far from the average result of the corpus (7.3% NSL). What can explain such a big variation? There must be a series of determinants that affect the artists.

When looking at the potential determinants of NSL, one of the first parameters that needs to be verified is time. Spontaneous language is in constant evolution, and some ways of speaking fall in and out of fashion, sometimes very rapidly. The tastes of audiences can also change over time, which in turn can affect the rappers' performances. Indeed, personal tastes depend largely on cultural capital (see e.g. Bourdieu 1991, 1990, or 1984a), which can change throughout individuals' lives due to upward or downward social mobility and age grading (see chapter 2 for more on these notions). In this case, however, the years of release do not seem to be an acceptable explanation, since the two artists released their track within one year of each other. There must therefore be another explanation.

After analysing this case more thoroughly, it becomes clear that the origins of the artists are very different. Guizmo (Wikipedia, 2013, s.v. Guizmo [rappeur]) is from Paris whereas 13Hor²⁶ is from Brussels. In addition, Guizmo was born in the Parisian *banlieue*, a place heavily influenced by *FCC*, whereas it would seem that 13Hor immigrated to Belgium from Congo as a child. Such varied origins could potentially explain the

²⁶ No reliable biography other than the artist's Twitter account could be found. He mentions that he lives in Brussels and is originally from Congo without much explanation. See: <https://twitter.com/13hor>.

difference in language use but another track from 13Hor in our corpus brings this conclusion into question:

Si t'as les couilles parle moi t'as des mecs de ma ville,
Bruxelles, BX vibes, à tes risques et périls
Fayette, Ca déglingue enfin du belge en rotation
(...)
Chez nous, on s'élève, parle de check, tu parles sérieux ou quoi?
Mais dites-moi qui a dit que le rap belge c'est de la merde?
(13Hor in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes Remix")

This shorter extract from the same author contains much more NSL. This means that 13Hor does sometimes use NSL and that he made a conscious and calculated decision not to do so in the previous track.

This brings us to a second important difference between these two tracks: Guizmo's track and 13Hor's second track are both part of the *ego trip* genre, whereas 13Hor's first track is a clear *knowledge* track with a political and committed overtone. This difference can be crucial, as Black Barbie explained in her interview:

Sur "La reine du 93", j'ai utilisé un peu plus de vocabulaire non standard parce que c'est un égo trip. Dans rap de bonne femme, il y a quand même une suite logique. Il y a un message derrière plus fort, différent, c'est un message social. (Black Barbie, 2013)

Indeed, as Black Barbie remarks, *ego trip* tracks might be much more likely to contain NSL. When trying to boast of their own qualities and criticise their competitors, rappers might choose to use a lot more slang, borrowings and vulgar language. On the other hand, when trying to defend a cause, they might adopt a language that will be easily understood and accepted by the general population.

At this point in the analysis, however, it is too early to decide which determinants played the strongest roles in the corpus. These quantitative differences and hints of linguistic

determinants are only early illustrations of the complexity of this phenomenon, which will be fully explored in chapter 2 to 5 that will look at diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants of NSL use.

4. Conclusions

This chapter focused on the global results from the analysis of the use of NSL in a corpus of selected francophone rap tracks. The general conclusion from this analysis is that, on average, French rappers do not deviate that much from standard French, since 93% of their vocabulary is perfectly standard. This finding confirms Martin's (2010a, pp.97-99) and Paine's (2012, p.52) conclusions, but on a wider scale, as Martin's observations came mostly from his analysis of Diam's' 2006 album *Dans ma bulle* and Paine's study was based on a smaller and less diversified corpus. The fact that colloquial language proves to be the most widely used NSL category in the corpus, which confirms again what Martin (2010a, pp.97-99) postulated, shows that even their NSL vocabulary is not oversaturated with cryptic language. In fact, all the cryptic NSL categories combined (slang, *verlan*, and combinations) account for around only 2% of the corpus, i.e. one out of every fifty words. This estimate should even be revised downwards because many slang or *verlan* words have lost their cryptic nature and become everyday occurrences. This research also shows that foreign borrowings are the second most common NSL category in the corpus and originate principally from English, as Paine (2012, p.62) asserted, and to a lesser extent Arabic. Consequently, the average French rapper's vocabulary is in reality constituted of predominantly standard words punctuated with mostly colloquialisms and English borrowings.

These findings fill in a gap in the literature, as such a broad and detailed lexicographic analysis was lacking, and come to counter in a quantitative manner many of the myths

surrounding language in French rap. For example, this research gives a direct answer to the misconception that French rappers make frequent use of vulgarities, a stereotype that both Pecqueux (2009, p.41) and Martin (2010a, p.98) had tried to demystify. Future researchers who will attempt to address similar issues will be able to draw on these quantitative results, which clearly show that vulgarities are actually among the lowest NSL categories used by French rappers. This study can also inspire future research, especially with regards to English and colloquial words in French rap. As these two forms of NSL are the most prevalent, it would be interesting to carry out more detailed analyses that focus on these types of words exclusively to find out precisely what words are used in what contexts. Such studies could even rely on this corpus and re-analyse it with this goal in mind.

Finally, it must be noted that these results are artificial to some degree because they do not represent anyone in particular. As the end of the chapter already showed, wide varieties between individuals can be observed, ranging from 20% NSL to 0%. This short analysis has already identified some clear potential determinants for the artists' use of NSL: the date of release, the rappers' origins and the genre of the track. More determinants, however, have an impact on the rappers' language, and uncovering them is one of the goals of this research. For this reason, the rest of the thesis will focus on the role of four major determinants of NSL in the corpus: diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic.

Chapter II:

“NTM, Solaar, IAM, c’est de l’antiquité”, or an analysis of diachronic determinants

1. Introduction

More than two decades have passed since IAM’s *Concept* in 1989. In the meantime, the French rap movement has gone from being limited to a few artists in Marseille and Paris to spreading across the whole country and beyond. As William Labov already pointed out in 1972 (p.161), it is not always enough to look at completed change. In order to understand the present state of a language or a sociolect, it can be necessary to look at ongoing alterations diachronically. Analysing French rap music diachronically is therefore vital, and it can help answer some of the research questions.

First of all, developing this approach will allow for a discussion of the extent to which such a diachronic analysis can relate to other approaches. It could, for instance, put a new perspective on some current sociological matters. Of course, this approach will bring an answer to a central question to this research: what determines non-standard language (NSL) in French rap? The passing of time has an unavoidable effect on the use of this type of language and this chapter will define it, determine its importance and draw conclusions from it. Finally, a diachronic approach will reveal how time can affect identity, recognition and aesthetics in this movement. These three notions are significant because they have a reciprocal effect on the use of language: they modify language and language modifies them.

In this analysis, it is important to understand what the difference is between diachronic and historical (socio)linguistics. In a linguistic context, historical can be perceived as “the

reconstruction of the history of a given language in its socio-cultural context” (Conde-Silvestre and Hernandez-Campoy, 2012, p.1) while diachronic refers to language change “through time” (Janda and Joseph, 2003, p.86). In other words, historical linguistics focuses on “old-time synchrony”, i.e. how a specific language looked at one moment in the past, and diachronic linguistics looks at how successive past synchronies led to change (Janda and Joseph, 2003, p.86). As a result, diachronic linguistics will always rely on historical linguistics. While historical linguistics can be carried out on its own and for its own sake, diachronic linguistics must necessarily be based on successive historical linguistic findings.

Diachronic linguistic changes can have two main origins. As Raymond Hickey (2012, p.388) describes, these changes can be internally- or externally-motivated. Internally-motivated changes are traced back to structural considerations and are independent of sociolinguistic factors. This type of change is caused by language itself because, among other reasons, most speakers will have found it unconsciously more convenient, over time, to modify their language in such a way. A very famous example of this type of diachronic change can be found in the works of the Neogrammarians who studied the regularity of sound change in Indo-European languages. They discovered that phonemes were gradually changing with time and that this change was always regular for all phonemes found in identical contexts (e.g. see Hermann, 1886; or Brugmann and Delbrück, 1897). On the other hand, externally-motivated changes are caused by socio-cultural factors, which can be determined by history or historical changes. The interests and focuses of cultures and societies change over time and this can impact language. The feminisation of profession titles in French is such an example. This change did not happen internally but rather through cultural pressure.

Externally-motivated changes are the topic of many sociolinguistic studies. The study of such a phenomenon can yield both linguistic and sociological insights into language, culture and their relationship. For example, Philippe Boula de Mareüil *et al.* (2011) studied stress patterns in the speech of French news announcers. They used modern computer-generated tools to analyse a 10-hour-long corpus consisting of recordings from the last six decades. They looked in depth at how “word-initial stress” and “penultimate vowel lengthening” have changed diachronically and discovered a decrease in mean pitch, pitch rise, initial stress and penultimate lengthening, which they linked to, among other external factors, “advances in restitution and broadcasting techniques”, “the popularization of television”, and a “listener-oriented shift from hyper- to hypo-articulated speech” because “familiarity is now prioritized over intelligibility” (Boula de Mareüil *et al.*, 2011, p.287).

Within externally-motivated diachronic changes, two sociolinguistic attitudes can be adopted (Cheshire, 1987, p.1): analysing either language change throughout the lifespan of one or more individuals, or the differences in language use between “cohorts of individuals living within a speech community” (Cheshire, 1987, p.1). The first approach is called *age-specific* change, i.e. analysing language use throughout individuals’ lives, and the other *generation-specific* change, i.e. analysing at one point in time different generations of speakers. This represents an important distinction. In terms of French rap, it would be pertinent to be able to tell whether individuals have gone through language change throughout their careers or if it is one generation after the other of new artists who brought language change.

The term generation might seem simple at first glance but its meaning is complex. As Fiona Barclay and Cristina Johnston (2014, p.134) argue, one of the central weaknesses of the generational concept is the arbitrary nature of the assignation of boundaries. A

generation can be defined around a significant social or historical event. For instance, Siân Reynolds (2011, n.p.) mentions *génération 68*. The definition of this group of people is problematic because only a minority of the population actually participated in the demonstrations. Yet, the term *génération 68* is still useful to identify people who were the right age at the time to take part in these events, regardless of their actions. Another problem arises when some people can be described as belonging to older or younger generations due to their interests, actions or thoughts. Consequently, the term generation will always remain arbitrary to some extent. What is more, there is a degree of subjectivity. An individual might see everyone who is the same age as their parents as belonging to one generation, whereas another individual who is a little older or younger may not place these same people in any particular generation. Within this thesis, generation must be understood temporally and subjectively. It refers to the 10-year gap between the artists in 1990/1991, 2001 and 2011 who, for the purpose of this diachronic analysis are seen as belonging to different generations.

Very close to age- and generation-specific change is the concept of age-grading. Jenny Cheshire (1987, p.3) defines it as “a change of behaviour with age that repeats itself in each generation” while Labov (1994, p.83) highlights the importance of “linguistic change against a backdrop of community stability”. In general, it refers to “age-specific differences” that manifest when individuals adapt their language to what is “considered appropriate” for their age (Cheshire, 1987, p.3). The main difference lies in the fact that most speakers, if put in the same linguistic context at a given age, will adopt these changes due to socio-cultural pressures and expectations. In other words, the same change is repeated generation after generation. For example, age-grading would apply to speakers of English who start to modify their vocabulary and pronunciation in favour of Received Pronunciation once they start to work. Age- and generation-specific changes, as well as

age-grading, are all central to a diachronic analysis of language in French rap because it is almost unavoidable that they will affect the artists in one way or another.

One of the main potential reasons why individuals may alter the way they speak is a change of social class. For example, Labov (1966, pp.187-188) carried a significant study on this topic in Martha's Vineyard. He looked at the centralisation of various vowel sounds and found that the inhabitants from lower-social classes who had no intention of leaving the island showed pronounced vowel centralisation whereas those from higher-social classes who had left the island or intended to leave the island did not centralise their vowels. The people who centralised them the most were the ones who had abandoned mainland careers to come back to the island. Regardless of the trajectory, social class is bound to have an impact on language. Its role is so significant that sometimes differences even between siblings can be observed (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, 2012, p.33). Social class is very relevant to French rap because many rap artists originally come from lower social classes, but their artistic fame often means that they become very successful socially and financially. Such social promotion must have linguistic consequences which will be made apparent by the diachronic analysis.

However, the very definition of social class can be insufficient for linguistic purposes. Indeed, Suzanne Evans Wagner (2012, p.375) explains that the traditional definition of social class takes into account only "income level, occupation, educational background, etc." This is the reason why Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski (1975) introduced the notion of "linguistic market". This notion acknowledges the access and use of the standard language by speakers of various social classes. An individual from a lower social class but with frequent access to standard language might demonstrate a good knowledge

of higher registers of language. So as we can see, social class will play a central role in diachronic change, but its analysis must be carefully carried out.

Studying the diachronic evolution of a language does not simply reveal linguistic innovations, it can also reveal aspects of society at large. As Bourdieu (1982, p.60) identified, when we communicate, we do not only provide information about what we say, but also and especially about how we say it. Studying what has been said in French rap since its beginning yields information about how it has been said. In turn, this gives us insight into the acceptable or desirable speech habits of the French rap movement over time. As Bourdieu (1982, p.16) also explained, words are nothing other than social entities. Their meanings can be derived only from social situations and it may not be possible to find a core meaning. From one linguistic market to the next, a same word can be used in various ways. The same can be said about the meaning of a word through time. A diachronic sociolinguistic analysis of French rap would bring valuable insights into the use of certain words in given contexts and into the artists' perception of the rap movement and French society.

In the diachronic analysis, but also in the next three chapters, the role of the contexts will be as important as the texts, or in our case the tracks in the corpus. Labov (1991, p.516) referred to this phenomenon as “internal factors” being explained by “external factors”. The internal factors, the actual language being used, are always determined by external factors, the socio-cultural context in which the discourse takes place. When undertaking a sociolinguistic analysis, it is always important to take real social situations into account: the speech must be anchored in a place and a time, an argument also defended by Sonia Branca-Rosoff (2007, p.163).

Analysing the context of the tracks is not only important for putting the use of language into perspective, but also for understanding the narratives being recounted by the artists. Tammar Zilber *et al.* (2008, pp.1047-1048) describe how people “construct their stories in relation to their social spheres and their position in them and in light of the ‘cultural stock of stories’ and local social conventions available to them”. In other words, the context of the rap artists will not only affect what they say and how they say it but also the way they choose to organise their narratives. In this sense, the text and context of the rap artists can be seen as “mutually constructed” because when composing their text, they are always aware in some way of their historico-socio-cultural contexts (Zilber *et al.*, 2008, p.1050). In case the artists do not explicitly contextualise their speech, it is also relevant because it would then indicate that they take for granted that their audience will understand it (Zilber *et al.*, 2008, p.1053).

Before the start of the analysis, the notion of strong- and weak-ties relationships must also be unpacked, as it relates to the diachronic analysis. Communities are constituted not only of macro-level interactions but also of micro-level ones, which can change over time and therefore impact language variation. According to Mark Granovetter (1973, p.1361), the micro-level relationships between individuals can be measured in terms of the amount of time that individuals spend together, the emotional intensity of their interactions, the intimacy that they share and the reciprocal services that they provide to one another. The relationships will be considered weak if the aforementioned criteria are poorly met, i.e. if the individuals do not spend much time together and have little emotional investment and little intimacy, whereas they will be seen as strong if the individuals spend a lot of time together, with emotionally rich interactions. The more networks individuals have in common, the stronger their ties. Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre (2012: p.334) argues that change is more likely to be brought by individuals who establish weak ties within given

social networks. When individuals have strong-ties relationships, they are less likely to come in contact with new words, expressions or syntactical constructions, and also communication is made easier because they know the members of their social networks well. As for individuals with weak-ties relationships, their lower commitments to the social network mean that they represent a bridge between communities, facilitating linguistic exchanges, and they also do not feel the social pressure to conform as much.

2. Diachronic determinants of the Ile-de-France rappers' NSL use

The quantitative results (see Appendix II 2.1. for full tables) reveal that the rap artists from the Ile-de-France region used increasingly more NSL between 1990/1991 (3.12% NSL), 2001 (7.11%) and 2011 (12.38%). Not only did the use of NSL quadruple on average, but every single category of NSL at least doubled. The second most striking observation is that the NSL category that increased the least is the use of vulgar words. This change is relative, however, because vulgar words did double in twenty years. Then the two NSL categories that increased the most are *verlan* and slang. On average, the use of *verlan* was 30 times as prevalent in 2001 and 55 times in 2011 compared to 1990/1991, while slang was used 13 times more in 2001 and 23 times in 2011. Furthermore, the evolution of foreign borrowings is fascinating: they became 3.66 times more frequent by 2011 and became diversified. Proportionally, a steady decrease in the use of English could be observed in favour of Arabic and other languages. Nevertheless, English still remained the overwhelmingly dominant language in the genre over the years (no less than 81.65%) while Arabic could not reach more than 13% of the total borrowings. In terms of the grammatical categories, the percentage of nouns remained almost unchanged. They have been and still are the most common type of NSL words, while the prevalence of verbs increased from less than 8% to almost 20%.

The above quantitative results leave very little doubt that time was a crucial determinant of NSL use in this section of the corpus. This opinion is also shared by Shurik'n from IAM who directly experienced the whole time-period that was selected for the analysis:

Oh oui, bien sûr qu'il a changé, il y a des mots ou des expressions qu'on utilisait il y a dix ans qu'on entend plus maintenant, bien sûr, il y en a plein. Celles qui sont dites et employées aujourd'hui seront complètement dépassées dans quelques années. Ça va très très vite. Et c'est quelque chose qui peut varier en fonction de pleins de critères, de facteurs différents. (Shurik'n, 2013)

In this extract, Shurik'n observes that the words and expressions that rappers use are in constant change. As he notes, and this is the most important aspect of this quotation, these changes can take place very quickly and be caused by different factors. It will be the aim of the upcoming qualitative analysis to try to unveil the internal and external determinants of this evolution to see how they relate to the results found in the linguistic analysis.

First, internally-motivated change will be taken into consideration. According to Charles Hockett (1950, p.449), the “fundamental speech habits” of individuals are established by early puberty, a hypothesis that many other researchers have confirmed after him. Although not all researchers agree on the precise timing (e.g. Johnson and Newport, 1989; or Krashen, 1973) or how this phenomenon takes place (e.g. Newport, 1990), the critical importance of childhood and early adolescence in regards to language acquisition has been proven by extensive evidence (e.g. Hécaen, 1976 or Johnson and Newport, 1991). A notable example is that of Gina Grimshaw *et al.* (1998, p.237) who showed how language acquisition is greatly hindered and full mastery never truly acquired in young people who learn how to speak in adolescence only after being fitted with a hearing aid, further supporting the importance of this critical pre-early-adolescence period. Consequently, internally-motivated changes in any language are the result of successive

generations of young speakers. Every generation will speak slightly differently from the next until such changes become significant.

Since NSL does not have fixed norms, changes can take place much faster than in the standard variety, in which change is met by criticism from teachers, grammarians and *l'Académie*. The French rap movement can be looked at as a linguistic community in itself. Every new generation of rap artists grew up using a language that was different from their predecessors due to internally-motivated changes in their linguistic environments. The problem with this argument, however, is that it would be difficult for such internally-motivated changes alone to explain the very strong and rapid increase observed in the corpus. For example, the next three artists grew up ten years apart and were the same age (24) when they performed the following extracts from the corpus:

Authentique oui trop typique, cette saveur aromatique
Qui jamais identique, reste pourtant poétique
Car sans limite, ma vocation est unique
Non je ne suis pas de ces loustics
Complètement idiopathiques
(NTM, 1991, *Authentik*, “Authentik”; NSL in the track: 1.66%)

Démarrage hold-up, de la première à la sixième,
Je viens mettre ça au top
Plus rien ne peut m'arrêter, ni rappeur ni Robocop
N'aie pas peur, quand je pilote le mic, rien que j'passe des rapports
(Rohff, 2001, *La Vie Avant La Mort*, “TDSI”; NSL in the track: 7.1%)

Avec le flow que j'ai dans la bouche
Tu vois les étoiles comme les astros
Les Mcs vont se vider pas comme la ken
Mais comme la gastro, révolutionnaire, nan
T'es toilette nan t'es pas Castro
(Sultan, 2011, *Ils sont pas prêts*, “Ils sont pas prêts”; NSL in the track: 16.62%)

In these three tracks, not only can we see important quantitative differences (NTM: 1.66% NSL; Rhoff: 7.1% NSL; and Sultan: 16.62% NSL), but also significant stylistic differences. The extract from NTM has much stronger poetic impact than Rhoff's and

especially Sultan's. NTM's track contains more elaborate words such as *saveur* or *idiopathique*, the more complex syntactical structure *qui jamais identique* and even the word *poetic* itself, whereas the other two tracks display a cruder style with simpler syntactical structures and words (*mettre*, *Robocop*, *gastro*, *toilette*, etc.) (for a full discussion of the effect of styles and genres, including more poetic rap, see chapter 5). These marked quantitative and stylistic differences could hardly be caused principally by different speech habits internalised in the artists' childhood. It becomes clear that other external factors are at play.

The first external factor that might have played a role in the increase of NSL is a change in the relationships between rappers. At the beginning of French rap, there were fewer individuals in the movement. These individuals were more likely to know one another well and to have stronger-ties relationships. These stronger-ties relationships were not conducive to linguistic innovations. With time, however, the movement grew considerably and, as a consequence, rap artists started to develop strong-ties with some individuals but especially weak-ties and no ties at all with other artists. Smaller social networks began to develop in terms of style, origins or interest. This was also reported by Hammou (2005) who described how micro-social networks developed in French rap during the 1990s and became common in the 2000s (cf. introduction). The more that weaker ties developed, the more linguistic change and innovation became likely (Conde-Silvestre, 2012, p.334). Nowadays, with the number of rappers and the easy communication between networks, it makes sense that linguistic change has been accelerated and that NSL increased. The artists who want to take ownership of the movement or stand out, as we will see, are more likely to spread their linguistic innovations, which can be picked up by influential individuals in other social networks and eventually potentially spread to the whole movement.

This change from strong- to weak-ties relationships between rappers made it easier for change to take place, but to explain the scale of the increase in the quantitative findings, even stronger external determinants must be explored. First, my research suggests that the rappers in 1990/1991 did not necessarily have a choice. Indeed, they may have opted for less NSL because they felt that they had to in order to be accepted by mainstream society. El Matador shares this opinion:

A l'époque, vu que c'étaient les précurseurs, je pense qu'ils avaient fait un effort. Vu que c'étaient les premiers à être jugés dans le milieu du rap et les gens, je parle de la presse, voyaient ça comme un phénomène qui allait s'essouffler. A l'époque les anciens étaient forcés d'utiliser un langage qui puisse paraître compréhensible par tout le monde. Les mecs utilisaient des phrases correctes et construites dans leurs chansons. (El Matador, 2013)

As El Matador explains, the early French rappers had to deal with the fact that rap music in France in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not as famous or even accepted as it is today. When the first artists started to rap, they had to choose between using an elaborate or a restricted code with NSL in their tracks. As Basil Bernstein (1991, pp.475-476; 1993, p.135) explains, elaborate codes use complex syntax and vocabulary and promote clear and precise communication between strangers, whereas restricted codes have simplified and rigid syntax with narrower vocabulary and are used with people who know each other and already have shared expectations. The early French rappers could not assume that a restricted code would suffice because they did not have a large audience yet with such shared expectations. If they had used too many slang and vulgar words from the beginning, people might have categorised them even more as thugs and delinquents, whereas they wanted to be seen as artists in their own right. The fear of being perceived as *racaille* was especially prominent at the beginning of French rap in the late 1980s and early 1990s as, according to Sébastien Barrio (2007, p.28), American rap had quickly spread to the *banlieues* and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In such a context, it is

reasonable to assume that the first rap artists were animated by a desire to legitimise their art beyond *banlieue* neighbourhoods. It can therefore be hypothesised that the first rap artists tried to use more standard language to make sure that mainstream society would at least give them a chance.

Nowadays the situation has changed dramatically: rap music is one of the most successful genres in France. The increasing success of French rap means that both artist and audience have more and more shared expectations and common assumptions, which, I argue, diminishes the need for the use of an elaborate code and can partially explain the rise in NSL observed in the diachronic analysis. This increased success of French rap also led to an equal increase in the number of rappers. Akro described in his interview how this higher number of rappers has had consequences for language use in the genre:

Comme souvent pour des styles de musique qui au départ s'adressent à un petit nombre et deviennent plus « mainstream », ceux qui pensent que ce style leur appartient le compliquent pour continuer à se l'approprier et partager ces mots/façons de parler avec leur public. C'est une des façons de se distinguer. Le rap maintenant est plus varié et il y a donc plus de « niches » utilisant leur langage propre. Comme plus de choses ont déjà été faites, il y a un besoin de se nourrir d'autres mots. (Akro, 2013)

As Akro states in this extract, French rap has become more diversified. As a result, rappers now face the need to stand out if they want to make a living and be recognised by their peers and their audience. According to several rappers that I interviewed, some artists will attempt to do so by “appropriating” certain NSL words and developing this type of language further.

In this context of fierce competition, some rappers may also think that it is in their interest to use more NSL words that are considered fashionable in an effort to attract attention from the people who use these words, which leads to temporary linguistic fads in the French rap movement:

Après il y a aussi des expressions qui sont à la mode. Tu ne peux pas passer à côté, t'es limite obligé de les utiliser pour te dire que ton morceau il va être un petit peu à la mode. Moi je suis comme ça, quand j'écris, s'il y a une expression à la mode, j'essaye de la mettre en valeur dans un morceau. Chose que font beaucoup de rappers. (El Matador, 2013)

In the above interview extract, El Matador reports that French rappers literally do not have a choice, they must use fashionable words if they want to be and stay relevant. This is because competition has become too fierce in the genre so that it is vital for rappers to use everything at their disposal to appeal to an audience. My research leads me to argue that this type of attitude can quickly create situations where rappers try to outdo one another and start to pile on NSL words in their lyrics to create their own memorable style and attract listeners, as Akro reported earlier.

Using creative NSL can also be a way to gain exposure in the rest of French society. Indeed, it emerges from my interviews that what could be considered an even greater achievement by a rapper is to create a fad of their own beyond specific French rap circles, and to impact language use in mainstream society. For instance, there is the recent success of an expression from Marseille, *à la bien*, which spread throughout the whole country:

Je te prends l'exemple de Soprano et « à la bien ». (...) « A la bien » ça vient à la base du fait qu'à Marseille il y a beaucoup de communautés maghrébines, de gens qui viennent du bled même clandestinement. (...) Au lieu de dire « oui ça va, je vais bien, tranquille », ils disent « oui moi ça va, à la bien ». Et après c'est rentré dans les mœurs. Et c'est devenu un langage courant. (El Matador, 2013)

The phenomenon that El Matador describes represents a dream for many rappers, because the spread of such expressions gives a lot of exposure to the artist. In the case of *à la bien*, anyone who will want to know where the expression comes from will eventually stumble upon Soprano's track (2007, *Puisqu'il faut vivre*, "A la bien"). Some rappers even try to invent their own NSL in the hope that it will catch on. For example, Rhoff introduced the

expression *en mode* (followed by a noun), defined as “en étant dans l'état défini par le nom” (Reverso, 2015, *s.v.* en mode), which became an instant fad beyond the rap movement and was eventually accepted as an everyday expression still used to this day (see Pourquery, 2012). Given this desire that many artists have to stand out by their use of specific types of NSL, it is not hard to understand why the corpus contained so much more NSL on average in 2011.

However, the more intense competition between French rappers and the desire to stand out are not the only determining factors that can explain this large increase in 2011. Some of this change can certainly be attributed to historical events. For example, it would be difficult to analyse these quantitative results without taking the 2005 riots into consideration. As Katharyne Mitchell (2011, p.406) explains, these riots broke out following the deaths of two teenagers from the Parisian suburbs who were electrocuted after hiding from the police in a power substation, in a context of tensions that were aggravated by Nicolas Sarkozy's clumsy remark regarding his intention to clean the *banlieues* of their most problematic inhabitants with a “Kärcher”. The demonstrations began in Paris and rapidly spread to other cities across the country, ultimately causing one death, three thousand arrests and nine thousand burned cars. Since these events, it can be argued that promoting *banlieue* subculture and slang vocabulary has once again come to prominence, similarly to the case of Makomé M'Bowolé in 1993 that inspired the 1995 French movie *La Haine* by Mathieu Kassovitz and contributed to the ‘birth’ of *cinéma de banlieue* (see e.g. Tourancheau, 1996, n.p.). After the 2005 riots, many rappers felt personally threatened and tried to defend and promote the *banlieues* in their art. For example, numerous tracks were written on the topic after these incidents, including Sniper's “Brûle” (2006), Keny Arkana's “Nettoyage au Kärcher” (2006), X Kalibur's and Blood's “Nettoyer au Kärcher” (2009) or Mafia K'1 Fry's “Guerre” (2007). Although it

would be difficult to quantify the exact effects of these riots on the use of NSL, they certainly left a visible mark on the genre.

Based on my research, these quantitative results must also be understood in a context of increasing use of the internet. Now, as long as someone has access to the internet, they can be instantly connected to people from all over the country and the rest of the world:

Grâce à internet, même l'argot s'est démocratisé par rapport à avant. Parce que nous avant, limite tu étais un Parisien et tu venais à Marseille et c'était une langue étrangère. Tu arrivais pas à assimiler, tu te disais « waw putain ils parlent trop vite ». Il fallait un temps d'adaptation. Mais maintenant je pense que de par internet, de par le rap, de par les réseaux sociaux, tout le monde arrive à se comprendre. (El Matador, 2013)

As El Matador explains, the internet and social networks have changed the status quo in French rap and in fact the whole country. According to Raymond Hickey (2012, p.390), change always originates in one or a couple of individuals. This change, by being continuously applied by more and more people, eventually becomes accepted by the population at large and recognised by grammars and dictionaries. The internet allows this process to take place much faster. Moreover, artists can now produce and publish video clips a lot easier than before thanks to YouTube and social media as well as improved digital technologies and the lower price of digital cameras. These social media also allow rappers to share their opinions directly with their fans in a language or sociolect of their choice. This further helps the spread of linguistic fads and NSL words and expressions.

This much faster spread of NSL thanks to the internet means that such words lose their cryptic dimension even faster. This might be seen as a problem for its original users who will then attempt to replace these terms with other NSL words, therefore contributing to the appearance of new and often more complex NSL. This phenomenon stems from a desire to keep ownership of the language. Indeed, it is common, according to Véronique

Castellotti and Didier Robillard (2001, p.62), for young people to change the way they speak and the words they use as soon as they realise that people outside their peers have started to use them (see also Valdman, 2000). This type of behaviour is to be expected because, when young people create slang words, it is partly for cryptic reasons, but even more so to strengthen group identity. When their idiosyncrasies have spread beyond the boundaries of the group of peers, slang words are no longer useful for identity performance and the initial users gradually stop using them.

Such a loss of ownership of vernacular words is part of the normal evolution of most vernaculars and can therefore be expected for NSL in French rap. Anthony Lodge (1998, p.99) describes how most vernaculars go through three separate evolutionary stages. First, a “koineisation” takes place during which a levelling and simplification happen due to more or less dense contacts between speakers and outsiders. Once this has been achieved, the evolution moves on to a “reallocation of the dialectal variants”. In this stage, some of the variants disappear while others persist in specific social classes or linguistic communities. Then finally, the vernacular goes through a dialectal levelling caused by the pressure that standard language exerts upon it. At that point, the vernacular has spread and forms a new urban dialect. This can explain why the language used by the rappers in our corpus has become increasingly more complex over time in terms of NSL. As mainstream society has slowly absorbed their language, they have felt the need to make it ever more complex. Semji illustrated this phenomenon when he spoke about the evolution of the use of *verlan* during his interview:

Ça [*verlan*] a pris une proportion énorme. Mais c’est vraiment un langage qui était à la base peu utilisé et qui aujourd’hui est vraiment limite universel et on entend ça partout. Mais bon à la base le verlan est quand même une langue ancienne, il est utilisé depuis de nombreuses années mais en tout cas dans ce milieu-ci ça a pris une plus grosse proportion ces dernières années. (Semji, 2013)

We can see that while mainstream society has absorbed certain *verlan* words, some rap artists have started, as a result, to use this language more often and in a more complex manner to mark their own use as different from the rest of society.

Now that the most important determinants of NSL variation in this section of the corpus have been addressed, the analysis will move on to variation within Akhenaton's section of the diachronic linguistic analysis.

3. Diachronic determinants of Akhenaton's NSL use throughout his career

The quantitative results (see Appendix II 2.2. for full tables) obtained from analysing Akhenaton's NSL use in 1991 (6.21%), 2001 (3.67%) and 2011 (8.79%) show that the results fluctuated significantly. His NSL use was almost cut in half in 2001 and then doubled in 2011. The only category of NSL that consistently increased is the use of slang. It doubled in 2001 (0.45%) and reached almost six times as high in 2011 (1.36% compared to 0.23% in 1991). No other category increased in 2001. However, if we compare only 1991 and 2011, some other categories increased significantly, such as vulgar words and combinations that both became four times as important. Then Akhenaton's use of foreign languages fluctuated as well. Akhenaton borrowed some words from Arabic only in 2001 while Latin was used only in 1991 and 2011, which is counterintuitive because Latin could be expected to appear in the least non-standard year (2001). Furthermore, three different foreign borrowings were used in 1991 against two in 2001 and four in 2011, which follows the general fluctuation observed in the corpus. Lastly, one aspect of the grammatical categories of these NSL words stood out: the unexpected 18% of NSL being adverbs in 2001. This observation alone shows that the language used in 2001 differs significantly from 1991 and 2011.

The observation that Akhenaton's NSL use did not increase nearly as much as the previous diachronic analysis and in fact fluctuated, which is not indicative of any dramatic changes, leads to the acknowledgement that there is always a possibility for artists not to change linguistically:

Donc Booba il a choqué mais le problème c'est que maintenant il est au top. D'un point de vue réussite professionnelle, il est au top, et il rappe ça et les gens vont dire que le truc c'est que son langage n'a pas changé, donc la forme n'a pas changé mais le fond n'est plus pareil. Mais si tu vas dans le fond du fond, il est authentique. Il reste pareil, il rappe ce qu'il vit. C'est pour ça que je dis que c'est difficile parce que oui maintenant il est pareil, c'est juste que le contexte a changé. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

In this quotation, Whoopy Jones mentions the example of Booba who, in his opinion, never changed the way he speaks. What is striking in this interview extract is Whoopy Jones's insistence that he remained unchanged even though the context around him changed. Similarly to the previous analysis of generational changes, such a situation can be partially explained with strong- and weak-ties relationships.

Akhenaton is a member of IAM, a band that is still performing after more than 25 years, which is indicative of a strong cohesion between members. Their strong connection is apparent in the following quotation:

Je préfère appeler ça un parcours, plutôt qu'une carrière solo. On a fait un pacte avec IAM, de ne pas faire de vraies carrières solos: des disques mais pas de tournée, pas de séparations trop longues. (Akhenaton in Mathieu, 2014, n.p.)

Indeed, as Akhenaton specifies, the members of IAM spend a lot of time together, especially in their recording studio La Cosca (Akhenaton, 2010, p.471), and they avoid long separations or concerts without the whole band. Furthermore, IAM has always been a band known for their unique style and their desire to maintain it, as Shurik'n mentioned in his interview:

Les références qu'on met dans nos textes nous sont bien propres et particulières. Des références à l'Égypte, des références à Chine antique, au Japon féodal, des références à plein d'ethnies dont les cultures et les civilisations nous intéressent. (Shurik'n, 2013)

IAM has definitely stood out in the rap industry thanks to this unique style that mixes different elements from mostly Oriental cultures. Although it would be difficult to measure it precisely, the strong cohesion of the band and the desire to maintain their unique style probably places Akhenaton in a situation where he shares weak ties with the rest of the rap industry and strong ties with his band. This is significant because, according to Mikaël Jamin (2004, p.172), individuals in dense (everyone knows each other) and multiplex (they have more than one commonality) networks are more likely to adopt the common language shared by all members of the community, whereas individuals who are in weak (they only know one or a few members) and uniplex (they only have one commonality) networks are much less likely to adopt the common language found in the network.

This means that rappers, such as Akhenaton, who do not have strong ties with various rap networks may not feel the need or pressure to adapt their language through time even if language in these various networks changes. It may seem paradoxical that weak-ties relationships are both conducive to diachronic change and stability at the same time, but in reality these two tendencies represent two sides of the same coin. Weak ties at the community level are conducive to diachronic change but, at the individual level, they favour diachronic stability. It is the individuals with weak ties, not feeling the need to follow the other members of their networks, who can stay true to themselves and introduce their linguistic particularities to these networks. If they are charismatic enough, the other members of the networks will start to imitate them, which is one cause of language change in a given community.

This argument can, I argue, partially explain why a lack of really strong changes was observed in Akhenaton's section of the corpus, but it does not explain the fluctuations. To explain them, several other determinants will be explored. First, upon scrutiny, the tracks chosen for each year belong to three very different types of albums, which can begin to explain these fluctuations. The tracks from 1991 belong to IAM's album *De la planète Mars*, those from 2001 to Akhenaton's solo album *Sol Invictus*, and those from 2011 to a duo album *We luv New York* with Faf Larage. Naturally, the contexts of these albums are very different. Simply looking at the titles is already very revealing. The first album contains a word play using Mars as a planet but also as an abbreviation of Marseille, which is an indicator of NSL. The second album, however, has a Latin title, something which can underline a desire to use more sophisticated language. The last album has an English title with unconventional spelling, a very clear desire to set the tone for more NSL. The second album is the only one where Akhenaton really had complete control over the content, as the other two albums were collaborations with other artists. Given the fact that the album must represent all its contributors, the language used is bound to be determined by all the artists involved.

The results for the second album *Sol invictus* must also be interpreted within the context of Akhenaton's conversion to Islam. Indeed, he converted in 1992 following his marriage to his Muslim wife (Akhenaton, 2010, p.509). It is worth mentioning that he chose to talk about this conversion and to defend Islam during the promotion of his album *Sol Invictus* in an interview with Thierry Ardisson on France 2's *Tout le monde en parle*.²⁷ This leads me to argue that his conversion can be linked with the increase of Arabic found in this album compared to the other two years. It would seem that following his conversion and

²⁷ An extract from this interview can be watched on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0uIUQAvdxA>.

in a context of racism towards Muslims in France, Akhenaton chose both to promote his new Islamic faith by using Arabic (4.5% of all foreign borrowings) and also to defend Muslims and Arabic speakers by demonstrating that being a Muslim is not incompatible with more standardised language in French rap.

As Akhenaton's conversion to Islam already illustrates, it would be too simplistic to limit oneself to the content of these albums. In reality, text and context always work together, and Akhenaton's life experiences can also offer clues as to why this fluctuation took place, since artists do not go through their careers unchanged:

Des rappers ont passé cette frontière [turning forty years old], comment ça va réagir? Si on respecte notre musique, notre public, si on se respecte soi-même, si on écrit des textes en adéquation avec nos âges, il n'y a pas de risque. Quand j'aurai soixante ans, je ferai des textes de mec de soixante ans. (Akhenaton in Mathieu, 2014, n.p.)

As Akhenaton explains, rapping at twenty years old is not the same as doing it at forty or even sixty. People constantly grow and change due to life experiences, which is bound to impact their art and language use.

This ultimately relates to age-specific changes and age-grading. These concepts play crucial roles, but Justine Coupland (2009, p.856) is quick to warn against the notion that aging would be the same for everyone under all circumstances. Each individual will evolve in their own ways and according to their own experiences, as Scylla remarks:

Donc c'est simplement encore une fois un témoin de l'époque dans laquelle tu es, de l'ensemble de tes influences. Et tes influences, elles sont multiples. Donc vraiment comme je t'ai dit, influences donc, fréquentations, tout ce que tu écoutes et tout ce qui t'influence à ce moment-là, ça vient se cristalliser en toi à un moment précis et ça va évoluer au fur et à mesure de ton évolution. (Scylla, 2013)

Scylla brings a crucial point to our attention in this quotation. All rap artists will be different because they accumulate many unique personal experiences as they get older,

such as listening to other artists, travelling, studying, or meeting new people, which can eventually change both their linguistic preferences and personalities. On this topic, Disiz made an interesting remark in his interview:

Ma manière de rapper change de disque en disque car mon arsenal linguistique s'enrichit d'année en année. J'apprends plus de mots chaque année, plus de métaphores sont donc possibles... (Disiz, 2013)

As Disiz mentions, with time, French rappers come into contact with more and more words and they can integrate them to their art. Although, as we saw earlier in this chapter, linguistic patterns are usually fixed by early or late puberty, there is indeed one aspect of language that always stays in constant evolution regardless: vocabulary and general knowledge. This can cause either an increase or a decrease in NSL, depending on the source of the newly-acquired vocabulary.

Theoretically, it is possible for artists to use more and more NSL as they age. In practice, however, my interviews revealed that many artists tend to reject this type of language as they get older, or at least they think they do:

Oui je sais très bien mais quand j'ai commencé, par exemple, moi, j'avais un champ lexical familier. Mais en prenant de l'âge, j'ai une fille qui écoute ma musique, donc les derniers morceaux que j'ai faits sont quand même un peu plus léchés au niveau du vocabulaire que les précédents parce que justement je fais la chasse pour moi-même aux mots familiers, aux gros mots, etc. (...) Donc pour ma part, je suis dans une phase où je ne cautionne plus trop l'usage de langage vulgaire, homophobe, familier, gros mots à tout va, comme on peut le voir de plus en plus dans le rap français. (Black Barbie, 2013)

As Black Barbie recounts, one of the most common reasons cited for the use of a more mindful language is the start of family life. During the interviews alone, Shurik'n, Scylla, El Matador and Black Barbie all mentioned this at some point.

Based on my analyses, I maintain that this could apply to Akhenaton and can further explain the lower quantity of NSL in 2001. Akhenaton and his wife had three children

together before the release of *Sol Invictus*: Yanis in 1995, Inaya in 1998, and Reyan in 2000 (Gala, 2015, n.p.; see also Akhenaton, 2010, p.379). Becoming a father had a strong impact on Akhenaton at the time:

Peu avant la naissance de Yanis, j'ai décidé de quitter notre appartement. Exit le centre-ville, je refusais de voir mon enfant pousser sur le béton, dans la pollution et la violence. (Akhenaton, 2010, p.380)

In this quotation, we can see that he consciously decided to bring changes to their lives and to stay away from danger and violence. It is possible that he applied the same type of change to his language in his lyrics, especially given the fact that in 2001 his two oldest children were old enough to understand him and to try to imitate him. Like Black Barbie, Akhenaton may not have wished for his young children to hear inappropriate language, whereas this was not at all a concern in 1991 and probably less of an issue in 2011 because his children were older.

In fact, what Black Barbie described in the above quotation is a common trajectory for many rappers, as can be heard in my interviews with Shurik'n, Scylla, El Matador and Black Barbie. Most rappers begin rapping in their early teenage years when an important goal is to be accepted and respected by groups of peers. It makes much more sense to use NSL in such a context. However, since many successful rappers continue to rap well into their thirties and even forties (e.g. Joey Starr, Kool Shen, Akhenaton, Shurik'n, etc.), my research suggests that their goals and focus often shift. During their career, many artists will get married and start a family. Gradually, children are born who then become old enough to listen to their art. As my interviews revealed, the responsibility for educating their children and caring for their family usually motivates artists to use less NSL through time, especially vulgarities. Of course, not all rappers go down this path. Booba, for example, still had not had any children in August 2015 at age 38.

It also emerges from my research that, as rappers get older, their social status can change along the lines of the social mobility discussed in the introduction. Once an individual attributes a value judgement to a language variety, he or she may choose to avoid it or on the contrary reinforce it depending on his social goals. This goes to show how speakers' intentions and goals play a central role in their use of language. If speakers are seeking upward mobility, it makes sense for them to abandon non-standard uses because, as Bourdieu remarks (1982, p.40), people who use popular language are systematically the victims of social devaluation. However, speakers can also seek downward mobility (Achard, 1993, p.59), and it is then in their interest to emphasise popular language to increase their sense of belonging. In this phenomenon, the rappers' cultural capital plays a crucial role (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1986). Stephanie Claussen and Jonathan Osborne (2013, p.59) define this notion as "the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are transmitted to an individual within their socio-cultural context through pedagogic action". It can be understood, within the French rap context, as the effect of the total amount of experience accumulated by rappers in their daily lives. This experience, or "capital", might sway them one way or the other: either towards reinforcing upward social mobility values and probably more SL, or downward social mobility values and more NSL.

In French rap, both types of social mobility can be expected. According to Castellotti and Robillard (2001, p.52), it is first of all the socio-professional trajectory that will play an important role. Although it is not the case for all of them and allocating classes is complicated due to lack of biographical information, many rappers do come from working-class environments. Through their art, they might seek social recognition and financial success. All artists start their careers completely unknown to the general population. Some, however, will become famous, even very famous like Diam's, Joey Starr or Booba. My research shows that the style and language that gave them a little

notoriety at the beginning of their career may not be appropriate once the whole nation begins to listen to their productions. This is when these artists choose to rap with much more standard vocabulary.

Elles en font un peu plus à leur début quand elles veulent s'affirmer. Et ensuite quand elles sont connues et je te parlais des personnes connues comme Keny ou Diam's. Une fois qu'elles sont connues, elles reviennent vers un truc plus traditionnel parce qu'elles ont un public assez large et il faut que leurs propos parlent à tout le monde. (El Matador, 2013)

Although El Matador talks about female rappers only in this particular extract, this applies to both male and female artists. Many of them water down their art linguistically and stylistically in order to appeal to a wider audience within the general population. I argue that changing their language in such a way means that they are more likely to please wider audiences, be perceived as cultured artists, and therefore appear on the radio, have their videos seen on television and be invited on talk shows. However, the artists' relation to social norms plays a critical role. Faced with social pressures and expectations, not all artists will choose to follow the norms, some will seek to destroy them instead.

The fluctuation in Akhenaton's use of NSL in 1991, 2001 and 2011 could be further explained by this notion of social mobility. The following explanations are merely hypotheses based on my research, because it is not possible to measure truly the actual effect of social mobility since many other factors come into play. Yet, the decrease observed between 1991 and 2001 can be looked at in terms of upward social mobility. Between 1991 and 2001, IAM went from being completely unknown to selling 500,000 copies of their album *Ombre est lumière* and then 1,500,000 copies of *L'école du micro d'argent*. This sudden and enormous success means that the band was projected to the forefront of French society. Their tracks could be heard frequently on the radio, their videos seen on television, and the artists were invited on television shows. This new fame

and financial success allowed the band to climb the social ladder. Akhenaton experienced similar success in his solo career, as his first solo album *Méthèque et Mat* (1995) sold 300,000 copies. By the time Akhenaton wrote his second solo album in 2001, he had already been affected by his success and a higher social position for a whole decade. As a result, it does not surprise me to find that he used a type of language that is more typically spoken by people from higher social classes. In 2001, Akhenaton was at the height of his fame at a time when rap music started to contain more NSL and he chose, consciously or unconsciously, to use less NSL, in line with upward social mobility values. Ten years later, in 2011, the context had changed for the album *We luv New York*. Rap music had spread even more with countless new artists. With this wave of young artists, Akhenaton could be perceived as *passé*:

Beaucoup partent en retraite anticipée
L'important est de gagner, j'm'en tape de participer
MC's échangent rondelles contre liquidités
NTM, Solaar, IAM, c'est de l'antiquité
(Booba, 2008, 0.9, "B2OBA")

We can see in this track extract that already in 2008, Booba was hinting that the original pillars of French rap were a thing of the past. My research suggests that, faced with such criticism and a rap movement in constant evolution, we can expect Akhenaton to feel the need to re-assert himself in the rap scene.

This desire can also be felt in the choice of the topic of the album: New York and the origins of rap. I would argue that Akhenaton is attempting to show that some of the earliest hip hop artists are still important in 2011. We can also feel this desire to appear relevant, possibly more than other extremely successful rap artists in 2011, in an interview with *Metronews*:

Vous pensez à Booba, La Fouine et Rohff?

Akhenaton: On n'a pas du tout les mêmes visions artistiques. C'est du Canada Dry. Ils ont la couleur du hip-hop, ils ressemblent au hip-hop, mais ils n'ont rien à voir. Les gamins, qui se délectent de ça, n'ont strictement rien à voir avec notre culture. (...) Ils veulent l'Audi A3, la montre (...). Ils ressemblent à la société de consommation française. (Ouadhi, 2013: n.p.)

In this interview, Akhenaton makes fun of modern famous rappers by claiming that they cannot be considered to be true hip hop artists. His use of “*notre*” is particularly relevant because it shows that he places himself on the side of rappers who can be regarded as hip hop artists. His attitude makes sense because, in order to appear as if he still belongs in the movement, it is important for Akhenaton to favour downward mobility values to look more *hardcore*, such as criticising the artists who, according to him, seek only financial success and are in fact missing the real hip hop fundamentals. One way to achieve this in his albums is to react against the very linguistic norms that he was endorsing ten years earlier. By using more NSL, he can present himself to the younger generations as someone fashionable and certainly not someone who belongs to the *antiquité* of rap. By acting in this way, Akhenaton promotes his own constructed authenticity as a “true” French rapper and hip hop artist.

In fact, the notion of authenticity itself can be the source of diachronic change since “authenticity in any music is not constant and unchanging” (Lum, 2009, p.36). As the industry evolves, so does the notion of authenticity within the movement. The artists constantly strive to appear authentic, basing themselves on unstable authenticity criteria, which ultimately results in further diachronic changes.

To end this chapter, it is important to point out that a few exceptions could be found in both sections of the diachronic analysis. First, when it comes to Akhenaton, some tracks displayed strong variations within the same year. For example, in *De la planète Mars* (1991), we find 11.91% NSL in “Elvis” against 4% in “Le nouveau président”. In *Sol*

Invictus (2001), “Sol Invictus” contains 1.6% NSL compared to 6.5% in “Chaque jour”. In *We luv New York* (2011), we can observe 14.6% NSL in “Le sens du mot flow” in contrast with 5.22% in “M.R.S.”. From these examples, we can see that the use of NSL is approximately trebled between these pairs of tracks for all three years. Then, in the generational analysis, some rappers from 2001 and 2011 were found to use less NSL than rappers from 1990/1991. For instance, Ministère A.M.E.R. (1991) used 5.6% NSL compared to 1.6% for Kery James (2001) and 3.18% for Mister You (2011). Both Kery James and Mister You used less NSL than Ministère A.M.E.R., despite the fact that Ministère A.M.E.R. released their track in 1991. Even though they represent exceptions, such counterexamples are essential because they show that other determinants are at play, which will be dissected in the following chapters.

4. Conclusions

In this chapter, we looked in depth at the diachronic determinants of NSL use in the corpus, both for three different generations of Ile-de-France rappers (1990/1991, 2001 and 2011) and for one artist throughout his career (Akhenaton in 1991, 2001 and 2011). The first conclusion from the analysis is that diachronic determinants play a central role in NSL use for the generational analysis, as a fourfold increase is noted with most notably 23 times as much slang and 55 times as much *verlan*. The strongest and most determining factor of this steady increase is the external changes that took place in French rap in the twenty-year period of the study. The early French rappers often chose to use less NSL because they had yet to be recognised as artists and accepted by the rest of society. Then, in the next two decades, competition between artists became increasingly fierce due to the success of French rap to the point where many rappers in 2011 felt the need to stand out and appeal to new and different audiences by using NSL extensively, which became a trend in the movement.

However, and this is the second broad conclusion from this analysis, diachronic change is not as important in Akhenaton's tracks between 1991 and 2011, since no strong quantitative increase is noticed, but rather a fluctuation. Finding clear diachronic determinants for one individual throughout his career is much harder because of the number of potential influences, including the other determinants of this analysis. Nevertheless, several determining factors stand out in the analysis. In 2001, age grading and upward social mobility seemed to play a significant role. Akhenaton had become famous and wealthy, had got married, and had had three children. Accordingly, his NSL use reflected upward social mobility values and a desire not to use offensive language. By 2011, his situation had changed and he was faced with criticism from other younger artists. His NSL use did increase, as was observed for the rappers from the generational analysis, but to a smaller extent because he did not do it for the same reasons. Instead, his higher NSL use pointed to an attempt to reaffirm his authenticity and relevance in modern French rap.

From this analysis, we understand that time plays a crucial role in linguistic variation, and more specifically NSL use. The rappers' historico-socio-cultural contexts are vital to their linguistic output, which shows how the links between text and context should always be carefully analysed and taken into account, as Labov (1991, p.516) and Zilber *et al.* (2008, p.1050) stressed. These historico-socio-cultural determinants include relationships between individuals, upward and downward social mobility, and age-grading. However, such determinants are hard to measure and all individuals can potentially be effected differently, not to mention the impact of temporary fads that make analyses even more complex. This study demonstrates how an initial diachronic linguistic analysis can lead to complex discussions of historico-socio-cultural matters that can enrich other disciplines. As a final note, further research on the topic could focus more on individual

changes or on even wider-scale analyses of generational changes. It could be interesting to see how other artists, besides Akhenaton, evolved throughout their careers or if an even greater corpus would yield the same results.

Chapter III:

“Hauts-de-Seine, majeur en l’air sur la piste”, or an analysis of diatopic determinants

1. Introduction

The broadness of the subject of diatopic determinants makes this chapter one of the most complex as well as revealing in the thesis. To tackle diatopic variation, it is first essential to define its meaning in the chapter and to address why it is so relevant to the use of non-standard language (NSL) in this corpus of selected francophone rap tracks. At its core, the term diatopic means “geographic”, and is mostly related to and used in the context of variation. Geographic can apply to the study of different countries or even continents, in its broadest sense, but also to the study of regions, cities or even neighbourhoods, in its most restricted sense. All these different layers of diatopic determinants come into play to form the linguistic identities of individuals. Furthermore, the role of these layers is accentuated when it comes to NSL use, because this type of usage is not subjected to official regulations and it is therefore prone to variation.

The language used by French-speaking rappers is no exception to this rule. At the heart of the French rap movement, whether in France or Belgium, lies a deep sense of belonging to various specific places and communities. It is indeed very common for many artists to feel the need to stress their origins. These demarcations are multiple and can be broad, sometimes spanning nations, regions, languages or cultures, as when artists claim their association with French rap as opposed to American rap, or very limited and precise, as when they assert their loyalty to a *département*, a city or a single neighbourhood. In

addition to this spatial attachment, ethnic origins play a major role for all artists. For example, many of the rappers whose parents or grandparents immigrated to France perform their musical and linguistic identities around their ethnic origins.

Consequently, this chapter will look at the significance of these spatial and ethnic origins and their impact on NSL in the corpus. A central question will be to see how the use of all the categories of NSL (colloquial and vulgar words, abbreviations, slang, *verlan*, foreign borrowings and any combinations thereof) changes from one city or one *département* to the next and when we compare artists with different ethnic origins. Due to the presence of Brussels in the section of the corpus that looks at the impact of cities, Belgium will play a stronger role in this chapter than in the previous ones. This analysis will seek to see to what extent these linguistic choices are based on upbringing and life experience, or an attempt to stress their spatial and ethnic origins through the use of a distinctive vocabulary.

In the analysis, the significance of identity performance as well as recognition by audiences and other rappers will need to be explored and dissected. Both of these concepts can be expressed as narratives, an idea that was partially addressed earlier in chapter 2. These narratives are performative, both individual and collective, and they can be understood only in their respective contexts (Gabriel, 1995), as intertextual dialogues (Fairclough, 1992) that are “embedded in broader discursive (cultural) practices” (Brown, 2006, p.734). For this reason, the notion of recognition in French rap is central to these identity narratives because it is vital for the rappers to see their own narratives validated by their peers. So individual narratives must be analysed in relation to collective ones. As Brown (2006, p.746) described, groups of people do not normally perform only one identity narrative but rather multiple ones that can be subjected to countless interpretations. What is more, these collective identity narratives are fictive in the sense

that they “are largely constructed from experiential and putatively historical data” and “they tend not to be comprehensive, consistent and precise” (Brown, 2006, p.749).

Next, in order to carry out this analysis successfully, the key concept of space and its impact on language choices will have to be fully examined. According to Doreen Massey (2009, pp.16-17), three important characteristics of space need to be differentiated. First, space must be defined in terms of the relations (or lack thereof) that constitute it. This implies that space is a product, in the sense that it is “*produced* through the establishment or refusals of relations” and that it is therefore social in its very essence (Massey, 2009, p.17). Henri Lefebvre (2009, pp.186-187) also shares this point of view. He claims that “space is social: it involves assigning more or less appropriated places to social relations”, which means that “social space has thus always been a social product”. Second, space is characterised by multiplicity, i.e. the simultaneous existence of several actors and objects (Massey, 2009, p.17). Almost paradoxically, while multiplicity needs space to take place, it would also be impossible for space to exist without multiplicity: space and multiplicity define and balance out each other. It can thus be seen how space is the dimension of social multiplicity and as such is invested with social meaning (Austin, 2009, p.3). Third, space is “always in the process of being made” because its actors are constantly redefining it through social interaction (Massey, 2009, p.17).

However, it is not possible to come to a proper understanding of space without exploring its relation to the equally important concept of place. As can be observed from Austin’s, Lefebvre’s and Massey’s quotations, in which space could be replaced by place in many instances, the meanings of these two terms are not necessarily easy to separate, a problem accentuated by the fact that they differ from one discipline to the next (Agnew, 2011, p.5). For example, Andrew Merrifield explains that, according to a Neo-Marxist perspective, space is seen as “rootless, fluid reality of material flows” (1993, p.521) while

place “comprises the locus and a sort of stopping of these flows” (1993, p.525). Robert Sack (1997, p.16), in line with an agency-based perspective, describes how “place differs from space in terms of familiarity and time” whereas Massey (1999, p.288), representing a more feminist perspective, believes that place is “constituted out of space-spanning relationships, place-specific social forms, and a sense of place associated with the relative well-being, disruption, and experience of living somewhere”. In this thesis, given the diatopic nature of the analysis, a slightly more geographic emphasis will be applied. As described by Agnew (2011, p.2), place will be understood here as a part or fraction of the social space as well as a “distinctive coming together in space”, i.e. place is seen as a “lived space” defined by specific social interactions (Agnew, 2011, p.6). Naturally, it results from this that these two terms will be dependent on the geographical scale of the social interactions. For instance, a *département* can be looked at as a place within France (space) or as space in which smaller places are found (neighbourhoods, streets, etc.).

If place is so intertwined with social interactions, it goes without saying that it is central to power relations between individuals. For example, Massey (2009, p.16) describes how power sometimes seems to be concentrated in certain places, such as in some cities over others or in some parts of cities over other parts. It must also be observed that not all people interacting within a given place have access to all its parts, because some sites of power are alienating to those who do not conform to the required characteristics. In French rap, many tracks illustrate the importance of stressing the place of origin and its inherent power conflicts, but one of the most emblematic was written by Tandem. The chorus of their track clearly shows how much the artists focus on the conflict-inducing place where they come from:

Tout le monde veut s'allumer, tout veut se la mettre
C'est la fin des haricots, il n'y a plus de lové...
93 hardcore!!

Levez les bras si vous êtes forts
Ma banlieue nord veut des gros sous, pourtant nos mains sont dans la
boue...
(Mac Tyer in Tandem, 2005, *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*, "93
hardcore")

In the above extract, Mac Tyer describes how people from Seine-Saint-Denis (93) aspire to get rich but are faced with the harsh reality that their hands are covered with mud, a metaphor for their lack of power. This extract shows how the interaction between place and power will be central to NSL variation, since they are always present and can never cease to determine the artists' language.

As discussed earlier, one of the most obvious examples of social and spatial interaction is the city. The city has a distinctive importance in French rap because a rivalry has existed since its earliest manifestations between Paris and Marseille, but also between cities such as Lille or Lyon. Like spaces and places, cities must also be regarded as social in their very nature. Although they occupy a precise geographic area, they are equally, if not more, defined by the people who interact with them and their history. According to Edward Soja (2010, p.363), cities are "spatially organized social formations [that] actively shape social relations and help to stimulate societal development". Thus, cities can be seen as containers that "concentrate people and workforce, ideas and interactions" (Hesse, 2013, pp.34-35) within a defined space, contributing to the development of shared perceptions of belonging and identity. Moreover, these social interactions inside cities and between cities are characterised by flows. These flows, or movements, of people, goods, ideas and communications are central to the development and existence of a city, to the extent that places and flows can be perceived as "interrelated and interdependent" (Hesse, 2013, p.33): places are impacted by flows and flows are shaped by places. At its core, the relationship between flows and places is "embedded in structure and agency, driven by social and economic stakeholders and institutions as much as by policy and

planning” (Hesse, 2013, p.34). What is more, flows between cities are taking place on increasingly larger scales, creating complex global city networks, due to the rise in accessibility of air transportation and the popularity of the internet.

Regional and global flows impact the performance of individuals’ identities in complex manners. Some people embrace these flows, leading to extensions, pluralisations or dissipations of their identity performances, while others react defensively, causing retractions. In French rap, both reactions can be observed, but the latter is more common because the notions of territory and regional conflicts are very strong, as Tandem exemplify further in their track:

Il faudrait moins d’flingues et plus de fric
Carcéral vécu chez moi, il n y a pas de sécu rien qu’on nous persécute
Mais tu vas perdre face à Belzébuth
Si tu as fait de belle études c’est mieux qu’une grosse peine sais-tu
Que faire du bitume, c’est voir des frères qui s’entubent ou qui s’entretuent
(Tandem, 2005, *C’est toujours pour ceux qui savent*, “93 hardcore”)

In this extract, the rapper denounces violence and inequalities in his *département*, and we can see that he clearly creates a contrast between the inhabitants of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the rest of society, setting themselves apart, a form of identity retraction. This was also exemplified in the first extract when the artists were not necessarily busy defending their city but rather trying to represent their own *département* (93). In fact, although the difference between cities, such as Paris or Marseille, is important in French rap, the conflicts between *départements* in France, and in French rap more specifically, might be seen to be even more pronounced.

Another crucial flow for French rap that affects spaces and places is immigration, especially from former colonies, as we saw in the introduction. More than ever, immigration is “at the heart of public debate” in France (Boubeker, 2013, p.185) while

the reactions of the general French population have been divergent and “far from monolithic” (Byrnes, 2013, p.2). In Belgium, immigration is also a widespread phenomenon, to the point where Martiniello (2003, p.225) called this country “one of the most multicultural and multiracial countries of the European Union”. In this context, the connection, which has always been strong, between rap and immigration can be of critical importance for sociologists and sociolinguists. Most rap bands have at least one member who immigrated to France or whose parents or grandparents did. In fact, many bands are composed exclusively of such artists with immigrant roots. What is more, immigration is a common topic, as can be seen in the following extract from El Matador:

Que des blacks blacks des beurs
Ça squate des heures
J’veux des liasses liasses de cash d’une large épaisseur
Ya des hazbas, des castagnes, ça gratte grave
Pas de blabla, clic clic et pa pa.
(El Matador, 2009, *Au clair du bitume*, “Aïe aïe aïe”)

In this extract, El Matador highlights the presence of black people and Arabs in France by using *que des*, i.e. “only” black people and Arabs. Such people of immigrant origin are indeed well represented in France, but measuring their exact demographics is not, however, as straightforward as it may seem. One major problem when studying immigration and its effects in France is that the “Loi n° 78-17 du 6 janvier 1978 relative à l’informatique, aux fichiers et aux libertés” states that:

Il est interdit de collecter ou de traiter des données à caractère personnel qui font apparaître, directement ou indirectement, les origines raciales ou ethniques, les opinions politiques, philosophiques ou religieuses ou l’appartenance syndicale des personnes, ou qui sont relatives à la santé ou à la vie sexuelle de celles-ci. (Legifrance, 1978, n.p.)

Furthermore, the term *immigrant* itself is broad and often used to talk about very different realities: foreigners living in another country, nationals of a particular country born

abroad who acquired nationality or nationals who have parents or grandparents who immigrated to their current country (Hargreaves, 1995, p.xvii; Thumerelle, 1983, p.124). As mentioned in the introduction, the term “of immigrant origin” (and any derivative, e.g. “of Algerian origin”) refers in this research to people who immigrated themselves to France or whose parents or grandparents immigrated.

These postcolonial diasporic realities create perceived problems of integration, which is a term that is widely used yet poorly understood (Hargreaves, 1995, p.28). Some essential markers can be identified, such as employment, cultural adaptation and upward social mobility versus crime and imprisonment, to name but a few. In France, although not nearly as much in Belgium, this concept of integration strongly relates to the *banlieues*, which are often perceived as a failure of integration even though they cannot be compared with American ghettos (Hargreaves, 1995, p.74). A high proportion of immigrants and their descendants live in close proximity within these housing estates, also known as *H.L.M.* (*habitations à loyer modéré*). The context of these *banlieues* is essential to the linguistic study of French rap precisely because this close proximity of foreigners and people of immigrant origin within the same *H.L.M.s* is bound to have sociolinguistic consequences, which go beyond language change. Throughout recent French history, they have been involved in many demonstrations such as *La marche des beurs* in 1981 (Hargreaves, 1989, p.87) or, as we saw, the demonstrations that followed Makomé M’Bowolé’s death in 1993 (Leblond, 1993, n.p.) and the 2005 demonstrations (Meier and Hawes, 2009, p.270).

The importance of immigration in France and Belgium cannot be overlooked. In France, it was already estimated in 1994 that out of the 57 million inhabitants at the time, around one quarter of the population had connections with recent immigration (Hargreaves, 1995: 5). Approximately four million were born abroad, five million were the children of

immigrants and five million had at least one grandparent who had immigrated (Hargreaves, 1995: 5). The same statistics apply to Belgium: 25% of the population is estimated to be of immigrant origin (calculated in 2012), including 12.9% foreign-born residents (calculated in 2007) (Hertogen, 2012a, n.p.; 2012b, n.p.). In both France and Belgium, around half of the immigrant population comes from the European Union (Direction générale Emploi et marché du travail, 2009, n.p.; Beauchemin *et al.*, 2010, n.p.).

In France, two major origins stand out due to their number and visibility: people from North African countries and those from sub-Saharan countries (Thierry, 2004, p.735; Thierry, 2000, p.492). For instance, Xavier Thierry (2004: 735) specifies that of all the immigrants from African countries admitted into France in 2002 (45.9% of all admissions compared to 32.5% for European countries), 66.9% came from North African countries and 25.8%²⁸ from (formerly-French) sub-Saharan countries. In fact, people of North African origin constitute the biggest minority in France, with 3,524,000 individuals or 5.8% of the French population in 2005, which includes 1,865,000 (3.1%) people of Algerian origin, 1,201,000 (2%) of Moroccan origin, and 458,000 (0.7%) of Tunisian origin (Tribalat, 2009, p.205). This high number of people of Algerian origin can be explained by how intertwined the two countries have been due to the major role that Algeria has played in French colonial history (e.g. see Byrnes, 2013; McGonagle and Welch, 2011; Loyal, 2009; Santelli, 2001; or George, 1986), of which the Algerian War of Independence is only the most notorious example (see Collard, 2006, p.171; or Thumerelle, 1983, p.119). In terms of the corpus, we will see later in the chapter how the

²⁸ Xavier Thierry does not account, in his article, for the missing 7.3% of admissions from other African countries.

presence of rappers of Algerian origin can be a determining factor, especially when it comes to the use of Arabic.

Ethnicity and immigration play such important roles in French rap because they impact many artists' identity performances. The rappers of immigrant origin sometimes choose to talk about the problems that they face or to speak in a way that identifies them as belonging to specific ethnicities. The need to project this strong sense of ethnic identity is not surprising because of the inequalities that ethnic minorities do face in their everyday lives. In France for example, they encounter a lack of representation on television (McGonagle, 2002, p.282; Hargreaves, 1992, p.19) and in politics (Meier and Hawes, 2009, p.278; Tiberj and Michon, 2013, p.581), persistent racism despite new laws and regulations (El Karouni, 2012, p.156), higher rates of unemployment and poorer access to the job market (Pan Ké Shon, 2011, p.512; Fromentin, 2013, p.63) and more insecurity in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Pan Ké Shon, 2011, p.507). In such a context, many rap artists feel the need to stand up for these minorities and to denounce abuses. When doing this, they might use more NSL or specific categories of NSL (e.g. *banlieue* slang or foreign borrowings).

Ethnic identity performances in French rap are paired with the aforementioned keen sense of belonging to specific places like cities, *départements* or neighbourhoods to form an important determinant of NSL. Consequently, the aim of this chapter will be to review all these ethnic and spatial determinants and to evaluate them in light of the corpus, the relevant literature and the extensive interviews that were carried out for this research. The chapter will first focus on the effect of ethnic origins and then move on to that of cities and *départements*, finally bringing the two together in the conclusion.

2. Quantitative data and qualitative analysis of the ethnic determinants

The quantitative results (see Appendix II 3.1. for full tables) show that the differences between all three ethnic origins were not substantial in terms of their overall NSL use: only around a 2.5% difference at most (French: 7.23% NSL; Algerian: 9.94%; and Senegalese: 9.73%). Of all three ethnic origins, the artists of French origin used the least NSL, although the artists of Algerian origin employed fewer abbreviations and colloquial words. Some of the differences between ethnic origins are not negligible. For instance, the artists of Algerian origin used three times as much slang and twice as much *verlan* as the rappers of French origin while those of Senegalese origin used more than two and a half times more combinations of categories and 50% more vulgarities, also compared to rappers of French origin. In terms of foreign borrowings, the artists of Algerian origin used much more Arabic than the other two ethnicities, as could be expected, and the widest variety of languages: 36.76% Arabic and seven different languages against 2.27% Arabic and two languages for rappers of French origin, and 2.41% Arabic and six languages for those of Senegalese origin. Moreover, Arabic was the second most used language, after English, for all three ethnicities, which is a testimony to the key role of Arabic in the genre. Finally, the grammatical categories between all three ethnicities were similar, except for verbs that were used twice as much by rappers of French origin.

When it comes to finding what determines the NSL uses that were presented above, one of the first aspects that can be mentioned is the inherent diversity of French rap: cultural, religious, or linguistic. This phenomenon was also pointed out by Semji:

Je pense que ça [foreign borrowings] a sa place partout dans nos musiques et ça donne justement un petit délire en plus et une multi-culturalité à la musique. (Semji, 2013)

The presence of such *multi-culturalité* in the genre is hard to deny. However, as we saw earlier, not all artists display the same level of diversity. Furthermore, the presence of linguistic diversity in tracks is not always a positive statement of cultural belonging. It can also be a sign of linguistic and cultural insecurity. In both cases, it does not surprise me to find that the artists of French origin were much less likely to manifest this diversity through the use of varied foreign words. If these artists of French origin did not grow up in the *banlieues* among families of immigrant origin from varied cultures, they are much less likely to have the necessary background to be able to manifest this diversity positively in their narratives. Simultaneously, having been exposed to less diversity also means that they do not experience the same level of linguistic and cultural insecurity as their Algerian and Senegalese counterparts. As Hargreaves (1995, p.xvi) explained, immigrants from former colonies can find it difficult to keep their cultural heritage from one generation to the next because they are generally both politically and economically excluded. As the artists of French origin do not undergo this cultural and linguistic insecurity to the same extent, they do not feel the need to stress the uniqueness of their linguistic skills as much as rappers with immigrant roots. These artists of immigrant origin, however, grow up in a society where they lack representation in elections and on television, as well as experiencing racism in employment and housing, and, as a result, some might feel the need to counteract this lack by standing up for their mixed cultural and linguistic origins. The need to stand up for one's origins and identity may determine the use of NSL to some extent, but it would be a mistake to assume that all linguistic choices are motivated by this desire. In this regard, El Matador makes a very insightful remark about the linguistic decisions surrounding his use of Arabic:

Ouais je sais parler arabe, je suis totalement bilingue. Après les mots que je vais utiliser, admettons, je vais prendre un mot de la langue algérienne et ça va être ce mot à la mode. C'est des langages qui sont déjà courants dans la

rue comme le wesh, le zarma, fais pas le zarma. Ça fait plus d'une dizaine d'années qu'ils sont utilisés. Donc tu les utilises naturellement. C'est pas choisi, ce que je veux dire c'est que c'est pas calculé. (El Matador, 2013)

Although El Matador believes that his borrowings are not *calculés*, he nonetheless seems to make some very conscious decisions that are not based solely on a need to express his Algerian origins but also on the perception of his audience's knowledge and expectations, as we saw in chapter 2. This goes to show that he is not simply using Arabic randomly but on the contrary methodically choosing words that are fashionable and likely to be understood by most rap fans, possibly because of the influence of other famous rappers who have been using them.

This observation can explain why, despite the high degree of diversity and the deep impact of artists of North African origins, French rap does not contain such a high number of Arabic words. For instance, the average linguistic results found for the corpus as a whole show that of the 2% of foreign borrowings, only 12% are Arabic as opposed to 81% English. If we had to base our inferences about these artists' origins on these results, it would make sense to assume that most had English-speaking parents or grandparents and only a minority North African origins. Yet, we know for a fact that this is not the case. Scylla also shares this opinion:

Quand tu vois dans certains départements en France, tu vois vraiment des populations mélangées. Et quand tu vois ici à Bruxelles, la place de la communauté turque et marocaine est très très grande et donc si on devait se dire que c'est en fonction du nombre de Français d'origine étrangère ou de Belges d'origine étrangère qui habitent à un certain endroit, si c'était en fonction du nombre que ça devait se ressentir dans le rap, je pense qu'ici tout le monde rapperait avec beaucoup de mots arabes. (Scylla, 2013)

As Scylla explains, this dichotomy between the high numbers of people of North African origin and the relatively limited instances of Arabic borrowings shows that ethnic origins are not the only factor at play. French rap is part of a specific music style with roots in

America, not North Africa, hence the clear dominance of English. What is more, the artists play for a diverse audience. A large part of this audience does not necessarily understand Arabic well enough for rappers to be able to use such words more than sporadically.

Indeed, people who regularly listen to French rap will have built up a small Arabic vocabulary based on common and frequently used words, but this vocabulary will most certainly be much smaller than their English one, since learning English is mandatory in most schools and French people are exposed to English daily through pop culture. Many of the Arabic words used in French rap have almost been standardised in everyday colloquial conversations by young people, although very few of them have found their way to the actual dictionary. A lot of the Arabic words found in the corpus fall into this category, with words such as *rhoya* (brother), *wesh* (hello), *bzez* (breasts), *halla* (mess), *harnouch* (police officer) or *handek* (beware). As El Matador hinted in his previous quotation, French rappers of Algerian origin, as well as most other artists, know that using uncommon Arabic words could render their lyrics incomprehensible for most listeners, so they often avoid doing so, consciously or unconsciously.

Nevertheless, the marked difference between artists of Algerian origin and those of French and Senegalese origins in this regard can hardly be denied. Despite the linguistic and cultural diversity found in some tracks, apparent ethnic divides are also quick to emerge, even though the artists frequently repeated otherwise in the interviews, such as in the following quotation from El Matador:

Il y a quand même un vivre ensemble dans les quartiers. Tu avais d'abord des Arabes qui savent parler en black, en africain, des blacks qui connaissent des mots arabes. Des Français aussi qui connaissent des mots arabes. (El Matador, 2013)

As El Matador describes, all artists borrow from one another. Yet, it is hard to refute the fact that the artists of Algerian origin used over 36% of Arabic in their foreign borrowings whereas their French and Senegalese counterparts only around 2.5%. This is a very meaningful contrast.

In spite of this *vivre ensemble*, it appears that a certain degree of communitarianism and separatism exists in French rap, a characteristic that Whoopy Jones noted clearly in his interview:

Ecoute, moi je pense qu'en Belgique, non, les différences se marquent plus dans la culture. C'est-à-dire que tu vas aller à Bruxelles ou à Liège, il y a de fortes chances pour que dans les quartiers de Liège ou de Bruxelles, les noirs du même quartier, ils écoutent le même son. Ils ont les mêmes origines. Par contre, dans un même quartier, les noirs et les arabes, ne vont pas écouter la même chose. Alors que les arabes de Liège vont écouter la même chose que ceux de Bruxelles, c'est plus culturel que le lieu où tu habites. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

In this quotation, Whoopy Jones raises an interesting point, which sets Belgium and France apart to some extent. In Belgium, most people of immigrant origin do not live in *banlieues*, they usually live in the city centre and tend to gather by ethnic origin in specific streets and neighbourhoods. This results in different ways to express cultural identity in relation to space, as described by Whoopy Jones. Although this observation relates only to Belgium, it can help us understand the origin of some of the differences found in the corpus. For example, I argue that the presence of similar cultural separatism in the daily lives of rappers of Algerian origin can explain how they have been able to maintain such a contrast with the other artists in terms of their use of Arabic. Without it, it is possible that their linguistic specificities would have been absorbed and then downplayed by the rest of the movement.

The current situation of artists of Algerian origin can be linked to the origins of Algerian immigration in colonialism. As Steven Loyal specifies:

The policy of assimilation and integration, which would later confront Algerians in France, here took shape within the colonial context. The attempt to assimilate Algerians into European values involved refusing to recognize the former as having an original culture in some instances, or as possessing a wholly different and negatively charged one, in others. (Loyal, 2009, p.409)

The uneven power relations between French colonialists and the Algerian population led to a clear separation between the two cultures. For example, Bourdieu (1958, p.133) witnessed how the Algerians were practically locked in a caste system with most of them belonging to the poorer strata of society, marked by “one’s physical appearance or sometimes one’s clothing or family name”. This racism and separatism followed many immigrants to France in the aftermath of the Algerian war. Although French colonialism and the Algerian war have been over for a long time now, such marked cultural differences can still be found, even within the postcolonial “mosaic” of the *banlieues* and French rap.

These underlying cultural differences are then reinforced, as my research suggests, by an essential factor that determines NSL use in French rap: whether or not rappers feel entitled to use specific forms of NSL, especially foreign borrowings. Indeed, the artists who do not have North-African origins do not necessarily dare or feel they have a right to use Arabic borrowings excessively:

Son rôle [ethnic origin] c’est vraiment que ça enrichit les textes, ça touche un peu le public. Mais comme je le dis tout dépend de la manière de le faire, il ne faut pas passer pour un imposteur. Abuser de mots arabes alors que tu n’en es pas, ça n’a pas de sens. Abuser de mots anglais alors que tu n’en es pas, ça n’a pas de sens. (Whoopy Jones, 2013).

Interestingly, while Whoopy Jones mentions that manifesting ethnic origins in artists' tracks enriches French rap, he is also quick to remind us that this can be done only if you actually belong to that particular ethnic minority. This relates again to the very influential concept of authenticity in French rap. Indeed, if a rapper's narrative and language use, such as many slang words or Arabic borrowings, do not reflect his actual origins, many other rappers and rap fans might criticise him or her for being unauthentic, i.e. "fake", which would be an unwanted loss of recognition from their peers and their audience for most rappers. This importance of authenticity in French rap can therefore further explain why only the rappers of Algerian origin used many Arabic borrowings.

However, such a world view requires a very rigid perception of identity performance that does not always coincide with the real world. In reality, people's identity performances are multiple:

Actuellement on vit dans un monde, ça a toujours été le cas en fait, mais encore plus à l'heure actuelle, où tu peux être soit belge ayant vécu dans un quartier où il y avait beaucoup moins de Belges, avec des potes qui venaient de toutes les cultures et tout d'un coup tu peux tout à coup te convertir à une autre religion, etc. Donc les identités sont ultra-multiples et les gens ont encore plus de facettes dans leur identité qu'avant. Ils sont influencés par plein de choses et ça va se ressentir encore une fois dans leur art pour celui qui devient artiste parce qu'il ne fait que manier finalement ses centres d'intérêts (Scylla, 2013).

As Scylla cleverly observed, it is tempting to assign labels to artists and to try to pin certain actions or attitudes to expressions of definable identity types, such as "artists of North African origin will use more Arabic", or "artists of French origin will not feel the need to use as wide a variety of foreign words". There is some validity to this approach but, as Scylla noted, it does not take into account the fact that social relations are complex and that too many factors come into play to be able to define identity performances so easily.

Indeed, identities are manifested through performative narratives that will differ from individual to individual and from track to track for the same individual. For example, the following two tracks represent two very distinct forms of identity performance:

Hauts-de-Seine, majeur en l'air sur la piste
Mc gardez la pêche, vous n'êtes pas sur la liste
C'est pas la rue mais l'être humain qui m'attriste
Comment leur faire confiance, ils ont tué le Christ
(Booba, 2008, *Temps mort*, "Boulbi")

Jette un œil à droite, envoie la purée jusqu'à l'extrême
C'est leur plancher, Eh négro! C'est l'heure d'manger,
Brûler leur sperme en échantillons, souder leurs chattes
On va pas s'calmer man, ça sert à rien qu'tu jactes.
(Booba, 2008, *Temps mort*, "Ecoute bien")

The first extract contains only a little colloquial language and makes references to Christianity, as the rapper adopts the specific narratorial voice of a wise person reflecting on human nature, although it could also be interpreted as an anti-Jewish rhetoric. We can still see some references to departmental conflicts but the extract is not otherwise very adversarial. The other extract, on the contrary, contains a lot of slang, vulgar words and foreign borrowings and is very adversarial. Without the references, it would be easy to believe that they come from two different artists because of how different these two forms of performative narrative are. This is because all individuals are capable of adapting their identity performance according to the context and their goals, resulting in seemingly different identities coming from the same person. Furthermore, all individuals who belong to two or more cultures, such as many rappers, will not express the multiplicity of their cultural identity in the same way (Phinney and Devich-Navarro, 1997, p.19). Indeed, the backgrounds of artists can be varied and complex, making generalisations regarding their cultural identities difficult.

One important element of this background is the rapper's relationship with school. It is clear that school plays a key role in this section of the corpus, as many children of immigrant origin face inequalities and under-achievement in the educational system that form a barrier against integration (Teney, 2013, p.585). As one could imagine, educational achievements are likely to determine the artists' language, a proposition also put forward by Black Barbie:

Après il y a aussi une question d'éducation. Le rappeur qui n'aura pas été loin à l'école ou qui ne sait pas forcément s'exprimer correctement, ben il va plus facilement utiliser le langage de quartier, du langage familier comparé à un rappeur qui aura fait un minimum d'études, des études de lettres, l'université. La donne change. Je pense que c'est vraiment le niveau d'éducation. (Black Barbie, 2013)

It seems logical to assume, like Black Barbie, that artists with higher education degrees will have a better command of standard Metropolitan French in their lyrics. While there is certainly an undeniable correlation, this simple assumption does not take into account the artists' intentions and performances. Some educated artists may choose to use NSL nonetheless for stylistic reasons or to appeal to a certain audience, and vice versa. Scylla is a good example in this respect. He studied political science at university, but it does not prevent him from using NSL in some of his tracks. In fact, the corpus illustrates his ability to vary this use quite dramatically, demonstrating a strong inclination towards contextualised performances, as his track "Le voile des mots" contains 2.2% NSL against 16.5% in "BX vibes" (Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*). When asked about this observation, Scylla declared: "Donc je pense que pour ma part c'est beaucoup plus pour mettre un certain cynisme et une ironie dans la situation que je décris" (Scylla, 2013). Clearly, Scylla is capable of adapting his linguistic performance depending on his goal and the message he is trying to convey.

Educational achievements may not be an accurate predictor for NSL use in all instances, but identity performances linked to the perception of educational inequalities play nonetheless a role in this section of the corpus. For instance, only artists of Algerian and Senegalese origin mentioned school, always in a negative way or related to a sense of lack:

Les épines de l'école buissonnière ont crevé nos bulles d'air.
(El Matador, 2009, *Au clair du bitume*, "Aïe aïe aïe")

Je suis né dans l'école du crime, Vitry.
(Rim K, 2007, *Famille nombreuse*, "L'espoir des favelas")

Sorti de l'école avec trop peu de diplômés.
(Médine, 2008, *Arabian panther*, "Peplum")

À l'école de la vie, j'ai qu'un stylo dans ma trousse.
(Disiz la peste, 2006, *Les histoires extra-ordinaires d'un jeune de banlieue*, "Une histoire extraordinaire")

As can be seen in the above extracts, the failures of the educational system are evident in the minds of many artists of immigrant origin. In Bourdieu's theory (1984a, p.466), these failures could be traced back to the teachers' *habitus*. As Jenna Min Shim (2012, p.212) explains, what teachers say as well as their gazes and gestures can be the expression of prejudiced and racialised beliefs. Such professional failures impact the artists and are echoed in their art and language. Consequently, using more NSL and incorrect grammatical constructions can be identity performances aimed at the rejection of French educational values and rebellion against what they perceived as racism and prejudices at school.

Yet, this portrayal may no longer be completely accurate. More and more scholars are looking at this problem from a different angle and are coming across findings that bring some nuances into this debate. For instance, Teney (2013, pp.585-586) found that educational aspirations are higher among ethnic minorities who also tend to have better

attendance records for tertiary education. What is more, Claudia Senik and Thierry Verdier (2008, p.615) observed that students of North African origin often prefer to follow the *enseignement général*, while Emmanuelle Santelli (2001, p.156) discovered that working class students of Maghrebi origin get better results on average than their working class peers of French origin. In other words, it is not entirely accurate to look at ethnic minorities and education in terms only of failure, thus causing an increase in the use of NSL. The impact of school is complex and must be nuanced, which shows in the lack of strong dichotomies in NSL use in the corpus. Moreover, it cannot be understood without also analysing the crucial role of the family.

Parents will teach their children how to speak from birth and will continue to determine their linguistic outputs throughout their lives by correcting them and imposing censorship (against vulgar terms for instance). Families can also impose ideologies on their children, encourage them to pursue secondary or higher education or on the contrary discourage them from studying in favour of manual labour. The role of the family becomes even more crucial when it represents the only source of information about a different culture and language. For instance, sharp differences will exist between families who regularly visit their “home countries” and the ones that never do. If an artist has extended family that remained in the country of origin, this can also have marked consequences for language use if contacts between family members are maintained. In the American context, for example, many researchers have established that bilingualism among immigrant populations disappears almost completely by the third generation (e.g. see Tran, 2010; Lutz, 2006; Richard, 2004). Even among Spanish-speaking immigrants, who usually retain the highest level of bilingualism, only 22% of third-generation immigrants can be considered bilingual (Lutz, 2006, p.1418). So the possibility is strong for an artist of immigrant origin to have been raised in French only:

Tout dépend du contexte familial dans lequel on a grandi. Si on grandit dans une famille d'origine sénégalaise en France, mais que les parents ne parlent que le français constamment à la maison, le langage de l'enfant ne sera que français. De petites différences culturelles pourraient être présentes mais ce serait du ressort de l'indicible. (Disiz, 2013)

Indeed, as Disiz remarks, cultural differences between families of immigrant origin and those of French origin are not always as wide as one could think. No guarantee exists that the children of immigrants will not choose to reject or ignore their native language and culture, especially when sharp contrasts exist between French cultural ideals and those of their family (Jelen, 2005, pp.101-103). This is precisely why the role of the family remains so significant. When so much variation is possible between complete cultural loss on the one hand and full cultural adherence on the other hand, whether or not a family successfully passes down their language and culture will make a substantial difference in the artist's use of NSL. This parental influence will be, however, different for each individual, and generalisations would be difficult due to all the factors at play.

3. Quantitative data and qualitative analysis of the spatial determinants

The second part of the chapter will focus on the impact of cities and *départements* on the use of NSL. First, the quantitative results (see Appendix II 3.2. for full tables) reveal that a contrast exists between Marseille and the other two cities. The Marseille artists used almost half the NSL (5.25%) used by the artists from Ile-de-France (9.15%) and Brussels (8.47%) and not a single word of *verlan*. Then Brussels artists used the most foreign borrowings (2.78% against 1.16% for Marseille and 2.09% for Ile-de-France) while the Ile-de-France rappers used the most slang (1.94% compared to 0.71% for Marseille and 0.79 for Brussels). Furthermore, the artists from Marseille used hardly any combinations of categories (0.05%), which indicates less complexity of NSL. When it comes to foreign borrowings, the rappers from Marseille continue to stand out, as they used half as many borrowings as their counterparts from the other two cities and much less English (only

58.46%) and more Arabic (23.07%) and Spanish (12.31%), although this may be due to the lower total foreign borrowings in Marseille. Lastly, all three uses of grammatical categories were almost identical despite the above differences.

Second, the quantitative results (see Appendix II 3.3. for full tables) also reveal that the artists from all three *départements* used relatively similar quantities of NSL words (92: 10.13% NSL; 93: 8.31%; and 94: 9.01%), as the widest difference between Hauts-de-Seine (92) and Seine-Saint-Denis (93) was less than 2%. Nevertheless, some differences did arise. First, the artists from Hauts-de-Seine used many more swear words (1.44%) than those from the other two *départements* (0.8% for 93 and 0.6% for 94). The same applies to *verlan* (1.09%) that is twice as common in this *département*. It can also be seen that Seine-Saint-Denis rappers used about half the foreign borrowings (1.41%) of the other two *départements* (2.52% for 92 and 2.34% for 93). Moreover, while the artists from Val-de-Marne employed the widest variety of languages (six compared to four for 92 and three for 93), those from *Hauts-de-Seine* used much more Arabic (27.77%) and as a result much less English (68.88%). Finally, the results for the grammatical categories were very comparable, with no significant differences.

The quantitative differences observed between Marseille and the other two cities and also, although less prominent, between Hauts-de-Seine (92) and the other two *départements* could actually be expected to some extent because, as we saw in the introduction of the chapter, French rappers perform specific forms of spatial identity by making sure that their language reflects their spatial origins:

Il y a ce côté fédérateur dans le rap où tu vas représenter un endroit et tu te sens comme investi de cette mission de représenter l'endroit d'où tu viens. Et forcément, à ce moment-là, tu vas utiliser... qu'est-ce qui différencie mon endroit des autres? Ben très souvent le langage est une des choses qui différencie clairement une population habitant telle région ou telle région. C'est une des choses tu vois, les accents, les expressions utilisées, c'est

clairement une des parts les plus marquées de l'identité collective si pas la plus marquée des identités collectives que tu peux trouver par rapport à un certain territoire, c'est des habitudes linguistiques. Donc forcément, ça va s'importer dans la musique en soi, c'est logique. (Scylla, 2013)

In this extract, Scylla tries to explain that places, language and identity are closely intertwined in the genre. His description reveals a lot about the link between French rap and spatial identity performance. As Tandem's extracts exemplified, many rappers do give the impression that they are on a mission to represent their place of origin. In fact, the connection between places and NSL seems logical, as Scylla pointed out. However, it may only appear to be so. This is why the next qualitative analysis, which will look first at the impact of cities and then *départements*, aims to review spatial determinants in light of the quantitative results to evaluate which ones are most determining.

When it comes to cities, the clearest determinant of language use is the fact that every city will have had different cultural, historical, linguistic and sociological influences:

Oui, moi je pense que oui, effectivement, il y a des différences. Si tu compares Paris et Marseille, c'est pas du tout le même rap. C'est pas le même rap, c'est pas le même vocabulaire, c'est pas les mêmes bases. A Marseille, ils n'ont pas la même manière de parler. Le langage familier marseillais n'utilise pas les mêmes racines que par exemple le langage familier francilien (Black Barbie, 2013).

As Black Barbie remarks, it is clear that major differences will arise when comparing two cities like Marseille and Paris, and this applies to Brussels as well. Many aspects of a city can and will make it stand out culturally and linguistically from other cities. The geographical position of a city on the map of the country will also have its impact. For example, Marseille, as port of arrival from North Africa, will have a critical impact on its history and therefore linguistic and cultural habits whereas Paris, as the capital of the country, will have had a very different evolution. Consequently, the following paragraphs will look at Brussels and Marseille and how their history, culture and population make-

up relate to the quantitative results. Paris will not be tackled here because of its prominence in the previous chapter and the upcoming departmental analysis.

Brussels is a multicultural city with a rich history of immigration, a fact that is exemplified in the following extracts:

Quand je débarque je les bluffe
Chez nous y'a des blacks, des blancs, des beurs
(B-Lel in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, “BX Vibes Remix”)

BX c'est trop petit, pour qu'on s'tape, pour qu'on s'chiffonne
Capitale du Zaïr, Maroc, Turquie
(Ghandi in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, “BX Vibes Remix”)

Le move est die, tasse-pé cesse de chialer
Mes supers négros le remettent sur les rails, yeah
(BD Banx, 2007, *Claque des doigts*, “Claque des doigts”)

All three Brussels rappers mentioned the presence and visibility of people of immigrant origin. This is not unexpected, since Deboosere *et al.* (2009, p.8) report that people of foreign origin, if we take into account Belgian children whose parents immigrated to Belgium, represent approximately 50% of Brussels inhabitants. Furthermore, it is estimated that around 25% of Brussels inhabitants are Muslims (Hertogen, 2008, n.p.), which can explain why several Arabic words were discovered in the corpus. Of course, people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are well represented due to the past Belgian colonisation of this country, but people from Rwanda and Burundi are also numerous (Mouthuy, 2010, n.p.).

One of the particularities of Brussels is that the city is bilingual (Teney, 2013, p.589). For instance, street names, most advertisements and road signs have to be written both in

French and Dutch. This multilingualism can help us understand the relatively high use of foreign languages in the corpus, as the following extracts illustrate:

BX vibes, machine gun phrasé, j'parle pas comme chez vous
J'rap durum, Kefta, qu'est-ce t'as? Welcome chez nous!
(ZA in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes Remix")

Quand la weed est purple, des sandwichs hamburgers
Quand ca sent la hmmm ou la tentative de murder
(Psmaker in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes Remix")

T'as con-tacté un psy?
Et accompagné un Rnouché?
(B-Lel, B-Lel, 2008, *Un gars à part*, "Un gars à part")

The above extracts show how Brussels artists are capable of using many foreign borrowings, sometimes in quick succession. Since Brussels is uniquely placed between two linguistic communities, having such linguistic behaviour might seem quite normal for people living in Brussels. After all, Brussels inhabitants are always faced with bilingual messages, from administrative employees to train announcements and advertising. From the youngest age, they assimilate the notion that it is normal to have a mix of languages in everyday life. Moreover, Brussels is also the capital of the European Union, which adds linguistic flows to this already bilingual city.

However, many of these families of immigrant origin do not enjoy equal power relations with the rest of the city. As Massey (2009, p.16) explained, power in cities is rarely distributed equally and Brussels is no exception to this phenomenon. Brussels "suffers from serious socio-spatial paradoxes" (Doucet, 2012, p.107). For instance, 26.2% of its population is at risk of living under the poverty line and the city is significantly "socio-economically and spatially segregated between east and west, centre and periphery" (Doucet, 2012, p.107). Brussels contains many neighbourhoods that could be perceived as disadvantaged or "deprived", not to mention the fact that Brussels is struggling to house

more than 30,000 people who are looking for social housing. Such inequalities can motivate certain rappers to use more NSL as a way to rebel against societal norms, such as the rappers from “BX Vibes remix” (Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*) who used 14% NSL in this track that shares their negative vision of the city of Brussels.

After examining Brussels, the analysis will turn to Marseille. Due to having an important Mediterranean port, Marseille has always attracted many immigrants, making it a large cosmopolitan urban centre with more than 800,000 inhabitants (Insee, 2014, n.p.). Shurik’n tried to explain, in his interview, how complex and diversified Marseille can be:

Donc, nous, on a plutôt utilisé l’argot ou les différents argots, surtout qu’à Marseille il y en a beaucoup. L’argot a changé à Marseille au fur et à mesure des vagues successives d’immigration. L’argot marseillais est composé de tous les pays qui composent la ville et dieu sait qu’il y en a. (Shurik’n, 2013)

Shurik’n’s quotation exemplifies how, as Massey (2009, p.17) described, cities are in a constant state of change due to countless flows of linguistic and cultural determinants. Massey’s observation applies to Marseille particularly. During the 20th century, the city saw successive waves of immigrants from Italy, Russia, Armenia, Vietnam, Spain and North Africa (Arabs and Berbers) - mainly Algeria -, Sub-Saharan Africa and Comoros (see e.g. Borkert *et al.*, 2007; or Guillemin, 2004). For instance, it was observed that, in 1999, 40% of young people under the age of 18 were of Maghrebi origin in several neighbourhoods (Tribalat, 2007, n.p.), which clarifies to a certain extent the higher presence of Arabic words in these tracks, a correlation that was also observed by Paine (2012, p.58) in his study.

Furthermore, the impact of Spanish immigration is especially visible in the corpus:

Peu importe où t’es, **escucha mami**
Les Cités d’or **es aqui, comprende papi?**
(C.2.6. Psy4 de la rime, 2008, *Les cités d’or*, “Les cités d’or”)

La rage du peuple, **la rabia del pueblo**
Parce qu'on a la rage!
(C.2.8. Kenny Arkana, 2008, *Entre ciment et belle étoile*, “La rage du peuple”)

Il y aura tout ce qu'il faut,
Bienvenue **amigo**.
(La swija, 2009, *Au sourire levant*, “Monde des merveilles”)

The previous extracts not only contain single Spanish words but even parts of sentences or small sentences. This can certainly be explained by Spanish immigration, but also by Marseille's geographical position, since the city is relatively close to the Spanish border. This geographical connection does not, however, hold for Italy. Strangely, this part of the corpus did not contain a single word of Italian, although it was established in 2005 that more than one third of Marseille's inhabitants had Italian origins (Parodi, 2002, n.p.; Poggioli, 2005, n.p.). It could be hypothesized that the Italian immigration in France is older, dating back to the late 19th and early 20th century (see Blancheton and Scarabello, 2010, n.p.), and that enough generations have passed for bilingualism to fade, but the same could actually be said about Spanish immigration that did, in fact, start in the late 19th century as well (see Lillo, 2012, n.p.). In reality, this discrepancy might be partially caused by the more recent Latin-American immigration in France that has intensified since the 1970s (González, 2009, n.p.). For example, Keny Arkana in the above extracts is of Argentinian origin. This discrepancy also highlights again the importance of individuality and performance in relation to NSL use, as not all rappers will choose to express their origins in the same way.

Marseille's uniqueness does not stop at immigration flows and has been exemplified in several aspects of the corpus. For example, not a single word of *verlan* was used by these artists, which confirms Hassa's (2010, p.59) and Paine's (2012, p.59) conclusions. This is due to the fact that, as my research shows, Marseille's inhabitants have largely rejected this type of slang as being undesirable and from Paris, or in fact as being undesirable

precisely because it comes from Paris, a subject which came up during one of the interviews:

Alors pour nous déjà le verlan n'est pas un argot, le verlan est exclusivement parisien. Ce n'est pas quelque chose qu'on retrouve du tout à Marseille. Pas du tout du tout du tout, non. Même si certains utilisent quelques mots de temps en temps, nous voilà on ne l'utilise pas. (Shurik'n, 2013)

Shurik'n gets slightly confused when categorising *verlan* and slang, since whether a word or a category of words is used exclusively in Paris or not does not negate its belonging to slang. However, what he is explaining is clearly confirmed by the quantitative results from this section as well as Akhenaton's tracks in the diachronic analysis, as neither contained any *verlan*. Consequently, it would seem that he is right to claim that the inhabitants of Marseille do not consider *verlan* as a type of slang that they would use in their daily lives.

Another aspect of Marseille's cultural and historical distinctiveness, which could be observed during the 2005 riots, can help us understand why this city stood out in the quantitative data. The 2005 riots did reach Marseille but the city was left largely untouched. Katheryne Mitchell (2011, pp.413-418) explains that this was possible because Marseille's inhabitants have a different sense of identity. Whereas people from Paris will see themselves in opposition with other Parisian *départements*, Marseille's inhabitants primarily consider themselves as being part of Marseille first and foremost. In fact, it would be difficult for them to identify with different *départements*, since the whole city of Marseille and its surrounding area belongs to Les Bouches du Rhône exclusively. As a result, every single Marseille rapper lives in the same *département*. Mitchell (2011, pp.413-418) adds that Marseille does not have the same types of isolated housing estates that are far from the city itself and that many of the youth of the city like

to spend time in the actual city centre. As a result, Marseille's inhabitants are often proud of the city's hybridity and cosmopolitanism (Mitchell, 2011, pp.413-418).

Nevertheless, it should not be concluded that no segregation can be found in Marseille. Although segregation is very different from Paris and cannot be linked to isolated *départements*, some divisions within the city itself are apparent: Marseille suffers from a separation between wealthy and poor neighbourhoods. Indeed, the city has its share of disadvantaged housing estates where much of the immigrant population has been concentrated since the late 1960s (Nasiali, 2012, p.1029). The strongest divide in the city is mentioned in the following extract:

Que je lâche des phases de marque pour les braves
Qui débarquent des blocs pour écouter du rap
(Chaud-chaud bouillant)
Les quartiers nord sont tous dans la place
(Chaud-chaud bouillant)
Les Marseillais prennent toute la place
(Soprano, 2007, *Puisqu'il faut vivre*, "Halla Halla")

In this track, Soprano is clearly referring to one part of the city over any other: the northern neighbourhoods. This does not come as a surprise because the upper-middle classes chose to live in the south and east, leaving the north of the city to working-class people (Boquier *et al.*, 2013, pp.544-545). This division was further accentuated by urban planning of the late 1960s because 90% of the subsidised housing estates were built in the northern part of the city and nowadays, most of the poorest people live in the north and in the centre (Boquier *et al.*, 2013, pp.544-545). Therefore, many rappers from Marseille, who are originally from working-class families, refer often to these "quartiers nord". The big difference with Paris, however, is that these neighbourhoods are within the city and not in separate *départements*, which, I argue, further explains their pronounced identification with Marseille as a city despite this presence of segregation.

When studying the differences between cities, and especially the famous historical contrast between rap music from Paris and Marseille, researchers might lose sight of the fact that many conflicts in the genre happen at the departmental level. The corpus contains numerous examples of these tensions, such as Tandem's track that was analysed in the introduction. The next three extracts offer good illustrations for each *département*:

Hauts-de-Seine (92):

Alors je dis paix à nos frères décédés
A cause d'un banal règlement de compte entre cités
En réalité chez nous, c'est dangereux, c'est nerveux
(E.2.2. LIM, 2007, *Délinquant*, "En bas de chez moi")

Seine-Saint-Denis (93):

Dans ma city peu de gazelles
On te blesse le nez avec ta propre montre Citizens, si, si
T'as du mal à la danse, c'est ma danse
C'est pas du zouk, ça, c'est brutal, ça, c'est la violence, ça!
(Alibi Montana, 2008, *Inspiration guerrière*, "Inspiration guerrière")

Val-de-Marne (94):

Pour survivre il faut un courage monstre
Pour faire face aux embrouilles contre les Val-de-Monstre
C'est la Mafia africaine, tu piges c'est l'équipe d'élite
(Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007, *Jusqu'à la mort*, "Val 2 meurtre")

All three extracts talk about different *départements*, but common themes and narratives can be drawn from them. First, many rappers use violence, danger, and death when describing their home place. In these extracts, we come across *paix à nos frères décédés*, *chez nous, c'est dangereux, c'est la violence, ça*, or *Pour survivre il faut un courage monstre*. The narratees in these lines are other rappers and people with different spatial origins. These verses serve as threats or warnings, but it is not always the case, which can be seen in LIM's extract that contains clear elements of grief and regret. Yet, these elements are usually buried within numerous other references to violence and the glorification of delinquency. These references are often linked to NSL, with words such as *city*, *gazelles* (women) or *Val-de-Monstre* in the extracts, but also *hardcore*, *kaïra*

(thug), *lère-ga* (struggle), *caner* (to kill), *gangsta*, *tèce (cité)*, *embrouilles* (quarrel) or *chlass* (knife) in the rest of these tracks.

The above extracts also reveal how such references to *départements* are often linked to smaller places such as *communes* or *cités*. It is not rare for all of these spatial identities to be visible within the same track, such as in Mafia K'1 Fry's track that contains references to both Val-de-Marne and Vitry-sur-Seine, which is a *commune* that is part of this *département*. This tendency to defend your spatial origins may come from the rich history of rap battles and *ego trip* tracks. Rap artists are used to defending their art and the legitimacy of their origins in actual battles or against fictive opponents in *ego trip*. This concept of legitimacy is strongly correlated with the notion of authenticity discussed earlier. Indeed, many French rappers feel the need to stress their spatial origins, by using specific narratives and linguistic forms that link them with a certain place, so that their authenticity cannot be questioned. So, we can see how many rap artists feel the need to represent their *département* and this leads to the appearance of NSL.

Furthermore, based on my research, departmental identity may have one other major effect on the artists, besides conscious and unconscious linguistic choices to represent their place, a fact discussed by Whoopy Jones during his interview:

Par contre, en France parce que c'est plus grand, en fonction du département ils vont d'abord écouter les artistes de leur département, par exemple Kery James pour le 92[sic]. Parce que voilà, il vient de là, et l'influence principale ça va être lui. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

In this extract, Whoopy Jones discusses how loyalty to one *département* may extend to musical preferences. He gives the example of Kery James who actually comes from Val-de-Marne (94). This determinant is not the most straightforward and would be hard to measure, but it should not be dismissed. By choosing to listen to artists from their own

département, such as Kery James, the rappers and the inhabitants of a specific *département* would significantly reduce the possibility of experiencing outside influences from other *départements*. This restricted musical repertoire will also impact their sense of style as well as the topics they feel are most important. When this tendency to reject musical productions from other *départements* is paired with the previous tendency to glorify their spatial origins with the use of NSL, researchers can understand how *départements* play a key role in French rap.

Yet, these strong determinants did not translate into marked quantitative differences between the three *départements* from the analysis. There are several possible explanations for this lack of results. Firstly, as we already saw with ethnic determinants, identity performances are complex, multiple and individual. It is possible that the departmental determinants did not prove to be sufficiently strong to leave a more visible mark in the corpus than what simple individual differences would have produced:

Oui il y a des différences d'argot, mais les conditions sociales restent les mêmes. Ce qui caractérisera les différentes façons d'exprimer son point de vue sur ces mêmes conditions de vie, seront les différences inhérentes à chaque individu. (Disiz, 2013)

As Disiz remarks, even though some specific slang does exist, there are in reality few marked differences between these neighbouring *départements*, beyond differences between individuals. They all contain similar working-class people of various origins who live in *H.L.M.s* and face discrimination in employment and housing. What is more, they may use many NSL words to glorify delinquency and violence in their *département*, but these words may not always be the result of conscious choices based on departmental identity performance:

Ben tout d'abord, c'est un langage que nous on a en temps normal, je vais dire, que l'on soit au quartier, on utilise souvent ce langage. (Semji, 2013)

Semji may not come from Parisian *départements*, but he raises a very valid point that can help further clarify these results. When French rappers mix NSL with notions of spatial identity, violence and delinquency, some will simply use common NSL words without making a special effort to use categories of NSL that differ from the other *départements*. They simply use their normal vocabulary. This, I argue, can lead to a few instances where differences are observed, which would nonetheless be hidden among many more cases of shared NSL with the other *départements* given their close proximity.

Secondly, other determinants, besides the allegiance to a *department*, could have been more influential in this section of the corpus. As we have seen on several other occasions, all major determinants of NSL converge to create unique linguistic performances by the artists. This is best exemplified by looking at the strongest quantitative difference observed between all three *départements*: the use of Arabic. The ethnic origins of the rappers from Hauts-de-Seine need to be taken into consideration when analysing these results. The following table contains the origins of all the chosen artists for this *département*:

LIM	Algerian origins
<u>Saïan Supa Crew:</u>	
- Feniksi	- Nigerian origin
- Leeroy	- Moroccan origin
- Sir Samuel	- his parents are from Guadeloupe and Martinique
- Vicelow	- his parents were from Martinique and Togo
Sultan	Comorian origin

Booba	French and Senegalese origins
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These artists' ethnic origins explain why Arabic was so important in this section of the corpus. When you consider that two tracks from LIM, Saïan Supa Crew and Sultan were chosen against only one from Booba, it becomes clear that artists with an “authentic” connection to Arabic were present in six out of the seven tracks from this corpus. As was concluded earlier, a strong correlation exists between the use of Arabic and North African origins, so that this difference should not be classified as determined by *départements* only. Once more, this underlines the importance of taking all determinants into account. Ideally, only one determinant at a time should be analysed but French rappers are not so easily categorised. These supplementary determinants can be minimised but never completely erased.

Finally, given the close geographic proximity between the three *départements*, it must be acknowledged that one of the reasons why such a small contrast was reported could be because inter-departmental variations may be measured only by small and very subtle differences in word choices and frequency. In other words, all three *départements* may use almost the same number of colloquial words, for example, but some of these words could be subtly different. The linguistic analysis presented in this thesis does not, however, focus on this issue, since only broad NSL categories were analysed without quantitative data about additional classifications within these categories. To fully investigate this problematic, further research would be needed that would focus on word choices and frequency exclusively, ideally isolating one NSL category and refining it into many other subcategories.

4. Conclusions

This chapter set out to study the impact of the diatopic determinants of NSL use in the sections of the corpus on ethnic origins, cities and *départements*. The general conclusion from the analysis is that the diatopic determinants contributed much less than the generational diachronic determinants to quantitative variation within the corpus when it comes to the overall use of NSL. Some wider differences emerged in relation to specific categories, such as the absence of *verlan* by Marseille rappers or the higher use of Arabic, slang and *verlan* by rappers of Algerian origin, but these differences are not as marked as some of the findings from the previous chapter. The main reason why more pronounced differences are not found is because the manifestation of these ethnic and spatial determinants depends on complex, varying and individual identity performances and narratives. Diatopic determinants do have a strong impact on language use, but in a much more individual and qualitative manner.

In fact, several determinants appear to be influential, even though they are not always linked to strong quantitative differences. First, the concept of authenticity proves to be essential because many rappers will not allow themselves to use specific types of NSL unless their origins justify it, which explains the higher use of Arabic by rappers of Algerian origin. Then the unique historico-socio-cultural differences between cities lead to specific identity performances by rappers. These performances are sometimes correlated with quantitative differences, most notably for the smaller use of NSL and lack of *verlan* in Marseille. Finally, what rappers perceive to be their audience's expectations is also determining. This is because they do not normally use an excessive quantity of NSL terms that their audience is unlikely to understand.

In conclusion, we have seen how diatopic determinants impact language use in French rap in a complex and multidimensional manner. All three separate determinants do not

account for much difference on their own, but, when put together, they allow researchers to understand linguistic variation in French rap better. The stronger determining effect of cities confirms one aspect of Agnew's (2011, p.2) definition of places as "distinctive coming together in space". The importance of this distinctiveness is crucial. The higher you go on the geographical scale, the stronger the differences are likely to be. The fact that spatial and ethnic identity performances are not found to be constant and generalised also supports Brown's (2006, p.749) description of identities as fictive and not consistent. This concept appears to be very relevant to French rap in which some rappers can change their artistic and linguistic performances dramatically from one track to the next. Lastly, this chapter contributed to writings in sociology and cultural studies on space, immigration and ethnicity by providing a sociolinguistic and qualitative take on these issues, which could form the basis of further research. For instance, other studies on this topic could focus again on the notions of spatial and ethnic identities in relation to NSL but from a different perspective, such as word choice and frequency of use. The impact of the geographical scale could also be refined by analysing a larger corpus with artists from other French-speaking countries.

Chapter IV:

“Cessez de bousculer l’exclue à la gueule masculine”, or an analysis of gender determinants

1. Introduction

A quick glance at the discography of French rap since the early 1990s is enough to realise that strong gender power and social differences are at play in the genre. Indeed, as we saw, only about 5% of all commercially successful recorded albums were performed by female rappers. This is why the main approach in this chapter will be to see if observed linguistic differences can be related to gender identity performance. In French rap, strong prejudices and widespread stereotypical beliefs regarding linguistic differences between male and female artists are common among some rappers. They assume that such gender differences do exist, often limiting their understanding of gender to men and women.

Such a point of view is illustrated in the following extract from Semji’s interview:

Ouais je pense que dans le monde du rap, le verlan ça fait un peu plus... Moi à mon sens quand j’entends ça, ça fait un peu plus macho, langage cité et les filles vont plus dans un délire love, mecs, tchic tchac, ça reste du français un peu plus commercial mais ça doit rester du français. Tandis que chez les mecs, c’est beaucoup beaucoup plus courant comme langage. Donc à ce niveau-là entre filles et garçons oui je pense qu’il y a 80% plus de chance d’entendre ça chez un garçon que chez une fille même si les deux peuvent l’utiliser quand même, ça existe hein. (Semji, 2013)

Although his description is limited to *verlan* in this short extract, Semji still presents in a few sentences an accurate summary of the dominant beliefs in the genre: female rappers do not talk about the same topics as male artists, their word choices are “softer” and more “appropriate for women” (notice the use of *doit rester*) and they are not expected to

imitate male rappers. His use of the word *macho* is also noteworthy and serves as an early example of hyper-masculinity and the importance of performance in relation to gender identity, which will be discussed later in the introduction. In this context, it makes sense to investigate these beliefs to see to what extent perceived gender differences determine non-standard language (NSL) use. Still, a researcher looking at gender differences is bound to explore similarities too. In fact, as Jennifer Coates (2004, p.3) describes, looking at gender from the perspective of similarities can yield different types of answers. This is also abundantly clear in Semji's quotation. Indeed, Semji goes beyond these stereotypes as well when he acknowledges that sometimes both men and women use this type of NSL, which is a first illustration of the problematic blurring of lines between gender and sex.

Accordingly, it is not surprising to find many counterexamples in the corpus to such stereotypical views. For example, the following extract from Black Barbie does not correspond at all to what is normally expected of a female rapper according to stereotypes:

Yeah, ça c'est un rap de bonne femme
Cru, franc, dur et brutal
Comme les coups qu'elle se prend
Quand il y a violence conjugale
Comme les contractions
Qui te crispent sur ton lit d'hôpital
Un morceau crade, sale, comme l'hygiène
Dans ce foyer pour filles-mères
Comme ce maton qui abuse d'une prisonnière
(Black Barbie, 2009, *Barbieturique*, "Rap de bonne femme")

Black Barbie may not use many NSL words in this extract, but she clearly does not focus exclusively on *délire love*, *mecs* and *tchic tchac*. Even when it comes to NSL use, the corpus contains many extracts that disprove the notion that female rappers cannot use such words as often as male rappers. Consequently, in terms of the research questions, the analysis presented in this chapter will attempt to show to what extent, if any, the use of all the categories of NSL (colloquial and vulgar words, abbreviations, slang, *verlan*,

foreign borrowings and any combinations thereof) is determined by the artists' gender performance in the written lyrics but also in video extracts, which will play a role, as we will see, when looking at the effect of gender identity performance on NSL use.

Trying to analyse gender differences immediately raises one critical question: what constitutes gender? More specifically, it is vital to differentiate gender from sex, especially in the context of this research. In non-academic spheres, binary oppositions are still very much at play or taken for granted, with male versus female being a prime example. According to Braidotti (1994, p.145), this attitude originates from "the universalistic stance of scientific discourse" and its "inherent dualism" (e.g. active/passive, culture/nature or masculine/feminine). The problem is that "a unified understanding of what gender is and how gender identity is developed continues to spark debate and discussion for practitioners and academics" (Walker, 2014, p.333). At first glance, one could think that gender is synonymous with sex and the difference between genders would therefore be biological. That chromosomal, hormonal and physical differences between men and women exist is denied by very few researchers. The issue begins when focusing on gender *identity*. The average person and many researchers and scientists believe that these biological differences are directly and naturally correlated with gender in society (Braun and Wilkinson, 2005, p.509; see also Bourdieu, 1998, p.21 and pp.23-24).

The belief that gender identities depend on biological differences does have some limited empirical evidence in the literature. For example, Deborah Cameron (2007, p.103) reports that language is more lateralised in men's brains. Although language takes place in the left hemisphere mostly for both sexes, it would seem that women use both hemispheres to a greater extent than men. It does not mean, however, and this is where the problem lies, that this creates a difference in language performance, word choice and topics of

conversation. Presenting all gender differences as biological and natural is “to mask the true, socially produced power relations between the sexes”, which will be looked at further in the introduction, and to present them as something “which cannot be questioned” (Moi, 1991, p.1030). To counter this phenomenon, feminists have defined gender as the “cultural interpretation or signification” of sex (Butler, 1997, pp.520-522). In other words, sex would be the biological distinction between men and women whereas gender would be its cultural manifestation. As Judith Butler (1999, p.10) explains, taking this argument to “its logical limit” means that no direct correlation should be found between sex and gender. What is more, if fully investigated, the notion of sex itself loses its straightforwardness. According to Butler (1993, p.5), “the concept of ‘sex’ is itself troubled terrain, formed through a series of contestations over what ought to be a decisive criterion for distinguishing between two sexes”. This concept also has a history, and changes depending on the culture.

It results from this that, fundamentally, gender is a cultural category: it is socially-created and fluid. According to Hughes and Williams (2001, p.1), this stance was most famously defended by Simone de Beauvoir, who made the distinction between sex and gender, chose not to believe in biological destiny, and saw gender as a social process. She famously declared:

On ne naît pas femme: on le devient. Aucun destin biologique, psychique, économique ne définit la figure que revêt au sein de la société la femelle humaine; c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit intermédiaire entre le mâle et le castrat qu'on qualifie de féminin. (De Beauvoir, 1949, pp.285-286)

The pervasive problem with socially-created gender identities is that their genesis is often concealed, i.e. people believe in their naturalness and their direct relation to the sex of individuals, whereas little or even none can be found in reality (Butler, 1997, p.522). For

example, there is no biological reason why women are usually found in the employment market as feminised service workers (e.g. salespersons, secretaries or air hostesses) or as workers in “helping professions” (e.g. teachers, social workers or nurses) (Fraser, 1989, p.124).

However, gender identities are not simply binary and, like all other forms of identity, must be looked at in terms of individual performances, which are usually called ‘performativities’ in gender studies following Judith Butler’s influential book *Gender Trouble* (1999; first published in 1990). Given the prevalence of this term in the literature, this chapter will refer to gender identity performance as gender performativity. This gender performativity is learned and developed throughout people’s lives (see e.g. Butler, 1999). Gender, as a performative act, is a learned behaviour that is imitative and processed to such an extent that it “comes to look natural” (Halberstam, 1991, p.443). As Butler (1993, p.2) specifies, gender performativity should not be seen as a “singular or deliberate” act. It is “reiterative and citational”, i.e. people are constantly performing their gender according to cultural and social standards. Gender performativity is therefore not independent; it is constructed by all the contextual relations of the individual with their social surroundings. In rap music, performativity differs from everyday life because rappers’ linguistic outputs are more explicitly artistic performances, but performativity still applies. In fact, this notion plays an even stronger role in this movement, precisely because of the fact that rappers *perform* in their tracks. These artists construct their artistic gender performativity by imitating, adapting to, criticising or transcending what other artists have done in the past. This is what people do in their everyday lives, but with a stronger emphasis on performance. It would therefore be even more inaccurate to describe these performativities as expressions of singular and personal gender identities.

Given the social dimension of gender performativity, it comes as no surprise that these performativities are governed by strong power relations. These gender power relations are equally important in French rap, where male rappers clearly dominate the movement in terms of numbers compared to the minority of female rappers. Moreover, allusions to these power relations can be found in many rap tracks, such as the following from Médine:

Garçon avec le cerveau dans le caleçon
(...)
Puis s'enfuit lâchement par la grande porte
Avec la certitude que le masculin l'emporte
Trop de choses qui me désolent alors qu'ici,
Ce sont les femmes qui font de nous des hommes,
Et que bien plus que les hommes elles sont chastes,
Que chez les lions ce sont les femelles qui chassent
(Médine, 2008, *Arabian Panther*, "A l'ombre du mâle")

As Médine indicated in his lyrics, most individuals perform gender in pre-determined manners. For instance, Médine tries to defend women and criticises men for their chauvinist behaviour. Many men are influenced to treat women in this chauvinist manner by social norms and traditions based on sex segregation and stereotypical gender performativity (hooks, 1981, pp.560-561). According to Toril Moi (2008, p.262), these social traditions are the effect of "heterosexist and heteronormative power structures". Individuals are theoretically free to act as they wish and contesting the status quo is always a possibility, but most people feel compelled to follow traditional behaviours because they fear "social sanction and taboo" (Butler, 1997, p.520).

As a consequence, we can say that:

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural

or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds (Butler, 1997, p.531).

As Butler suggests in the above quotation, a strong correlation exists between gender performativity and power relations. Butler (1993, p.2) explains that the norms regulating gender work performatively to compose “the materiality of bodies”, i.e. “they materialise the body’s sex” as well as sexual differences to consolidate “the heterosexual imperative”. When making this claim, she does not deny that the fixity of the body is material; she simply says that this materiality is the “most productive” effect of power (Butler, 1993, p.2). This is because “gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body”. In other words, it is through our clothes, bodily movements, gestures, or actions that we “constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, 1997, p.519). In fact, according to Bourdieu (1998, pp.91-92), the body is socially determined in a twofold manner: its appearance depends on external socio-cultural conditions, such as the profession or eating habits, and its perception and evaluation rely on socio-cultural factors, e.g. considering thin bodies as desirable or on the contrary a sign of poverty. As Hughes and Williams (2001, p.2) specify, this can also mean that gender performativity, which is thus controlled by “the dominant, compulsory heterosexual regime”, is only visible on the outside of the body but appears to be the expression of an “interior core”.

The concepts of performativity and power relations are also essential in another discipline that is key when carrying out an analysis of language use and gender: queer theory. This field of study, which is not the same as Gay and Lesbian Studies, is “an interdisciplinary and antihegemonic critique” that analyses power and oppression (Koch, 2008, p.20; in Weber, 2011, p.155). Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013, p.520) add that it is a “cover term for various, often highly heterogeneous, approaches that are driven by a critical focus on heteronormativity”, often from the “perspective of the sexually marginalised”. In other

words, queer theory looks at how certain heterosexual norms and habits are constructed as “natural, normal, or preferable”, such as the idea “that ‘proper’ human beings are either women or men, that ‘proper’ women and men are heterosexual” (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, pp.520-521). Queer theorists criticise the idea that sexuality would be the “basis of an essentialist identity” because it ignores the importance of the intersectionality of sexuality with other determinants (e.g. ethnicity, age, class, etc.) (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.520), a notion that will be more fully developed later in the chapter.

At the intersection of queer theory and linguistics, the discipline that is most relevant to this research is queer linguistics. This discipline uses some of the insights gained by queer theorists and applies them to language, from a sociolinguistic point of view as well as “almost all language-related disciplines” (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.522). Consequently, queer linguists critically analyse the linguistic “mechanisms that construct heterosexuality” as the norm together with the notion that “gender binarism” is natural (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.522), which stems from a desire to “understand the role of language in society without simply reproducing cultural ideology” (Barrett, 2002, p.39). This leads to analyses of the discourses surrounding sexual identities, with a focus on “discursive acts” and “cultural practices” that give the impression that heterosexuality is natural and normal (Nelson, 1999, p.376). Queer linguists do not see language as being reflective of stable or pre-discursive identities, but rather as one of the means to perform fluid and temporary, i.e. contextual, identities, (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, p.522). They challenge whether linguists and researchers in other disciplines should limit themselves to the two “binary macro-categories” of male and female, since doing so alienates anyone who deviates from the average heterosexual norm (Motschenbacher and Stegu, 2013, pp.522-523).

Such contestation of the status-quo also leads to discussions of androgyny and hybrid gender performativity, which will play a role in this chapter. Fullwood *et al.* (2011, p.115) explain that both genders can manifest typically masculine and/or feminine linguistic features depending on various factors, such as the purpose of the conversation or the relationship between the two speakers. This prompts Thomson *et al.* (2001, p.174) to declare that “gender-preferential language is not definitional”, by which they mean that individuals are not limited by any single gendered linguistic strategy, but on the contrary will select masculine and/or feminine features according to the context of the conversation.

In this analysis, one of the main questions will be to see whether the previous assertion applies to French rap. The literature that focuses on how gender impacts language use is abundant, mostly studying men versus women and, as Coates (2004, p.32) stresses, skewed by the researchers’ tacit acceptance of “polarised gender varieties” while rarely taking the aforementioned queer linguistics notions into account. In recent years, the idea that men and women talk differently has become immensely popular and forms what Deborah Cameron (2007, pp.7-8; see also Xia, 2013) calls “The Myth of Mars and Venus”. Fundamentally, the premise behind this myth is that men and women do not use language in the same manner to communicate (Cameron, 2007, pp.7-8). Allegedly, and these are the definitions that will be used in the upcoming qualitative analysis, feminine speech is characterised by collaboration and affiliation, an increased interest in language, a greater linguistic mastery, and a strong focus on interpersonal relations. On the other hand, masculine speech is supposed to be characterised by more linguistic competitiveness, less politeness, more directness, and the internalisation of a more adversarial speech (Coates, 1996, p.13). The idea behind this theory is that since childhood men are influenced to focus first and foremost on their social statuses, which

is reflected in their speech and word choice, whereas women would be more encouraged to focus on interactions and emphasise solidarity (Coates, 1996, p.22). These differences are assumed to be the root-cause of miscommunication between men and women.

However, scientific research on this topic does not support these stereotypical beliefs (Cameron, 2010, p.526) and many supposed misunderstandings between men and women can be attributed to tactical decisions, like pretending not to understand to avoid having to act (Cameron, 2007, p.89). When differences do emerge, they are not typically wide and these same differences can be found when comparing only men or only women (Cameron, 2010, p.526). Some observed linguistic differences can also be indirectly linked to gender if they have a strong correlation with specific roles or activities typically dominated by men (Cameron, 2007, p.50). If both men and women from the same role or profession are interviewed, such differences are unlikely to manifest.

Nevertheless, Cameron (2007, pp.54-55) does acknowledge that gender plays a part in language use and that being a man or being a woman is likely to be marked in some way, because most people see their gender as being fundamental to their identity. Yet, she stresses that the ways to mark this distinction will always vary depending on the individuals, since their linguistic performativity of gender does not really depend on “global categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’” but rather on the “particular and much more local forms of masculinity and femininity” (Cameron, 2007, pp.54-55). What she means by this is that masculinity and femininity are gendered and performed equivalents of men and women, they are not necessarily limited to biological sex, and they are not universal but rather individual and dependent on local gender performativities. The importance of such local performativities was already made apparent in chapter 3 on diatopic determinants and gender is no exception to this crucial impact of spatial determinants. In addition to local performativities, these linguistic choices will also vary according to

people's age, origin, occupation, social class, or religious beliefs (Cameron, 2007, p.53). Indeed, it would be wrong to compare gender differences to the differences between nations because no geographical boundaries separate genders (Cameron, 1996, p.36). So if gender is performed linguistically in a similar way for men and women, why are linguistic gender differences emphasised so much? Beyond the pernicious effect and attraction of stereotypes, Cameron (2007, pp.16-17) cites the problem that many studies that do not yield results are often not published. In the context of language and gender, this means that studies that find no differences between men and women are less likely to be published.

The question that remains to be answered in this chapter is to see if the findings of researchers like Deborah Cameron and Judith Butler will apply to French rappers and their use of NSL. To tackle this question, the quantitative and qualitative analyses will offer two different approaches. The description of the quantitative results will be much more dichotomous, looking at male versus female rappers, while the qualitative analysis will focus on broader gender performativity. In this chapter, the study of the similarities will be as important as differences: when taking contextual performance into account, do female and male rappers use different or similar languages?

2. Quantitative data and qualitative analysis of the gender determinants

The quantitative results (see Appendix II 4. for full tables) from the linguistic analysis of NSL use by male and female rappers show that the differences between male and female rappers were relatively small in terms of overall NSL use. There was only .7% variation between the two sexes (men: 7.61% NSL; women: 6.91%). All NSL categories were very close, except for vulgar words and combinations of categories. Even though their use is quite low for both sexes, these categories were still used around twice as much by men

(0.76% vulgar words against 0.31%; 0.54% combinations compared to 0.31%). The use of *verlan* by male and female rappers was also rather similar (men: 0.4%; women: 0.28%), and certainly far from Semji's description in the introduction. Moreover, male and female rappers' use of foreign words was quite similar, although male rappers used them slightly more (2.04% instead of 1.72%). Female rappers' tracks also contained a very similar proportion of English (74.7%) and Arabic (15.06%) to male rappers (79.62% and 14.1%). This finding is particularly relevant for Arabic because strong contrasts had been observed in the previous chapters. Yet, it appears that on average no difference can be found in relation to gender. Despite these similarities, it must also be noted that male rappers used a greater variety of foreign languages (fourteen for men against nine for women), although this difference is likely to have been caused by the larger number of tracks in the male corpus that allowed more infrequent borrowings to appear in the database, which diminishes this distinction significantly. Finally, the similarities between the sexes extended to grammatical categories, as they exhibited very few differences.

Moving on to the qualitative analysis, the first crucial point that must be raised is the importance of avoiding "universalistic discourses" when looking at gender performativity in French rap or any other social group (hooks, 1981, p.554), as was already mentioned briefly in the introduction. As Kalle Berggren (2013, p.189) stresses, a more "intersectional" approach must be undertaken. By saying this, the author means that gender is always interconnected with other equally important determinants such as age, social class, or ethnic and geographical origins, that all converge to create the individual's personal gender performativity. In other words, it is difficult to use gender on its own to make broad generalisations as its performativity varies a lot depending on individuals and their background, a phenomenon also mentioned by Scylla and L. Sinistros in their interview:

Je pense que ce que la personne encore une fois veut faire passer, le langage est une arme pour faire passer ça et chacun va avoir son intelligence de plume et son humour souvent pour faire passer justement ça. Et les gars ben évidemment si quelqu'un a une envie de montrer que c'est quelqu'un de... selon l'image qu'il a envie de dégager de lui-même, par exemple montrer que c'est quelqu'un de dur, ben il va utiliser un vocabulaire le plus dur possible. (...) Moi par exemple, je suis quelqu'un de très très dans la métaphore, et ça ben voilà ça dépend de qui tu es de la manière dont toi tu es structuré, de ton caractère, de tes influences, et de ce que tu veux dégager. (Scylla, 2013)

Je dirais qu'il n'y a pas vraiment de différence entre un rappeur et une rappeuse. Maintenant, chaque personne est différente, chaque personne a un vécu. (L. Sinistros, 2013)

Not only are the individual's past and background significant but, as Scylla remarked in these extracts, the effect that they are trying to create in their tracks is also essential to NSL use. These points have been raised in previous chapters and are an overall theme of the whole thesis, since all the determinants analysed in the separate chapters are actually always manifested simultaneously in all tracks.

The quantitative results from two tracks by female rappers and two tracks by male rappers illustrate this phenomenon well. Casey's "Créature ratée" has 1.14% NSL (2010, *Libérez la bête*), Princess Aniès's "Trop despee" 15.88% NSL (2008, *Au Carrefour de ma douleur*), Oxmo Puccino's "Le soleil du nord" 1.18% NSL (2010, *L'arme de paix*) and Scylla's "BX Vibes" 16.53% NSL (2009, *Immersion*). The contrast found between the NSL results of these tracks certainly cannot be attributed to linguistic differences between men and women, since both sexes produced tracks with a lot of NSL and tracks with very little. To try and understand the differences between these results and their relation to gender performativity, a deeper qualitative analysis of both lyrics and videos is required. Given the amount of information found in each track, this analysis will focus on only two: Casey's "Créature ratée" and Scylla's "BX Vibes".

The first track, “Créature ratée”, is performed by Casey, a female rapper whose parents were originally from Martinique, who was born in Rouen and who now lives in Seine-Saint-Denis. In this track, she is clearly not the narrator. She is performing someone else’s discourse and tackling the issue of racism towards black people in modern French society and the history of African slavery. When looking at the linguistic results, one would not expect to find a rap track with many adversarial and stereotypically masculine behaviours, such as trying to appear aggressive, physically strong, independent, unemotional, active, or more competitive. Yet the video and some of the lyrics tell a very different story. The first image that the viewer sees is a skull, followed by a muscular man with war paint on his body accompanied by a sinister sound. As the video progresses, women and half naked



Casey, 2010, *Libérez la bête*, “Créature ratée” (0:19)

men are seen dancing in trance-like states, muscles contracting in a display of strength and agility. Then the camera moves to Casey. It becomes rapidly clear that her behaviour and appearance are far from being stereotypically

feminine. Her physical appearance is masculine, with her braided hair, making it look short, and her hoodie. Then Casey is shown sitting and half-dancing on a chair, legs wide open and arms resting on her thighs, with heavy, long necklaces around her neck. She even stands up and starts moving like a



Casey, 2010, *Libérez la bête*, “Créature ratée” (0:49)

boxer, further stressing her aggressive and adversarial attitude.

What is more, the lyrics contain references to aggression and physical strength, such as the following extract:

Parfois le sauvage plonge dans la démence
En rage peut réduire un humain en miettes
(Casey, 2010, *Libérez la bête*, “Créature ratée”)

This image of savagery is a recurring theme in the track, as Casey describes and appropriates views common when slavery was an accepted practice. Black people are therefore described as animals. This creates a dichotomy in the lyrics. On the one hand, it is very clear that this animality is negative and insulting, since black people are presented as intellectually inferior to white people. Yet, on the other hand, the artist also lends them strength and power, in several instances like the previous extract, by explaining that these slaves were strong and should therefore be feared, which is also emphasised by the video that features men dancing with war paint. By drawing on both the video and the lyrics, the viewer therefore understands that these slaves were not inferior to white people in reality, but in fact proud warriors who were physically strong, independent and active, all prominent stereotypical masculine features. In short, we can see that Casey’s personal life experiences and social and ethnic origins have led her to create this track with a particular form of masculine gender performativity.

The second track, “BX Vibes”, is performed by Scylla who is, as we saw in the methodology, a French-speaking Belgian rapper whose parents are also Belgian and who grew up in Brussels. His track is a clear example of an *ego trip* rap, focusing not so much on himself but rather on the city that he is trying to promote, Brussels. The video starts in the sky with the sun above the clouds. Then the camera plunges down. Underneath, it is



Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes" (0:19)

raining on a grey city. A man stands in the rain, raincoat and hood on. Only half his face is visible and he appears threatening, clenching his right fist. Next, the camera zooms on his face as he stares at the viewer, with a very

intimidating expression. This threatening and masculine performativity is matched by the lyrics:

Alors fieu, tu r'connais pas la force de l'ogre?
Tu morfles, t'as tort de me mettre hors-jeu
Pote, je bosse, ma gorge vaut de l'or
Moi j'élabore une nouvelle sorte de rap exporté de la morgue
(Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes")

As the video continues, it turns out that he is standing on a roof above the city, like a king on a throne overlooking his kingdom, but also a trope for an outsider. In the following shots, he is seen wearing a leather jacket and casual clothes while walking in the city, rapping and making aggressive gestures (e.g.



Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes" (0:28)

thumb across the neck), which reinforces his adversarial masculine gender performativity.



Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes" (2:04)

Other men are seen in the video, break dancing or talking to the camera, lips synced to the lyrics. Soon after, the rapper is represented with the use of drawings of himself as a winged

demon, which further stresses his strength and power.

In brief, it can be seen that gender performativity in Scylla's track is not unlike Casey's. In both tracks, the video and the lyrics feature strong, threatening figures who are performing a form of masculine identity that is typical of rap music. Both videos are in black and white and both artists are wearing similar casual clothes. Moreover, many references are made to death in both tracks. Yet, the linguistic results could not be more different. This confirms the fact that in many instances gender alone cannot predict NSL use. In these two examples, the most determining factor, beyond individual differences, might be the genre of rap music, Scylla's track belonging to *ego trip* and Casey's to *knowledge rap*. This determinant, however, will be explored in chapter 5.

As could already be observed in the previous two tracks, performativity is central to how gender manifests in both music videos and lyrics. Indeed, this concept is as equally important in the music industry as elsewhere (McClary, 1993, p.404, and 1994, p.78). As mentioned in the introduction, and according to Butler (1993, pp.16-17; 1997, p.519), this act of performing gender through speech, bodily movements or fashion is reiterative in its very nature. This means that male and female French rappers can be expected to perform their gender by repeating certain bodily and linguistic behaviours. These behaviours will be determined by what is considered to be the norm, which is heterosexuality in most social groups, since not obeying it results in social sanctions and taboo (Moi, 2008:, p.262; Butler, 1997, p.520).

If French rap is studied as a field, i.e. the "objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake" (Bourdieu, 1984b, p.197), then I argue that one of French rap's most determining doxas regarding masculine gender identities can be viewed as the performativity of "hyper-masculinity". According to Zaitchik and

Mosher (1993; in Vokey *et al.*, 2013, p.562), this concept is a type of performativity and narrative that can be defined as the embodiment of four inter-related beliefs: “toughness as emotional self-control”, “violence as manly”, “danger as exciting”, and “callous attitudes toward women and sex” (see also Dereef, 2006; or Iwamoto, 2003). In other words, it is the performativity of excessive and stereotypical heterosexuality, defined as having to be strong, independent, sexually active, and/or in control, which is sometimes accompanied in rap music by threats of homicides (Hunnicuttt and Andrews, 2009, p.626). Although typically applied to men, these concepts can also relate to women, as Casey’s “Créature ratée” already exemplified to some extent and as we will see again later in this analysis.

This gender performativity is certainly not universal in French rap but it is nonetheless very pervasive, partly due to the impact of American *gangsta* rap. Some of the most famous and successful artists in rap history, like 50Cents, Tupac, TheGame, Dr Dre or DMX, to name but a few, regularly show(ed) off their muscular bodies while being surrounded by provocative young women. Even in France, some of the most well-known rappers imitate all or some of these behaviours, such as Booba, Sefyu, Rhoff, Nessbeal or Seth Gueko. Not surprisingly, the corpus contains many passages that illustrate this tendency:

Le doigt sur la gâchette ou sur un clyto
(ROHFF, 2010, *La cuenta*, “Rien à prouver”; NSL: 10.9%)

Pas d'embrouilles man, pas de litige
Sinon ça va saigner est-ce que tu piges?
(Booba, 2008, *Temps mort*, “Boulbi”; NSL: 10,48%)

Trop cher le gasoil, ma jauge déborde de sang, crouille!
Les pecs qui vont avec, la voix qui va avec
(Sefyu, 2011, *Oui je le suis*, “Top Gun”; NSL: 9.72%)

These three extracts exemplify typical hyper-masculine gender performativities. Rhoff mentions having his finger on a clitoris or a trigger, the former exemplifying his success with women while the latter stresses how dangerous he can be. The last two extracts focus more on strength and aggressivity. Booba warns people that blood will be spilled if he is provoked and Sefyu boasts about being full of blood and muscles. In other words, the above extracts show how these male rappers are trying to project the image of being strong, muscular and dangerous. These tracks also contain a high percentage of NSL (around 10%) because this type of hyper-masculine gender performativity is often reinforced by the use of slang and vulgarities, a concept that will be explored further in the chapter.

Furthermore, this gender-related doxa also contains the pervasive idea that only men should rap, an observation exemplified by the overwhelming majority of male rappers in the genre. This common belief is also illustrated in the following quotation from El Matador:

Surtout en France et en Belgique je pense que si tu vois une fille rapper, tu te dis tout de suite « ah oui c'est la meuf qui rappe, nanani nanana ». Il y a direct quelque chose on ne va pas dire négatif, c'est pas négatif hein. Mais t'as besoin qu'elle te prouve entre guillemets, si c'est une femme. (El Matador, 2013)

In this extract, it is evident that, although they are not completely rejected or banned, female rappers need to prove their talent before being accepted as rappers. By reading between the lines, we can see how El Matador suggests the opposite as well: if a man sees another man rapping, his first assumption will be that he is a talented and experienced rapper. This opinion may change quickly after listening to him, but it is clear that, in El Matador's opinion, upon first seeing a man and a woman rapping, only the woman's

capacity to be a rapper is likely to be questioned. It does not help either that women are treated by so many male rappers as sexual objects.

Even when male rappers do not really treat them as such, many artists, like Whoopy Jones, are still very uncomfortable with the idea of a woman speaking and rapping like male rappers:

Oui, bien sûr, je vais te dire clairement, moi, avoir des rappeuses qui parlent comme des chiottes, ça m'intéresse pas. Ce n'est pas bien, je sais... Mais je n'ai aucun souci avec une fille qui va faire du rap, il y a juste une manière de le faire. Il y a des filles qui le font bien. Diam's, elle le faisait bien. Elle était terrible, elle était trop trop forte, elle savait dire ce qu'il fallait. Il y avait aussi Lady Laistee... Mais les filles qui font mal, je n'aime pas je trouve que c'est pas... Enfin, elles le font moins parce qu'elles savent bien. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

The weight of dominant gender beliefs lies heavy in Whoopy Jones's declaration. Although he claims the contrary, he seems to be struggling with the idea of a woman rapping. If they do, they are supposed to do it in a sterile and precise way, whereas male rappers are free to rap however they want. He even appears relieved at the end of the quotation when he states that most female rappers abide by this principle. However, his opinion in this regard does not match the actual behaviour of female rappers.

Faced with this lack of acceptance by most male rappers, many female rappers have had the opposite attitude: they have leaned towards a more masculine gender performativity by trying to imitate male rappers and to ignore the gender-related doxa. As El Matador observed, female rappers often act and dress like male artists:

Tu sais il n'y a pas une meuf qui s'est affirmée, maintenant peut-être que ça se fera, en tant que meuf, mignonne avec des cheveux longs. Elles sont toutes en mode garçon manqué. C'est pareil pour Keny, Diam's et d'autres que j'ai connues et qui n'ont pas forcément percé, mais ça a été comme ça tout le temps. (El Matador, 2013)

El Matador's quotation simultaneously describes the phenomenon of masculine female

gender performativity while also reinforcing the idea that “real” women are absent from French rap. In this quotation, he is policing the boundaries of gender in French rap by implying that female rappers should be feminine, which he defines as being attractive with long hair. He does not address the social construction of gender nor the fact that the way male rappers dress is equally atypical and even sexualised, since it is often about a display of hyper-masculinity. It is as if, in his mind, it was strange only for a woman to act and look like a rapper (e.g. baggy trousers, a large hoodie, a hat, eye-catching jewels, etc.). The validity of male artists’ behaviours is not questioned. This observation illustrates how many male rappers, who are part of the dominant group, almost cannot see how their perception of rap music rejects and belittles female rappers, who are part of the non-dominant group (on this topic, see hooks, 1981, p.557).

Yet, as explained above, it does not prevent many female artists from completely ignoring the idea that women should not act like male rappers. Despite taboos and social sanctions, my research shows that they choose to perform a very masculine form of gender on numerous occasions:

Cessez d’bousculer l’exclue à la gueule masculine
Mes origines et mon air androgyne, je n’sais pas faire sans
(Casey, 2010, *Libérez la bête*, “Rêves illimités”; NSL: 2.48%)

Moi ici pour être le meilleur des hommes
J viens ici exposer toute ma réalité
Représenter imposer toute ma féminité
(Lady Laistee, 2005, *Second soufflé*, “Corda”; NSL: 10.96%)

Petite pucelle du microphone, je vais te déchirer l’hymen!
(Black Barbie, 2008, *Black Barbie style*, “La reine du 93”; NSL: 6.83%)

It is clear from these extracts that female rappers are perfectly capable of adopting (hyper) masculine behaviours and narratives. In the first two quotations, the two artists directly allude to their masculinity, with Casey actually using the terms *gueule masculine*, and in

the third, Black Barbie utters a sentence that is very violent and sexually explicit, a typically hyper-masculine gender performativity for rappers. Unlike with the previous tracks from male artists, this gender performativity is not necessarily accompanied by more NSL, as all three extracts vary in this respect. This means that some female artists reject the idea of acting or looking like stereotypical women but do not necessarily extend it to their language.

This rejection of the doxa is not limited to female rappers. It emerges from my research that many male rappers also choose to perform their gender identity by positioning themselves against common stereotypes in French rap. As will be apparent in the next extracts, these male artists not only reject the accepted expressions of hyper-masculinity, but also the treatment of women and female rappers:

Il veut que des belles meufs, des liasses et des Berlines
A ce qu'il paraît de nos jours, on appelle ça un MC
(Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "Le voile des mots"; NSL: 2.17%)

Nous aussi on souhaite émanciper la femme,
Mais on ne règèlera pas le problème en relookant les Afghanes
Travail égal, fiche de paie inégale pour femme,
C'est tout de même pas une philosophie musulmane
(Médine, 2008, *Arabian panther*, "Don't Panik"; NSL: 10.72%)

Et ils s'ront pas nombreux à v'nir à ton s'cours
Sous prétexte qu'un homme, ça souffre pas et ça s'plaint pas
(Tandem, 2005, *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*, "Le monde est stone";
NSL: 11.11%)

In these extracts, we can see that the artists are condemning common beliefs and perceptions in French rap and in modern society. Again, this behaviour is not always accompanied by a rejection of linguistic norms, since two out of the three artists use a high percentage of NSL, a practice that is in accordance with the main doxa. One of the extracts further illustrates how rappers are not necessarily limited by one type of linguistic gender performativity. Scylla used only 2.17% NSL whereas his previous track (Bx

Vibes) contained 16.53%. Depending on their goals and on the context, the artists' linguistic gender performativities will vary.

This confirms how these performativities are indeed fluid and temporary, as queer linguists assert. Based on my research, this assessment applies to both male and female artists. For example, female rappers' gender performativities are not one-dimensional and limited to masculine and hyper-masculine attitudes. Many female artists contest existing norms in different ways:

Pour celles qui font la vaisselle et puent des aisselles
Pour celles en strings ficelles qui jouent les pucelles
(Lady Laistee, 2005, *Second soufflé*, "Corda"; NSL: 10.96%)

La plupart de mes sœurs
Sont en mode 40 – 42
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, "Zoulettes"; NSL: 12.57%)

Remballe toutes tes bimbos
Regarde j'suis pas J'lo
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, "Attends"; NSL: 10.97%)

These three extracts present counter-performativities to stereotypical beliefs regarding women and female rappers. They are only a small sample of all possible performativities, but they nonetheless already contain two very different attitudes. The first extract presents a form of gender performativity that is neither masculine nor completely feminine. Lady Laistee mixes stereotypes (washing up, thongs, acting like a virgin) and a non-stereotype (smelling bad) to create a unique and intriguing form of androgynous gender performativity. Her use of the verb *jouer* in *qui jouent les pucelles* should also be noted. It illustrates the performative nature of gender once more: Lady Laistee stresses how these women are *acting* like virgins, a behaviour that is contextual and reiterative. She does not wish to claim that this is how they are, but only how they choose to act in certain circumstances.

The last two extracts differ from the first one in this regard by the use of the verb *être*. It sounds as if Amy and Bushy are trying to present facts about women which counter general expectations by stating that most women are not like famous thin stars. They perform their gender by stating how they do not wish to be perceived. Casey's and Amy and Bushy's extracts therefore show how gender performativity is not binary but must be placed within a continuum of possible contextual and reiterative performativities. Furthermore, it can be observed that all three tracks dismiss the notion that women cannot or should not speak like stereotypical male rappers: all three tracks contain a high percentage of NSL.

All these examples of gender performativity are intimately linked to the existing gender power inequalities in French rap. French rap is a movement that contains many male artists who feel that they are more entitled to rap than female rappers, which has become clear after analysing some of the previous lyrics and quotations from interviews (e.g. El Matador's and Whoopy Jones's). It is also apparent in the success of stereotypically chauvinist rappers in France and America and in the limited presence of female artists in the movement. Many of these male artists construct their gender performativity around the heterosexist doxa in the movement. As a result, it is quite common to find traces of these beliefs in the lyrics, which serve to illustrate and reinforce the dominant position of men over women and female rappers. The following extracts are good examples of this phenomenon:

Surveille ta frangine, si elle a des gros bzezs
(El Matador, 2009, *Au clair du bitume*, "Aïe aïe aïe"; NSL: 13.21%)

Et pendant c'temps comment ça va demandent les autres
Bien sauf que j'ai peur de la boxer devant les gosses
(Sinik, 2006, *Sang froid*, "Descente aux enfers"; NSL: 6.55%)

Touche pas à mon pote, encore moins à ma go
(Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007, *Jusqu'à la mort*, "Tout est possible"; NSL: 5.47%)

Laisse pas traîner ta fille ou son fils aura ma tête
(La Fouine, 2011, *Capitale du crime vol.3*, “Jalousie”; NSL: 11.11%)

All four rappers assert male domination over women in several different ways with these narratives. In the first extract, El Matador shares his belief that brothers need to interfere with their sisters’ romantic relationships to prevent other men from taking advantage of them. He does not seem concerned to know whether his sister agrees with his initiative. In the second, gender performativity is more complex because Sinik is explicitly not the narrator. Instead, he plays the role of an imagined abusive husband. Nevertheless, it is striking to notice that this character is not afraid of beating his wife, only to do it in front of the children, an utterance that exemplifies how male domination over women by using fear and violence can appear normal to some individuals. The third extract is a mix of protection and possession. Although the rapper is warning people that he will defend his girlfriend if necessary, this declaration is also surrounded by domination and control, as this woman is unlikely to be free to leave him without potentially dangerous consequences. The last extract alludes to the sexual possession of powerless women, almost as if there was a direct correlation between wandering alone as a woman and being sexually assaulted. We can also see that these reinforcements of male power can be accompanied by higher use of NSL, although not systematically.

As we saw earlier with some examples of gender performativity, female rappers do not passively endure this male domination. They adapt to this hyper-masculine environment:

Et tu as aussi des filles qui se retrouvent dans un environnement ultra masculin et qui du coup vont peut-être vouloir prouver deux fois plus qu’elles ont leur place là-dedans. Donc elles vont peut-être rapper comme des bonhommes et utiliser peut-être encore plus qu’un autre certains termes. Parce qu’elles misent aussi sur ce côté ironique, vu que ça fait un peu bizarre d’entendre certaines choses de la bouche d’une fille. Et elles vont peut-être même parvenir à briser des clichés à ce niveau-là. (Scylla, 2013)

What Scylla is describing in this extract is a type of excessive hyper-masculine female gender performativity, which is emphasised by the use of *prouver deux fois plus*, as a response to the hyper-masculinity of French rap, a phenomenon that has already been observed earlier to some extent. As we saw, many female rappers reject certain forms of gender performativity that are built around appearing stereotypically feminine. They are not afraid to claim the existence of their (hyper-) masculinity, to use vulgarities or to appear violent and to create conflicts.

At this point in the analysis, this attitude should no longer be unexpected. What can be surprising, however, is how far some female artists can go. As Scylla explained, some of them are willing to do anything to show that they belong, even reinforcing the male-dominated heterosexist doxa in their lyrics:

Dans l'underground le cœur des filles s'est emmuré dans le béton
Trop d'mecs au compteur donne mauvaise réputation
(Black Barbie, 2008, *Black Barbie style*, "Underground"; NSL: 9.35%)

Celles qui sucent pas pour le cash
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, "Zoulettes"; NSL: 12.57%)

Ta meuf kiffe ton pote, tu sais pas ce qui t'attend
Si t'as de la chance, elle prendra sa pilule à temps
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, "Attends"; NSL: 10.97%)

Y'a des tas de putes, ça baise mais ça fait la prude
(Diam's, 2006, *Dans ma bulle*, "Dans ma bulle"; NSL: 8%)

Certaines attendent leurs règles pour te faire croire qu'elles sont vierges
(Diam's, 2006, *Dans ma bulle*, "Dans ma bulle"; NSL: 8%)

All of the above extracts are helping to spread the idea that women can be regarded as or treated like prostitutes, especially if they are sexually emancipated. Taken out of context, these quotations could be assumed to belong to chauvinist male rappers. It is also apparent that such linguistic and gender performativities seem to be accompanied by higher use of NSL, just like the tracks with sexist content by male artists that were studied earlier. This

observation dispels the incorrect idea that this gender performativity is found only in tracks by male rappers. What is more, it also explains why so little difference was observed in terms of NSL use: this study shows that both male and female artists are capable of the same linguistic gender performativities, regardless of how misogynistic they may sound.

The opposite performativity by female artists is also very common in the corpus. These female artists react to the explicit expression of male dominance by condemning it or by treating men in the same manner:

Y a comme un goût de peur chez les meufs de l'an 2000
(Diam's, 2006, *Dans ma bulle*, "La boulette"; NSL: 11.30%)

Et les [ra]cailles bavent à la moindre rate qui passe
Trop vite en rade, on s'demande qui est la p'tite tasse
N'essaie même pas d'te mettre à ma place
Avant qu'on r'trouve ta vieille carcasse à la casse
Immatricule PA, issue du 95
Les reufs trinquent quand la reine péra
(Princess Aniès, 2008, *Au carrefour de ma douleur*, "Trop despee"; NSL: 15.87%)

Dans ma bulle, si Vénus est victime d'adultère,
Bah Vénus prend un gun et te vise à la tête
(Diam's, 2006, *Dans ma bulle*, "Dans ma bulle"; NSL: 8%)

These three extracts show how female artists can adapt to and/or denounce common hyper-masculine attitudes. The second and third extracts especially stand out because they represent forms of Foucauldian reverse discourse (Foucault, 1990, p.101), as these women use common hyper-masculine language, normally employed to belittle or ridicule them, to attack chauvinist men with their own vocabulary. What is very intriguing about Diam's' second extract is that this artist was found earlier to adopt the opposite attitude of reinforcing stereotypes in the exact same track ("Dans ma bulle"). Clearly, her performativity of gender and her reaction to unequal power relations are very flexible and

cannot be reified, another good illustration of how contextual and temporary these performativities can be. Princess Aniès's performativity is equally interesting. In the video, her appearance changes a lot from scene to scene. In one scene, she utters very aggressive sentences while standing behind a wire



Princess Aniès, 2008, *Au carrefour de ma douleur*, "Trop despee" (0:22)

fence, wearing a hat tilted to the side, with many men around her, a form of hyper-masculine gender performativity. Yet, in another scene, she wears much more feminine



Princess Aniès, 2008, *Au carrefour de ma douleur*, "Trop despee" (0:22)

(traditional Chinese) clothes and has an elaborate haircut with only women around her, a much more feminine gender performativity. In the lyrics, she is not only threatening men but also questioning some of their belief

systems. As described earlier, part of (hyper-) masculine linguistic gender performativity in French rap is often built around the sexual possession of women, but Princess Aniès links this conduct to prostitution. By doing so, she is trying to create a power shift, which she strengthens by claiming that male rappers raise a toast/suffer when she raps, demonstrating their acceptance and submission with a single word (*trinquent*). In addition, NSL is used profusely in all three tracks, which dismisses again the belief that female rappers cannot use NSL and also shows once more that this type of violent and adversarial gender performativity is usually supported by specific NSL word choices.

The effects of unequal power relations and gender performativity are central to the understanding of the strongest discrepancy observed in the quantitative data, the use of

vulgarity. In the literature on linguistic differences and gender performativity, the closest observation that has been made on numerous occasions is the idea that men internalise more adversarial speech than women. This use of adversarial speech can be applied to French rap, given the importance of *ego trip* and competition between artists. However, it has already been observed on several occasions in this chapter that both male and female artists can use this speech style. Furthermore, Cameron (e.g. 1985, p.35) has also shown that this was a false belief. This variation has much more to do with social class, education and bias on the part of researchers than with gender itself. Accordingly, the discrepancy in the corpus regarding the use of vulgarities cannot be attributed to the tendency to be more adversarial.

Yet, there must be an explanation for this phenomenon since the corpus does testify to the fact that male rappers use more vulgarities than their female counterparts. This opinion can be found in several of the earlier quotes from interviews and is also apparent in the following extracts from Shurik'n:

Oui sûrement et je pense qu'une fille, qu'une artiste, et heureusement, elles n'ont pas forcément besoin de réclamer le côté vulgarité. Après, l'égo trip dans le rap c'est une tradition. Même une femme peut faire de l'égo trip sans problème. Mais le côté vulgaire, ouais, le côté sec qui n'est pas forcément le plus valorisant pour le rap et qui n'est pas quelque chose dont elles ont besoin de s'inspirer. (Shurik'n, 2013)

Shurik'n's extract illustrates the belief that women should not use vulgarities, but it also goes further than that, as it also contains two revealing implicit remarks. First, Shurik'n emphasises his opinion by using the phrase *et heureusement*. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of not only his belief that women should not use vulgarities but also of the idea that it would in fact be very shocking for them to do so, hence his relief that it is not the case. Second, he betrays, probably unknowingly, an underlining opinion that women should not rap when he claims that *même une femme* can perform *ego trip*. Indeed,

Shurik'n sounds as if it would be very difficult for women to manage such a performance, although this is nuanced, in the same sentence, by his use of *sans problème*.

To investigate why such a discrepancy is found in the corpus, it is necessary to analyse the content of the tracks. It emerges from the corpus that male rappers use vulgar words that allude to the (sexual or physical) "possession" of women as well as vulgarities related to the shame of homosexuality, and more specifically of male homosexuality. The regular use of these two types of vulgarities by male artists cannot be overlooked in this context. It probably offers the best explanation for the quantitative discrepancy found in the corpus. In line with J. L. Austin's theory of the performativity of language (1975, p.73), the more frequent use of such words can be analysed as speech acts that serve as a hyper-masculine gender performativity (on this topic, see e.g. McClary, 1994, p.73; Moi, 2008, p.265). These words are not descriptive, i.e. only the manifestation of simple misogyny or homophobia, but first and foremost performative.

First, this analysis will look into how this notion applies to misogynistic vulgar words in the corpus. The following examples that will be studied are all from male rappers but it has been shown that female artists are equally capable of using them. The only difference in the corpus seems to be quantitative: male rappers do it more often. So as to see how this gender performativity impacts the use of vulgar words as well as NSL use, the average results for both categories are mentioned with the track extracts. As a comparison, the average NSL use in the whole corpus is 7.33% and the average use of vulgar words is 0.66%.

Cette vibe n'est pas faite pour les grosses pétasses ni les petites en feu
(Convok in Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*, "BX Vibes Remix"; NSL: 14.2%;
vulgarities: 1.83%)

Parce que personne ne veut de l'orphelin et que tout le monde veut baiser la
veuve

(Fonky Family, 2006, *Marginale musique*, “La guerre”; NSL: 3.31%; vulgarities: 0.6%)

Le deal, le vol et baiser des sales connes
(Disiz la peste, 2006, *Les histoires extra-ordinaires d'un jeune de banlieue*, “Une histoire extraordinaire”; NSL: 4.82%; vulgarities: 0.38%)

J'baiserai la France jusqu'à ce qu'elle m'aime
(Tandem, 2005, *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*, “93 Hardcore”; NSL: 9.46%; vulgarities: 1.45%)

Tant que j'aurai la gaule je serais là pour les baiser
Amène la gnôle et le cul d'Alizée dans les caves de l'Elysée
(LIM, 2007, *Délinquant*, “Si on réussit”; NSL: 12.64%; vulgarities: 2.61%)

These extracts all contain lyrics that centre around the sexual possession of women and they clearly exemplify how these male rappers are asserting their hyper-masculinity by insulting and degrading women. When they use such words, they are not trying to offend women. Instead, they are attempting to assert their virility. In other words, my analyses lead me to assert that these narratives must be understood performatively. By using these misogynistic vulgar words, they are showing to their audience and fellow rappers that they dominate women and that they are not women themselves, since all these words allude to their penis and their regular heterosexual intercourse. In three out of the five extracts, the use of these speech acts is associated with more NSL and vulgarities: up to twice as much NSL and four times as many vulgar words. However, this correlation is not systematic. It happens that some artists who were not vulgar in the rest of the track still employ such misogynistic terms, since gender performativity is only one of many possible determinants.

As mentioned above, this performative use of misogynistic vulgar words is often accompanied by insults related to male homosexuality. The following track extracts illustrate this tendency:

Que les pédés restent tous à terre, je les mets tous à la herbi

(B-Lel, 2008, *Un gars à part*, “Un gars à part”; NSL: 12.44%; vulgarities: 2.63%)

Mon rap s’écoute dans les prides, le tien dans les Gay-Prides
(Soprano, 2007, *Puisqu’il faut vivre*, “Halla Halla”; NSL: 12.29%;
vulgarities: 1.46%)

Dakar hémisphère ouest, chez nous il y’a pas de pédés
(Alpha 5.20, 2010, *Scarface d’Afrique*, “Où est ton cœur négro?”; NSL:
7.55%; vulgarities: 2.74%)

T’as beau sucer le monde entier, tu ne seras jamais ivre
(Sultan, 2011, *Ils sont pas prêts*, “Badaboum”; NSL: 8.29%; vulgarities:
0.4%)

Trop d’pédés dans l’rap parlent mal, kho check mon numéro 9.2
(Booba, 2008, *Temps mort*, “Indépendants”; NSL: 11.47%; vulgarities:
1.94%)

The homophobic insults and references made in these extracts all serve as speech acts to perform a type of hyper-masculinity defined in opposition to homosexuality. These vulgar terms show that they are not themselves gay, that they are heterosexual artists who follow the heterosexist doxa. It is also apparent that this performativity is connected to higher uses of NSL and vulgar words among male rappers.

It is crucial to note that this tendency to use homophobic language does not apply to female rappers in the corpus at all, which can further explain the quantitative difference. Unlike with the use of misogynistic words, as we saw earlier in the chapter, the corpus did not contain a single illustration of such linguistic behaviour from women. It should not be concluded, however, that they never use them under any circumstances. The corpus contains tracks from some of the most famous and influential female rappers, so it is very representative in that respect, but the number of tracks is limited to twenty. If the corpus contained several times this number, some homophobic language might be found. Other determinants could also be at play, such as the impact of rap genres (see chapter 5). For example, homophobia in American rap lyrics has been linked to gangsta rap (Oware,

2011, p.25). Further research would be needed, however, to explore this possibility fully. Regardless, the emphasis needs to be placed on the discrepancy, not the complete lack of such words from the female corpus. Male rappers appear to use them more in this corpus. One possible explanation might be that being compared to a homosexual is usually an insult directed towards men, and female artists are therefore much less likely to perform their gender by appropriating these words.

In order to close the discussion of gender and NSL use, this final section will come back to the research question and offer concluding and summarising remarks with some last striking illustrations. The observation that male rappers used more vulgarities than female rappers might lead some people to conclude that female artists do tend to use more standard language after all. During the interviews, one of the two female rappers interviewed actually shared this opinion:

Oui je dirais que oui [that a difference does exist between male and female rappers with regards to NSL use] parce que quand tu vois Keny Arkana ou Ladéa, ben toutes les deux ont un langage plus soutenu, plus philosophe, plus réfléchi que 1995, on est bien d'accord. Donc peut-être qu'on pourrait faire alors une corrélation entre le niveau de réflexivité et le niveau de standardité du langage. Parce que je trouve que Keny Arkana et Ladéa ont un langage plus soutenu mais en même temps plus réfléchi. (Henrotte, 2013)

Florence Henrotte sees a link between women and a more skilled, standard and rational way of speaking. Regardless of how prevalent this idea is, it is actually based on unfounded myths, as has been abundantly demonstrated throughout this chapter.

Just as with any other gender performativity, strong contextual variations are present and counterexamples to this incorrect belief abound. Both extremes of vulgarity and NSL use are possible, as Black Barbie explains:

Pas forcément parce qu'il y a des rappeuses qui peuvent être très crues, très cash et des rappeuses qui peuvent être plus dans l'écriture et qui vont faire attention à ce qu'elles écrivent. (Black Barbie, 2013)

What Black Barbie describes in this quotation has indeed been observed in the corpus so far. We saw how female rappers can use misogynistic and adversarial language like men but their ability to emulate male rappers is not limited to vulgarities, sometimes they use a lot of NSL, as the following track extracts illustrate:

Mets les warnings si tu m'vois dans ton retro
Y aura pas d'zoum zoum zeng dans ton merco
Mon coco c'est la zik pas la cc
D'mande à Co qui speed sur mpc pas d'ex aequo
(Princess Aniès, 2008, *Au carrefour de ma douleur*, "Trop despee")

Dans les blocs y a rien d'malsain à faire du cash en sous-marin
Bail illicite-travail clandestin, toujours underground
Faut que nos mômes aillent à l'école le ventre plein
Et y a l'mandat cash à envoyer pour faire cantiner l'frangin alors
(Black Barbie, 2008, *Black barbie style*, "Underground")

Pour les sœurs speed, emboutés dans le métro
Zbeul dans la gove, check gros doigt dans le rétro
(Amy & Bushy, 2010, *I life*, "Zoulettes")

The three extracts from these female rappers contain a very high percentage of NSL, much higher than what the average male rapper uses. The existence of such lyrics shows that NSL is certainly not the prerogative of male rappers and that female rappers are as capable of using it as men are, sometimes even more so. For instance, the top three tracks with the most NSL in this section of the corpus are: "Pète sa mère" with 18.01% (El Matador, 2009, *Au clair du bitume*), "BX Vibes" with 16.52% (Scylla, 2009, *Immersion*), and "Trop despee" with 15.87% (Princess Aniès, 2008, *Au carrefour de ma douleur*). Princess Aniès, a female rapper, is in third position, which means that she used more NSL in her track than most male rappers in theirs. Moreover, the only track without a single NSL word was performed by a male artist (13hor, 2010, *Cris du Coeur*, "1960 gravé dans

nos coeurs”). This further strengthens the notion that gender alone, especially if limited to a simple male versus female analysis, cannot and does not explain variations of standard language use.

3. Conclusions

In this chapter, we analysed gender determinants of NSL in a corpus that compared male and female rappers. It can be concluded, both from the quantitative data and the qualitative analyses, that no real difference can be found between male and female rappers with regards to their NSL use. When differences are found, they are not very wide and can also be observed by only comparing men or only women. The only NSL category that stands out is the use of vulgarities. Although male artists used twice as many vulgar words, further analyses of the corpus prove that the total use of vulgar words by all rappers is quantitatively low and that great individual differences exist for both sexes in this respect too. These findings do not mean, however, that gender does not play a crucial role in relation to NSL use in French rap. In reality, gender performativity is very influential, but such performativities cannot be connected to “global categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’” (Cameron, 2007, pp.54-55). In this analysis, the strongest gender determinants are unequal power relations and hyper-masculine gender performativity. Power relations are essential because many male and female rappers react to heterosexist male dominance in the movement either by countering these views or by reinforcing them, and sometimes by doing both in the same track, which leads to specific gender performativities that are correlated with the presence or absence of NSL. Then hyper-masculine gender performativity is usually accompanied by higher use of NSL, especially slang and vulgarities, because these linguistic choices are used by both male and female rappers as speech acts to reinforce their image of hyper-masculinity.

In conclusion, the linguistic differences between male and female rappers seem to belong to the “Myth of Mars and Venus” (Cameron, 2007, pp.7-8). Furthermore, the fact that different performativities were found within single tracks by the same artists supports queer linguists’ assertion that gender performativities are contextual, fluid and temporary. These fluid and temporary ways of performing gender linguistically show how universalistic or binary discourses are hard to apply to the rap movement and how individual differences must be taken into consideration. In this regard, this study confirms the long list of books and articles on the topic of gender and language use that assert that no real difference exists that cannot be explained by culture or context. As this research still showed that the use of homophobic language seemed to be the prerogative of male rappers in the corpus, further research on a wider corpus will be needed to see if this attitude is generalised among female rappers or only limited to this study. It would be particularly important to see if other determinants might be at play that could explain this difference, such as the diaphasic determinants that will be explored in the next chapter. It would also be relevant to research whether this observation applies outside of the rap movement. Further research might also enable academics to find other differences linked to gender in French rap or on the contrary reduce the small differences observed in this corpus.

Chapter V:

“Mon rap prend de la protéine”, or an analysis of diaphasic determinants

1. Introduction

The last determinant of non-standard language (NSL) use in selected francophone rap tracks that will be analysed in the thesis is diaphasic. The term diaphasic typically refers to the notion that different styles or registers are used depending on the communicative setting (Coseriu, 1981, pp.1-32). This term must therefore be understood in connection with situational or contextual variation, which can ultimately be individual (Ferguson, 2006, n.p.). In other words, studying diaphasic changes means that researchers must analyse how one or more individuals express themselves depending on particular and varying linguistic, social or cultural contexts. In relation to the research questions, the quantitative and qualitative analyses developed in this chapter will look at how diaphasic variation determines the use of NSL categories (colloquial and vulgar words, abbreviations, slang, *verlan*, foreign borrowings and their combinations), which should further clarify to what extent these types of words are used in the genre, both from quantitative and qualitative perspectives. As in the previous chapters, the concept of performance will be central, along with a strong emphasis on aesthetics.

Before embarking on such a diaphasic analysis, some essential notions must be defined and understood: style, register, but also genre. Catherine Smith (2014, p.388) defines register as “a variable set of essential linguistic features that meet the communicative needs of a domain”, style as “a fixed set of features that identify a particular author or time period” and genre as “a fixed set of textual conventions for a particular type of

document”. Although these three terms have different definitions, it is difficult to completely separate one from the other. Genre and register complement each other, while style always determines them. Conventionally, register refers to the level of formality of language, often including varieties of language such as formal, informal, colloquial, or vulgar. Since the main focus of this thesis is NSL, which belongs mostly to informal and lower registers, it is apparent that register has been and will be a main focus in this analysis. As the corpus is constructed around many different individual rappers, style is also bound to be a strong determinant of NSL use. To make this analysis possible, however, the notion of genre had to come to the forefront initially. Indeed, the first level of diaphasic variation that had to be unpacked, and that formed the basis of the quantitative data and subsequent qualitative analyses, relates to the different musical trends, i.e. the genres present in rap music and more specifically French rap. These different genres have a determining impact on performance and can be separated relatively easily, allowing for the creation of a corpus.

Many different genres co-exist and sometimes intermingle (for more on the topic of rap genres, see e.g. Barret, 2008; Béthune, 2004 and 2003; or Cachin, 1996). The most (in)famous of them is probably *gangsta* rap, which is well represented in both America and France. This controversial form of rap music, in which criminal activities, stereotypical masculine behaviours, material possessions and misogynistic acts are put on a pedestal, has links with African-American socio-cultural practices such as “toasting”, telling the tale of an anti-hero who conquers all obstacles, and “the dozens”, an insult game, as well as life in American ghettos and French *banlieues* (Béthune, 2003, p.85; Béthune, 2004, p.129; Rosen and Marks, 1999, p.897). In this rap genre, transgression is central and the line between fiction and reality is often blurred, i.e. author and narrator do not necessarily coincide (Rosen and Marks, 1999, p.902 and p.910). Another famous form

of rap is called *freestyle*. Originally, this word designated improvised performances but nowadays it usually refers to a track or a performance that is devoid of narrative thread, i.e. a succession of lines and rhymes with little to no connection between one another (Barret, 2008, p.18).

Besides *gangsta rap* and *freestyle*, many other rap genres exist, such as *hardcore* and *alternative*, often with a distinction between commercial and independent, but this chapter will focus only on three: *jazz/poetic*, *knowledge* and *ego trip*. The analysis is limited to three genres because it would not have been possible to carry out a thorough analysis of all genres. The latter three were chosen due to their strong differences and their impact on French rap. These three genres have already been defined in the methodology (see chapter 1), but *ego trip* and *knowledge* rap require some additional clarifications. First, it is important to keep in mind that *ego trip* bears a strong resemblance to both *gangsta* and *freestyle* raps. *Ego trip* and *freestyle* are nearly synonymous because almost all instances of *ego trip* tracks are in *freestyle*, though the reverse is not necessarily true, because what matters is not so much what you say but how you say it, which leads to non-narrative productions and successions of *punchlines* (Barret, 2008, p.50). *Ego trip* is also very close to *gangsta* rap because the artists boast about all sorts of achievement, including their illegal activities and their success with women, which are all prominent features of *gangsta* rap (Béthune, 2003, p.78). Béthune (2004, p.47) stresses the symbolic nature of these performances, while Julien Barret (2008, p.40) reminds us that interpreting these texts as invitations to social revolt and violence would be nonsensical since the goal of the MCs is purely to show their ability to “handle the mike”, i.e. provide a good rapping performance for their audience. Then it should be noted that, although *ego trip* and *knowledge* rap are two very distinct tendencies in rap music, this does not mean that *ego trip* and *knowledge* rappers can be opposed. Barret (2008, p.19) stresses that most artists

will produce both types of tracks throughout their careers. Furthermore, *knowledge rap* forms a minority within the industry (Barret, 2008, p.27) and the criticisms expressed in these tracks often focus on exclusion and discrimination in the system rather than on a complete refusal of this political or capitalist system (Barret, 2008, p.24).

Any analysis looking at how genres determine language use must also look, therefore, at notions of aesthetics. Hanquinet *et al.* (2014, p.112) explain that “aesthetic dispositions have traditionally focused on how artistic preferences and aesthetic judgments are socially embedded”. Accordingly, all aesthetic understanding is constituted by the assimilation of a tradition without which it would be hard, if not impossible, to understand the true meaning and reach of artistic creations (Béthune, 2003, p.16). “Popular” art from one era can become classical for another (Shusterman, 1992, p.209). What is more, emotions aroused by art and hypersensitivity of the subject towards the aesthetic object are also central to the understanding of perceptions of art (Renoue, 2001, pp.127-128).

The researchers that emphasise the social dimension of aesthetics often draw on Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984a) (e.g. see Hanquinet *et al.*, 2014, p.112; Bennett, 2011, p.530). Bourdieu (1984a) considers that the construction of aesthetics is a social process and is therefore entangled in relations of domination and power. This is because “art, as opposed to daily life, cannot be appreciated immediately without any cultural resources” (Hanquinet *et al.*, 2014, p.112). In order to appreciate works of art, people need to acquire dominant and “legitimate” cultural capital, which is not equally distributed in society (Loesberg, 1993, pp.1052-1053). This leads to power struggles surrounding the “definition of legitimate, middlebrow, and popular culture” (Allen and Anderson, 1994, p.70), which are usually dominated by those who possess the most economic and/or cultural capital and who therefore impose their own taste hierarchy. The habitus also plays a role in this process by making people “misinterpret learned and acquired aesthetic tastes

as natural to” them (Loesberg, 1993, p.1040). What is more, Bourdieu (1984a, p.41) adds that working-class people define themselves in relation to dominant aesthetics, whether they accept or reject them.

Nowadays, however, researchers such as Hanquinet *et al.* (2014, p.114) point out that “aesthetic stakes have been transformed”. The importance of the historical canon is now “considerably eroded” and even maybe, to some people, “old fashioned” (Hanquinet *et al.*, 2014, p.114). Features of works of art, like “representation”, “harmony and beauty” or “artistic skills”, have slowly changed (Hanquinet *et al.*, 2014, p.115). Thanks to this erosion of the importance of the historical aesthetic canon, rap music can be even more readily accepted as an aesthetic object than before. In fact, as Béthune (2004, pp.21-23) explains, it would be a great mistake to investigate rap only from a sociological standpoint.

Furthermore, since aesthetic disposition towards “legitimate” culture is based, according to Bourdieu (1984a, p.34), on distance, whereas participation is central to “popular” culture, one of the elements that make rap music interesting is the fact that it bridges the gap between “legitimate” and “popular” culture. Indeed, rap operates a defamiliarisation of language in the traditional poetic sense, which serves to create distance from the audience. As Shklovsky (1998, p.19) explained, the goal of poetic speech is to “increase the difficulty and length of perception” and “remove the automatism of perception” in an effort to make individuals consider the artistic value of the language being used, which is exactly what French rappers do with their complex rhyming patterns and non-standard pronunciations and words. Yet, at the same time, the use of specific forms of NSL reduces this defamiliarisation and creates a link with equally specific audiences who have access to the meaning of those words. Moreover, the participation of the audience becomes even more apparent in rap concerts and battles, where they directly influence the artists’

performances. As a result, French rap represents an aesthetic blend of “legitimate” and “popular” culture.

The problem, however, is that rap music does not easily lend itself to an aesthetic analysis. As we saw in the literature review, it is not possible to use traditional musicological terms, such as key, melody or harmonic structure, to describe rap music (Béthune, 2004, p.62). Instead, the elements that define rap are *scratching* (moving a vinyl record back and forth), *mixing* (combining multiple sounds), *sampling* (re-using portions of sound from other recordings), but especially *beat* and *flow* (Kennett, 2001, p.353; Ortega, 2008, p.26). *Beat* must not be confused with rhythm. Although *beat* and rhythm can sometimes be identical, the essential characteristic of the *beat* lies in its regularity, its uniform pulsation, whereas rhythm can be variable (Broughton and Brewster 2003, p.101). *Flow* designates the quality of the verbal performance and depends on factors such as rhythm, timbre, or pronunciation (Béthune, 2004, pp.81-82). Furthermore, rap stands out by its appropriation and re-use of works from other artists instead of unique and individual creations, its eclecticism and mixing of genres and contents, its dependence on technology, and its challenge of aesthetic autonomy and artistic purity (Shusterman, 1992, p.211).

At the beginning of French rap, the first element that posed a real problem was the adaptation of American rhythm and stress. Indeed, while French and English have many consonants in common, they differ in their vowels, and especially the stress of these vowels (Nadsat, 2014, n.p.). French stress patterns are fixed and rappers can therefore not really play with them as much as American rappers. What is more, French is much less of a tonic language, which means that individual words do not normally get emphasised. Instead, the last word in a group united by meaning is stressed. Accordingly, French rappers had to adapt rapping to the reality of the French language while also, sometimes, adapting French to the reality of rapping.

The latter has happened in different ways. For example, Béthune (2004, pp.86-87) describes how some rappers modify the natural stress of French words to fit the *flow* better. Rubin adds (2002, p.4) that it is often this non-standard stress that leads people to interpret French rap as aggressive even when the lyrics and vocabulary have no violent or rude element, as in the following extract from 1995:

Car le rap c'est **froc** baissé tout le temps
Puis reviens réglo
Chacun de mes flows **choque** les p'tits, les grands
(1995, 2011, *La Source*, "La source")

Here, two words are strongly emphasised although they do not occur at the end of a group of words. This serves to disturb listeners' expectations and draw their attention to this rhyme, a tactic that might be interpreted as aggressive, although it could also be a consequence of the main *beat* that gets emphasised in the lyrics. Some other artists change the pronunciation of words to achieve certain effects, like pronouncing "playa" "pla - i - a" (Rubin, 2002, p.3).

While this non-standard pronunciation offered one possible adaptation, most of the earliest French rappers also adapted rap to the French language by drawing on classical French poetry and poetic meters like the Alexandrine. They made up for the lack of varying stress patterns by relying more on poetic meters. Barret (2008, pp.123-124) explains that poetic meters in early French rap tended to be regular, with more predictable rhyming patterns. With time, however, the poetics of French rap gradually became more complex, with a much smaller reliance on fixed numbers of syllables.

On top of this prosodic evolution, the focus of rappers has switched to complicated rhyming patterns, sound echoes and figures of speech over the last twenty-five years (Barret, 2008, pp.123-124). Rhyme, assonance, alliteration, comparison, and word play

have all evolved and become richer and more diversified. In other words, French rap has changed as much in a couple of years as classical poetry in several centuries (Barret, 2008, p.67). Nowadays, rhymes do not necessarily occur at the end of a verse and most rappers use assonance and paronomasias as much as rhymes. In fact, paronomasia has become the most widely used form of sound echo and the oversaturation of this figure of speech requires great articulatory capabilities (Béthune, 2004, pp.98-99). The following extract is a good illustration of modern rhymes and word play in French rap:

J'ai la cote, toi toi t'as l'entrecôte chez le boucher
Wallah que tes toilettes tu vas les boucher
Crouille, c'est le son qui va te faire quitter ta miss
 Pour une meuf guez-mer ou bien le mari de ton fils
Fissa fissa moi je m'en fiche m'affiche pas sur tes fiches-a
 Molotov toujours au charbon comme dans la chicha
 (Sefyu, 2011, *Oui je le suis*, "Mr Molotov")

The previous quotation is filled with rhymes, paronomasia, assonance and word play. The repetition of the word *boucher* represents an antanaclassis which plays with the confusion between two meanings: "butcher" and "to clog up". Much less obvious is the paronomasia between *la cote toi* and *(wal)lah que tes toi(lettes)*. This particular form of paronomasia is what we call a *rime semi-équivoquée* because these two sound groups are almost homonymous. There is also the *rime pauvre* between *boucher* and *quitter* and the *rime suffisante* between *miss* and *fils*. Moreover, we can see that rhymes do not always occur at the end of the verse, as *fils* and *fissa* are an example of a *rime annexée* (between the last word of the verse and the first one of the next). Further in the same sentence, we have another example of a *rime semi-équivoquée* between *m'en fiche* and *m'affiche* while the last word of the sentence, *fiche-a*, is connected to both *affiche* (repetition using *verlan*) and *chicha* (*rime riche*). One last element stands out from this extract and is very relevant to this thesis: the use of NSL. It is clear that NSL words are implicated in many rhymes,

such as *wallah*, *miss*, or *fiche-a*. One of the main goals of this analysis will be to make correlations between rap genres, sound echoes and NSL.

The last problematic aspect of a diaphasic analysis that needs to be addressed in this introduction is the notion of performance. As we have seen on many occasions, there is of course the idea that the artists, as narrators, are performing their creation like a role. Concretely, this means that, when rappers talk about crimes and violence for instance, the person talking or being talked about in the track may not necessarily be linked to the artist, but rather to an imaginary character, much like the characters from fiction novels (Kirsch, 2011, p.419). It is particularly relevant when taking into account the fact that many artists rap in all three genres of *knowledge rap*, *gangsta rap*, or *ego trip*.

There is, however, one further element of performance which must be considered. When the diaphasic analysis is carried out, it may not be enough to look at the transcribed lyrics. As Jeanette Bicknell (2005, p.263) claims, “song is music, text is not”. By this, she means that the text does not convey everything that can be gained from listening to the actual performance. For example, Tyler Bickford (2007, p.461) explains that a purely textual analysis of Bob Dylan’s “Down the Highway” would miss the relationship between *highway* and *baby* because, in his performance, Dylan rhymes *baby* with *highway*. To this, Francis Gooding (2012, pp.44-48) adds that it may not always be possible to transcribe rap lyrics adequately due to the inability to divide the lines or the voluntary ambiguity of some passages, to name but a few limitations.

Track performances can also be linked to videos. Numerous rap tracks have an official video, which can turn out to be very meaningful and shed some light on the interpretation of certain words, which was already made clear in Chapter 4. For this reason, a diaphasic analysis must also take videos into account. It is important to note that analysing a video

does not only mean looking at narrative threads. Carol Vernallis (1998, p.163) specifies how using a narrative thread is just “one of several ways to establish continuity”. In many instances, the video is constituted of a continuation of images which are linked to the lyrics, sometimes with a delay, and “the disposition of figures and their movement on a ground often takes the place of plot and character development in a traditional sense” (Vernallis, 1998, p.176). What is more, when it comes to rap music, lyrics and gestures in the video are often linked, which is certainly worthy of investigation in the upcoming analysis. Some researchers have also focused on the presence and effect of certain themes (see e.g. Sloane *et al.*, 2013; Conrad *et al.*, 2009). This can be relevant to the study of NSL, since a correlation might exist between violent themes, for example, and the presence of certain NSL words.

In conclusion, the diaphasic analysis in this chapter will try to understand how the use of NSL is affected by rap genres, aesthetics, figures of speech, themes and performance.

2. Quantitative data and qualitative analysis of the diaphasic determinants

The quantitative results (see Appendix II 5. for full tables) of the analysis of the differences in NSL use between *jazz/poetic* rap, *ego trip* and *knowledge* rap show that *ego trip* tracks contained much more NSL (10.22%) than the other two genres (3.18% for *jazz/poetic* and 2.32% for *knowledge*). In fact, *ego trip* artists used every single category of NSL much more, including ten times as much slang and almost 14 times as much *verlan* and combinations of categories. Then, *Jazz/poetic* rappers used half as many vulgar words and one third of combinations compared to *knowledge* artists while *verlan* was almost absent from both of these genres. When it comes to foreign languages, both *knowledge* (84.21%) and *jazz/poetic* (50%) rappers borrowed from English less than *ego trip* rappers (91.58%). This finding is quite unexpected, but it must be relativised because

both genres used very few foreign borrowings in total (18 words for *jazz/poetic* rap and 19 for *knowledge* rap). Furthermore, Latin words were used only in *jazz/poetic* and *knowledge* raps, while *ego trip* rappers borrowed from a wider variety of foreign languages. These rappers borrowed from four different languages, and their use of Arabic (6.31%) was relatively important. Finally, the use of grammatical categories was very similar in all three genres.

To explain these quantitative results, the qualitative analysis will first look into how rhymes, figures of speech, and other sound echoes determine NSL use. As Barret (2008, p.18) asserted, one of the main features of *ego trip* is the production of non-narrative tracks that accumulate memorable punchlines and sound echoes in order to glorify the ego of the artist. This main aesthetic goal of *ego trip* can have consequences for NSL use:

Oui ça il [NSL] y est, il n'y a pas photo. Mais ça aussi c'est pour la musicalité de ton texte. Quand tu dis un truc en verlan, parfois avec la rime qui suit tu as plus de possibilités de rimes. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

As Whoopy Jones mentions, a connection may exist between rhymes and NSL in *ego trip*. Indeed, as one of the artists' main goals is to make as many rhymes as possible, it could be hypothesised that the use of NSL will be correlated with this genre because this form of language increases rhyme possibilities.

To verify whether this claim can at least partially explain the quantitative results, it must be investigated whether *ego trip* tracks really contain a higher concentration of rhymes and other figures of speech and also whether these rhymes and figures of speech are linked to NSL. It will also be important to analyse to what extent these rhymes, and particularly the ones containing NSL, impact meaning, with a focus on how they help add emphasis and/or polyvalence of meaning. With this investigation in mind, one extract from every track of the diaphasic section of the corpus was analysed. Since it would be much too

lengthy to report on the analysis of every single extract thoroughly, the following study will focus on a few noteworthy examples. Even for these selected illustrations, describing all the rhymes verbatim would take a very long time while not necessarily being groundbreaking in and of itself. Accordingly, all rhymes, figures of speech and their connections will be represented schematically and only the most striking and important ones will be explored.²⁹

First, the analysis will focus on *ego trip* tracks, starting with the following extract from “Jalousie”:

J'rentre comme un M16 entre les mains d'un atteint de la Parkinson
 Ratatatatata fais pas l'pare-balles-tringue pas d'flingue c'est ta mort qui sonne
On espère s'en sortir, pourtant ça ne parle que de haram
 Les traîtres on les piétine, les jaloux on leur passe le salam
 Compose le eighteen, j'viens foutre le fire
 Tes oreilles prennent de la valeur
 Banlieue Sale, Foulek Empire
 La concurrence est prête à tout pour bronzer sous les palmiers
Écarter les jambes comme Jordan au-dessus du panier
 On court après la fraîche, les condés nous courent après
 Veulent des noms mais on préfère se faire contourner à la craie

(Sixcoups MC in La Fouine, 2011, *Capitale du crime* vol.3, “Jalousie”)

This extract does contain a very high concentration of figures of speech, with both internal and end-of-line rhymes, and many forms of sound echoes, which have an impact on meaning in several instances. The first meaningful connection in an end-of-line rhyme is

²⁹ In the next six extracts, NSL words will be highlighted as opposed to underlined to avoid confusion with the underlined rhyming words.

between *Parkinson* and *mort qui sonne*. Since in a rhyming pair, the second word usually gets the emphasis, this latter rhyme stresses the concept of death (*mort*). If these two words are analysed on their own, death can almost be seen as a logical conclusion to Parkinson's disease, but within the lyrics it also serves as an emphasised warning of impending scattered shots. This warning must be understood in relation to *pare-balles-tringue* (a word play between *parre-balles*, bulletproof, and *baltringue*, informer), since death is presented as the indiscriminate fate awaiting any informer. We can see how the rhymes, figures of speech and NSL all work together to draw the attention of the audience to key notions. After emphasising a threat, the artist moves on to a mockery in the second of the two lines containing the *rime suffisante haram* (sin) / *salam* (greeting). The double emphasis formed by these two words, which form a *rime suffisante* in Arabic, puts the mockery of jealous people to the forefront.

Then, a little further, we find a series of three rhymes that culminate in the use of *Empire* pronounced the English way. It is worth noting that, as Bickford (2007, p.461) stressed, it was essential to listen to the track to notice this English pronunciation and therefore the rhyme between *valeur* and *Empire*. These rhymes and the use of English stress the multinational appeal, value and power of *Banlieue Sale*, which can be interpreted literally, therefore forming a striking contrast, or seen as the music brand that it is. These examples of meaningful links between rhymes and the analysed extract of the lyrics, which are in no way exhaustive, show that not only is it clear that the text is oversaturated with figures of speech, rhymes and paronomasias, but it is also apparent that NSL plays a central and meaningful role in many of them. Furthermore, many of these sound echoes would not work if a standard word were to replace the non-standard one, such as *pare-balle-tringue*, *flingue*, *fire*, *empire*, or *eighteen*.

The next extract will allow us to see if this phenomenon is present in another *ego trip* track from the corpus:

Viens pas mettre le nez dans mes affaires
Mon rap prend de la protéine, souève v'là les haltères
Je fais des dons d'urine pour que la France entière se désaltère
L'Afrique c'est la terre, alors santé je déblatère
Portuaire est l'arrivage, le paysage est mortuaire
En banlieue, Mesdames, Messieurs, on fait dans la came et l'sports-wear
On met du blik au marché, Malik me clique sur Internet
Ce son c'est ma manière de dire d'aller niquer ta mère
Des MCs en millions d'pixels, le soir sur XXL
T'es assis négro, ça va du 4X au 6XL
Tu voudrais nous chier d'sus, dev'nir officiel
Tes grosses merdes se coupent en 2, essaye sans ton string ficelle
(Booba, 2006, *Ouest side*, "Le duc de Boulogne")

This extract from Booba is also highly saturated with figures of speech, rhymes and paronomasias with several skilled uses of meaningful NSL. The extract begins with a long series of *rimes suffisantes*, which quickly catch the attention of the audience due to their repetitive nature: *affaires*, *haltères*, *désaltère*, *déblatère*, *mortuaire*, *sports-wear* and *mère*, with *sports-wear* being spontaneously highlighted as the only NSL word in this series of rhymes. When looking at these words individually, it becomes clear that *mortuaire* seems out of place, especially in relation to the highlighted *sports-wear*. This connection between *sports-wear* and *mortuaire* is reinforced by their common non-standard pronunciation: they are pronounced with a stress on the first syllable and with

the second syllable close to the English / weər /. The contrast between *sports-wear* and *mortuaire* allows the artist to insert a new idea and stress it, while also setting an enigma. One possible interpretation is that the shadow of death inevitably follows people who take part in illegal businesses, like the immigrants in the line containing *mortuaire* who leave their countries on unsafe small boats. *Mortuaire* can also be analysed in relation to *banlieue*, since the end of the previous line and the beginning of the next could be interpreted as an enjambment. This serves to reinforce this image of death surrounding illegal businesses and *banlieue* life.

Although many more could be analysed, another meaningful use of NSL in rhymes can be found in the line ending with *XXL*. In this line and the following ones, Booba makes repeated use of the same rhyme again: *XXL*, *6XL*, *officiel* and *ficelle*. This brings the attention of the audience to them and especially to the two lines with *XXL* and *6XL* due to their additional high NSL content. These two lines draw an interesting picture. Booba makes simultaneous use of porn (*XXL*, an adult-rated TV programme), black people (*négro*) and large sizes (*6XL*). While Booba uses this to mock other rappers who try to become famous and to appear on television, this could also be seen as a criticism of the habit and history of commodifying black bodies (on this topic, see Okwedadi, 2009; or De Vignes, 2011). It is as if Booba was suggesting that black men are appropriated by the media to the point where they almost become porn stars, but also that they play into this history and these stereotypes through their cult of hyper-masculinity. The artist ends this critique by saying how the media and those who fall prey to them cannot really have any impact on them (*nous chier dessus*) because they keep on missing them (*tes grosses merdes se coupent en 2*), as they wear thongs (*string ficelle*) like strippers or porn stars. What we can remember from this extract is that, just like with the previous one, rhymes and figures of speech are numerous, many words have more than one connection with

other rhymes (e.g. *mortuaire*) and NSL is strongly implicated with many of these rhymes, often meaningfully.

These two extracts clearly illustrate that there is a strong correlation between *ego trip*, rhymes/figures of speech, and NSL. The rest of the corpus of *ego trip* tracks contains passages which resemble these two extracts, although the concentration of rhymes and NSL may vary slightly from one part of a track to another or between tracks. Now that this correlation has been made apparent, it will be compared with *knowledge* tracks:

Monsieur le Président,
Avec tout le respect que je dois à votre fonction
Je vous demanderai un peu d'attention
Je me présente à vous en tant que citoyen,
Sain de corps et d'esprit, en pleine possession de mes moyens
À l'heure où je vous parle, dans le pays le couvre-feu résonne
Je fais appel à l'article 19 de la déclaration des droits de l'homme
Sans étiquette, je ne jugerai que vos actes
D'avance, veuillez recevoir mes excuses les plus plates
(Axiom, 2006, *Axiom*, "Ma lettre au président")

This extract from Axiom has a much smaller emphasis on rhymes and figures of speech. Although there is a rhyme on every line, we can see that they are quite similar and less complex. Except for the *rime riche* between *possession* and *déclaration*, they all occur at the end of a line: *fonction/attention* and *citoyen/moyen*. We do find two instances of paronomasias, *résonne/homme* and *actes/plates*, but these are less complicated than in the *ego trip* tracks, with none being constituted by several words or occurring internally.

Most importantly, not a single word of NSL can be found in this extract and it is therefore not implicated in any rhymes or meaningful link between rhymes.

However, it does not mean that these rhymes and figures of speech do not have a meaning and purpose. They all evoke republican language with words like *fonction*, *citoyen*, *moyen*, *résonne* or *déclaration des droits de l'homme*, which is further reinforced by the remade version of the French national anthem serving as the music of the track. Some very revealing connections can also be drawn, for instance, between *fonction* and *attention*, implying that the president needs to be careful with his presidency, and *possession* and *déclaration des droits de l'homme*, as if the artist wanted to remind the president that they possess human rights. Nevertheless, this extract is very minimalist in its use of figures of speech, but it is not always so, which is well exemplified in the following extract:

Commissariat d'Aubervilliers, déposition ←
C'est Marie Leblanc qui porte plainte pour agression →
Contre une demi-douzaine de méditerranéens
Sanguinaires, maghrébins qui n'avaient rien de caucasiens →
En effet, même si la mémoire vous fait défaut →
Quels sont les faits, qui sont ces fous ? →
Quel trajet avez-vous fait ? ←
Marie raconte qu'en ce 9 juillet 2004 ←
Elle se rendait à la plus au nord de toutes les gares →
Embarquement 9h37 station Louvres ←
Sous le wagon la pression souffle et les portes s'ouvrent →
(Médine, 2008, *Arabian Panther*, "RER D")

This extract contains a greater complexity of rhymes and figures of speech, although no NSL is used. This complexity also extends to the meaning of some of the rhymes. To understand this extract well, it is important to keep in mind that it tells the story of Marie Leblanc who falsely claimed to have been mugged by anti-Semitic African and Maghrebi people in the Parisian metro in 2003. The first notable example is the line that ends with *caucasiens*. First, the artist uses rhyme to link this word with *maghrébins* and *méditerranéens*, even though they are opposed in the lyrics, which creates a form of paradox. Next, the rapper already partially expresses the truth behind this fake story by not making *sanguinaire* rhyme with *maghrébin*, whereas two other words (*rien* and *caucassiens*) in this line rhyme with it. This clearly sets *sanguinaire* apart, as if he was already trying to show his audience that there was indeed no link between these two terms. Then further in the extract, the rapper gives us another noteworthy example. Médine hints again at the truth with a series of paronomasias that focus on *fait*. The first line ends with *défaut* and the last one with *fait*. In between, the artist plays with words starting with *f*- so that the word *faux* is strongly implied even though it is not actually used, especially when taking *défaut* into account. Once more, the artist seems to use rhymes to hide meaning in his lyrics: these “facts” (*faits*) are fake (*faux*).

These were only two examples, and additional analyses of this extract would reveal more meaningful rhymes. As a result, this particular extract illustrates directly that some *knowledge* tracks contain many complex rhymes and figures of speech that impact the meaning of the lyrics, even though NSL did not feature in them. Nevertheless, despite this greater complexity, the two previous *knowledge* extracts did not reach quite the same level of oversaturation observed in the first two *ego trip* extracts. In fact, most of the *knowledge* tracks in the corpus oscillate between Axiom’s extract and Médine’s. In other words, rhymes in *knowledge* tracks appear to be much less to slightly less numerous than

in *ego trip* with little reliance on NSL to form rhymes, figures of speech, sound echoes and meaningful connections.

Lastly, we will look into *jazz/poetic* rap to see how the use of NSL correlates to figures of speech and rhymes. The following extract comes from MC Solaar's "Carpe Diem":

Au **ciné** c'était **Bebel**, en boîte **Genesis**
Le Goretex prend la place du Duffle-coat
Et ce sont des robots qui remplacent les cosmonautes
Le temps passe
Y'a plein de philosophes, mais plus d'philosophie
Fuck la fausse philo, vive la Philadelphie
Parfois je pense au **SVP** 11 11
A mon vieux jeu Simon, aux hommes volants de Folon
Le temps passe, **Alea Jacta Est**
Qu'on vienne de Budapest ou de gare de l'Est
Alors **Carpe Diem**
Parce qu'il faut du temps pour les gens qui s'aiment
(MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, "Carpe Diem")

The first observation is that not only does this extract contain many rhymes and figures of speech, but it also includes NSL. Furthermore, some of it is used in meaningful rhymes and figures of speech, as we will see. However, this NSL does not always belong to lower registers of language. For instance, two Latin expressions are used, which were marked as foreign borrowings although they are usually associated with formal language.

The second significant observation that can be made in this extract relates to how MC Solaar is trying to mark the passing of time with the passing of mass media, a very modern approach. Some of the first rhymes actually help him to stress this attempt. Although *duffle-coat* is initially contrasted with *goretex* and *cosmonautes* with *robots*, it is manifest that a similar contrast can be found between *duffle-coat* and *cosmonautes*, as the latter is much more modern. Yet, *cosmonautes* is still outdated to some extent because this word is associated with the Soviet space programme (Rey and Rey-Debove, 2011, *s.v.* *cosmonaute*) and could therefore be seen to belong to another era, unlike *robots*.

The same contrast can be observed between *philosophie*, which dates all the way back to Ancient Greece, and *Philadelphie*, a modern symbol of culture, knowledge and philosophy. By making this connection with a rhyme, MC Solaar is almost trying to say that philosophy made it possible for a city like Philadelphia to be created. As with many analyses of poetry or music lyrics, however, other interpretations are possible. For instance, *Philadelphie* can refer to the 1993 movie *Philadelphia* with Tom Hanks who plays the role of a gay man who eventually dies from AIDS, while it could also point to Philadelphia's role in African American music (see e.g. Kornfield, 2006). The word *Philadelphie* is also part of meaningful series of figures of speech centred on the notion of philosophy. When the rapper links *philosophes*, *philosophie*, *fausse philo* and *Philadelphie*, his use of a combination of NSL and figures of speech draws our attention to this part of the track. If we read between the lines, we can understand what he is referring to. It is very likely that he is making fun of the New Philosophers, such as Bernard-Henri Lévy, André Glucksmann, or Pascal Bruckner, who were often seen on TV in the 1970s and who did not win unanimous support. His mockery is quite subtle as, for instance, *fausse philo* almost sounds like *verlan* for *philosophe*, which does not add to their credibility.

Finally, his use of *carpe diem*, an idiom borrowed from Latin, also provides the audience with polyvalence of meaning. It can be understood in a mundane way or in relation to Renaissance poets. In the everyday sense, *carpe diem* can be taken as the logical conclusion of the track. As everything around us changes so rapidly, we need to enjoy what we have while it lasts. What is more, the use of *carpe diem* also further emphasises the idea of change introduced earlier in the track. Indeed, *carpe diem* poems were a standard genre within Renaissance poetry, as illustrated by Pierre de Ronsard (1578) in “Cueillez dès aujourd’hui les roses de la vie”, and MC Solaar is acknowledging this, while showing us that poetry is in constant change.

From the analysis of this short extract, we have observed that rhymes and figures of speech were numerous, and that several NSL words were linked to them, sometimes with meaningful emphasis and polyvalence. The next extract from Rocé will help us see if this level of complexity and involvement of NSL is achieved by other *jazz/poetic* rappers:

L'enfance a besoin d'escorte dans le souci du lendemain.
 On choisit pas toujours ses potes, souvent ça vient comme ça vient.
 On forme des groupes qu'on supporte, croire à un destin commun
 Ça rend sûr, ça enveloppe l'amitié sur le terrain.
 Y a des violences qu'on voit pas, comme un sourire trop grand pour être vrai.
 Des bruits qui peuvent bless, quand on s'connait depuis le CP.
 Mais on sort les mauvais morceaux, parce que ça sert de parler.
 Surtout quand ta bande glande trop, et qu't'as le prestige de la saler.
 (Rocé, 2006, *Identité en crescendo*, “Amitié et amertume”)

Rocé’s extract contains fewer rhymes and figures of speech and slightly less NSL (three words: *potes*, *CP*, and *glander*; with possibly *saler* that may have a non-standard meaning

in this context). Yet, their presence is still rather significant and offers additional interpretation on some occasions, which is why we will analyse the two rhymes that contain NSL.

First, we find a *rime semi-équivoquée* between *escorte*, *ses potes* and *supporte*. In terms of meaning, *ses potes* can be analysed as being surrounded by the two key notions of *escorte* and *supporte*. The presence of these figures of speech accentuate the ambiguity of the lyrics by drawing the attention of the audience to their two potential interpretations. *Escorter* can be understood as “protecting” or “following” and *supporter* as “helping” or “putting up with”. The reason why Rocé does not clarify what he means exactly could be because he wants us to understand that this is how friendships actually are, fluid and ambiguous with highs and lows. Second, the line that contains *CP* includes a rhyme that is a good illustration of polyvalence. The *rime pauvre interne* between *blesses* and *CP* reveals a dimension of meaning that is not readily apparent in the lyrics, which states only that it is rumours (*des bruits*) that can hurt friendships. But by making these two words rhyme, Rocé insinuates that primary school can also hurt. So we saw, from this short analysis, how this extract also exhibits many rhymes and figures of speech, with some having more than one connection with other words. The use of NSL is not very marked but still involved in two rhymes that turned out to be essential to decipher the different layers of meaning.

Based on this first qualitative analysis, it cannot be denied that *ego trip* was the genre that included the highest quantity of rhymes and figures of speech together with the highest involvement of NSL in these rhymes. Not only were their lyrics oversaturated with rhymes and figures of speech, numerous words had two or more rhyming connections, which proved to be essential to understand all layers of meaning. Accordingly, the use of rhymes and figures of speech can be said to play some role in the appearance of NSL in

ego trip. This conclusion is partially confirmed by the fact that *knowledge* rap appears to be the genre with the least rhymes and figures of speech while also displaying the smallest overall quantity of NSL. However, we have also seen that rappers in some tracks, especially in *jazz/poetic* raps but even in *knowledge* tracks, do rely a lot on rhymes and figures of speech as well. Indeed, in some *jazz/poetic* tracks, both the oversaturation and the complexity of rhymes sometimes rivalled those of *ego trip* in terms of simple numbers and involvement of NSL in emphasised and ambivalent meanings. Yet, their overall use of NSL is much smaller. This shows that there is no clear and direct correlation and that other aspects of genre and aesthetics will need to be analysed to explain the increased use of NSL in *ego trip*.

The next determining effect of genres and aesthetics that will be explored is that of the representation of themes. One of the strongest differences between the three genres studied in this analysis is the topics discussed in the tracks and the types of narratives developed. During the interviews, Akro from Starflam summarised this notion very well:

Tout d'abord, soit on utilise notre langage habituel dans les textes, soit on utilise des niveaux de langage différents pour coller à un thème ou exprimer quelque chose de différent. Nos raps sont parfois proches du langage parlé, parfois du langage écrit. Cela dépend du thème abordé et de la réflexion amenée par ce thème. (Akro, 2013)

In this quotation, we can see very clearly that the artist is making a conscious decision to employ a specific language register depending on the theme and the objective of the track. There is one factor in particular that could explain why themes might play such a major role in NSL use for this section of the corpus: the link between *ego trip* and violence. As Julien Barret (2008, pp.491-502) described, notions of violence and crime are very common in *ego trip* tracks, with frequent use of words such as *fusil*, *mort*, *cogner*, *crime*, *carnage*, or *meurtre*. The recourse to talking about crime and violence could be seen as a

natural consequence of the goal of appearing as the best and therefore the need to criticise, and so metaphorically to kill, your opponents.

In the interviews, two artists, Scylla and El Matador, also focused on this inevitable link between *ego trip* and verbal violence:

(...) si tu es plus dans l'égo et que tu vas plus dire moi je suis meilleur et je le revendique, et ben tu vas utiliser un vocabulaire plus guerrier d'une manière à pouvoir descendre les autres. A partir du moment où tu descends les autres, il y a des touches d'ironie. Tu fais appel à la punch line, à certaines formes de langage non standardisé. (Scylla, 2013)

Il y a l'égotrip mélangé un peu au rap street qui est de parler de ce que tu vois, de ce que tu vis constamment. Alors les gens vont utiliser au maximum des codes du quartier. Les codes standard de rue. Ca va parler de flic, de drogue, de machin, etc. Forcément dans ça va se greffer le langage non standard. (El Matador, 2013)

As Scylla describes, it is not unreasonable to assume that *ego trip* rappers will resort to using a “warrior-like” language, even if it might be done ironically by some artists. Trying to sound the best can be achieved by simply producing lyrics with the highest quality, but many rappers, following the African American tradition of the *dirty dozens*, will prefer a more direct approach by mocking, threatening and insulting their competition.

Then, El Matador explains that *ego trip* is often mixed with street or *banlieue* culture. One of the reasons why rappers use such street codes, on top of the other reasons explored in chapter 3, is to produce types of performances and narratives that will appeal to specific audiences, as observed in chapter 2:

L'argot c'est aussi pareil, c'est pour toucher le public que tu veux toucher, il comprendra ce que tu veux dire. Tu vas parfois utiliser des mots que seul, enfin moi ça m'est déjà arrivé, que seul un groupe de personnes va comprendre. C'est un langage encore plus restreint et c'est pour toucher certains publics. (Whoopy Jones, 2013)

Indeed, as Whoopy Jones remarks, it is not enough to produce a track that is, in itself, superior to others with the cleverest mocking, threatening and insulting lyrics. It is equally important, given the increased competition between rappers described in chapter 2, to make sure that the track is catered towards a specific audience that will possess the socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge to recognise the superior quality of the track.

If a real correlation exists between the use of NSL, *ego trip* and violent/*banlieue* themes, a thorough analysis of themes in several tracks should unveil it. The themes that were chosen for this analysis were influenced by Conrad *et al.*'s 2009 article on "Controversial Rap Themes, Gender Portrayals and Skin Tone Distortion: A Content Analysis of Rap Music Videos" whose themes were adapted to the context of French rap. In the end, the analysis concentrated on the following themes: materialism (the display of wealth or consumption), misogyny (sexualising or objectification of women and/or dominance of men over women), violence (threats, physical force, displaying or firing weapons, and criminality), political awareness (advocating a political position or raising awareness of political or societal problems), expression of culture (displaying symbols of hip hop or *banlieue* culture), disaffection with mainstream society (showing contempt for dominant beliefs or societal pillars), and group unity (groups of people gathered together). Since *jazz/poetic* rap and *ego trip* were so similar in terms of their use of rhymes and figures of speech, the following qualitative analysis, which will look at both videos and lyrics, will compare two *ego trip* tracks with two *jazz/poetic* ones.

First, this study will focus on the videos. Analysing these videos will be interesting because they contain two different ways of making a music video. One from each genre contains a narrative thread (MC Solaar's "Carpe Diem" and La Fouine's "J'arrive en balle") while the other two do not contain any clear ones (MC Solaar's "Le Davinci

Claude” and La Fouine’s “Jalousie”). The following table contains the number of occurrences per theme per minute (statistical mean):

<u>Occurrences of themes per minute</u>	Carpe Diem (4.42% NSL)	Le Davinci Claude (2.62% NSL)	J’arrive en balle (9.09% NSL)	Jalousie (11.11% NSL)
Materialism	0.88	8.74	0	15.29
Misogyny	0	5.53	0	0
Violence/crime	6.73	0	3.18	2.74
Political awareness	0	0	0	0
Expression of culture	0	1.16	34.04	47.64
Dissatisfaction with mainstream society	0	0	0.24	0
Group unity	0	4.07	0	6.86

The results from this table can seem somewhat counterintuitive. Indeed, the track with the smallest amount of NSL still contains many occurrences of misogyny and even more of materialism. What is more, “Carpe Diem” was the track with the highest number of violent themes. Not surprisingly, however, the *ego trip* tracks clearly distance the

jazz/poetic tracks in terms of expression of *banlieue* and rap culture while “Jalousie”, the track with the highest use of NSL, contains the most materialistic themes.

Nevertheless, these numbers alone are not enough to get a real picture of the themes in these tracks. Some of the scenes in which these themes are depicted appear numerous times throughout the videos (e.g. rappers standing in front of some graffiti). Choosing to repeat them can be regarded as meaningful, but it is also necessary to analyse the results without taking such repetitions into account. The next table therefore presents the number of occurrences of different themes:

<u>Occurrences of different themes per minute</u>	Carpe Diem (4.42% NSL)	Le Davinci Claude (2.62% NSL)	J’arrive en balle (9.09% NSL)	Jalousie (11.11% NSL)
Materialism	0.58	1.45	0	1.17
Misogyny	0	1.45	0	0
Violence/crime	1.17	0	1.71	1.37
Political awareness	0	0	0	0
Expression of culture	0	0.58	2.93	7.84
Dis. with mainstream society	0	0	0.24	0

Group unity	0	1.16	0	0.58
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Once all repetitions have been taken out, this table already tells a very different story. First of all, we can see that “Carpe Diem” is no longer the video with the most violent themes. In fact, this video contains very few of the themes that were selected for this analysis. Furthermore, materialism and misogyny have become much less prevalent in “Le Davinci Claude”. One theme in particular stands out: the expression of rap and *banlieue* culture. In both “J’arrive en balle” and “Jalousie”, this theme is the most prevalent, whereas it is almost absent from the two *jazz/poetic* videos. These results, however, still do not tell the full story of the effect of themes in these tracks. They show only very broad and abstract categories and do not look at how the rappers performed these themes in the videos. This is why a more qualitative analysis of all four videos will be carried out to see how these themes are represented and what it can mean for the use of NSL.

First, the two narrative videos will be looked at, followed by the non-narrative ones. “Carpe Diem” and “J’arrive en balle” both tell a story that centres on a car. Yet, the actual depictions of themes in the videos are very different. We saw earlier that both videos contain violent themes, but we quickly realise that this violence is accidental in “Carpe Diem” and criminal in “J’arrive en balle”. In “Carpe Diem”, the first images that the viewers see are those of a crashed car, which explodes a few seconds into the video. Most



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, “Carpe Diem” (0:15)

of the violent images in the rest of the video are related to this car crash. On the contrary, “J’arrive en balle” begins with the two rappers stealing a

police car and threatening its occupiers. Most of the violence in the video focuses on this robbery. The rappers are seen on many occasions driving around the city in the police car with a man wearing a balaclava and brandishing a gun through the window. The rappers also pretend to shoot in the air with their fingers and give the viewer the finger.



La Fouine, 2011, Capitale du crime vol.3, "J'arrive en balle" (0:34)

So we can see that, although both videos contain violent elements, their nature varies greatly so that the way they determine NSL use cannot be compared. The same applies to the presence of materialism in the videos. In "Carpe Diem", MC Solaar is seen wearing an expensive suit and driving a fancy car, but the emphasis is not necessarily on the accumulation of material goods. His expensive white suit comes to symbolise his death while the fancy car ends up destroyed, which could in fact be interpreted as a rejection of capitalist values. In "J'arrive en balle", La Fouine exposes his expensive jewels and watch and the artists, when they steal a police car, seem to promote both a rejection of authority as well as theft, violence and crime to



La Fouine, 2011, Capitale du crime vol.3, "J'arrive en balle" (0:48)

acquire material goods. Again, this theme is treated completely differently in the two videos and it is not hard to understand why the *ego trip* track contains more NSL. This higher presence of NSL is also further

explained by the fact that only "J'arrive en balle" contains expressions of *banlieue* and rap culture. Much graffiti is seen throughout the video and the artists wear typical rap outfits with hoodies, hats, sunglasses, and/or jewels.

The other two videos, “Le Davinci Claude” and “Jalousie”, contain similar themes but we will see that they are handled very differently too. In “Le Davinci Claude”, no violence



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, “Le Davinci Claude” (0:06)

can be observed, whereas the rappers and the people in “Jalousie” pretend to shoot with their hands or to fight with their fists on many occasions. Materialism is very

present in both videos. “Le Davinci Claude” presents people with expensive clothes going to a nightclub. This representation of materialism cannot be denied but it is portrayed very differently from “Jalousie”. In the latter, the rappers dance in front of expensive sports cars



La Fouine, 2011, Capitale du crime vol.3, “Jalousie” (2:37)

and La Fouine pretends to sleep in a suitcase full of 500-euro notes. Next, the expression of rap or *banlieue* culture is almost absent from MC Solaar’s video: only two people look like rappers and they are lost in a



La Fouine, 2011, Capitale du crime vol.3, “Jalousie” (0:37)

large crowd of people with no link to hip hop. On the contrary, La Fouine’s video shows numerous people who look like rappers, hip hop artists and youths from the *banlieues*. Furthermore, they are presented to the viewer amidst much

graffiti. Then group unity is also depicted very differently. In “Le Davinci Claude”, people appear united in the nightclub, while they dance and party, whereas people in

“Jalousie” gather in dark streets, near graffiti, and in dark staircases. The street is indeed much more present in the latter video. When these details are studied, the discrepancy of NSL, despite what seemed like similar themes, becomes much more understandable. The only counterargument to this observation is the presence of misogyny in MC Solaar’s video only. The camera focuses on women’s body parts several times and a few women can be seen sitting around the rapper, flirting with him while simultaneously touching and kissing each other.

One of the ways to try and explain this discrepancy between misogyny in the video and low use of NSL use is to analyse the presence of themes in the lyrics. The themes from the lyrics may not coincide with those from the videos. For this reason, we will also study the following table which presents the occurrence of themes per 100 words (statistical mean):

<u>Occurrences of themes per 100 words</u>	Carpe Diem (4.42% NSL)	Le Davinci Claude (2.62% NSL)	J’arrive en balle (9.09% NSL)	Jalousie (11.11% NSL)
Materialism	0	0	0.45	1.66
Misogyny	0	0	0.68	0.83
Violence/crime	0.67	0.78	3.18	2.77
Political awareness	0.67	1.57	0	0
Expression of culture	0	0	2.27	1.94

Dis. mainstream society	1.12	0	0.68	0.27
Group unity	0	0	0.45	0

In the case of misogyny, this study leads to a very different interpretation. The reverse of what occurs in the videos can be observed: the *jazz/poetic* tracks do not contain any misogynistic language or themes whereas both *ego trip* tracks do. In “J’arrive en balle” and “Jalousie”, we can hear expressions such as *niquer ta reum, ma nouvelle tasse[-pé], aimer une pute c’est traîner son couple sur un trottoir, nique sa mère, des garces sincères, or ta nympho’*. It must also be noted that these expressions contain a lot of NSL.

Then violence is found to be handled very differently in both genres. For example, in the two *jazz/poetic* tracks, we hear:

J’tente pas de me débattre, ils ont des tas de balles en silicones
(MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, “Carpe Diem”)

Il faut s’y faufiler de nuit et si possible d’un pas smooth
Ou que le gardien te couvre sinon c’est l’alerte rouge
(MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, “Le Davinci Claude”)

It is clear that only rubber bullets are being fired in “Carpe diem” instead of real ones while, in “Le Davinci Claude”, MC Solaar is trying to avoid *l’alerte rouge*, which would mean commotion and probably fighting. Violence is therefore indirect and metaphorical in these two extracts. On the other hand, violence in the *ego trip* tracks is physical or literal and often relates to criminality, with expressions such as *j’ai chargé mon gun, tu te fais descendre, Tout vient à point à qui apprend à vendre, Capitale du crime, y a que les flingues qui éternuent, un brolic dans le gosier, or Les traîtres on les piétine*. Once

more, it is apparent in the previous extracts that this theme in *ego trip* strongly correlates with NSL.

The above differences also extend to how dissatisfaction with mainstream society is depicted in the tracks. In “Carpe Diem”, this dissatisfaction focuses on constant change and modern consumption habits:

Avant avec des francs je partais acheter des picorettes
Maintenant avec des euros c’que j’demande ce sont des Nicorette
(MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, “Carpe Diem”)

MC Solaar in this extract is nostalgic for the time when he could buy snacks with francs instead of medicine with euros nowadays, which shows that these criticisms focus on society at large. On the contrary, the criticisms in “J’arrive en balle” apply only to one category of people, with three repetitions of *on n’a plus rien à perdre*. There is little doubt, especially when taking the content of the video into account, that *on* refers to disadvantaged people from the *banlieues*.

Lastly, not all themes are present in both genres. For instance, only the two *ego trip* tracks contain materialistic themes: *CL 63 MG*, *Je suis en tête des ventes*, *J’suis dans mon Jacuzzi*, *ma montre est suisse-suisse-suisse*, or *bronzer sous les palmiers*. The same can be said about expressions of *banlieue* and rap culture, which feature only in *ego trip* and seem to be strongly correlated with NSL: *devant le bloc*, *Les rappeurs*, *punchlines*, *le flow*, *Ghetto*, *représente la rue*, *l’peura*, *banlieue sale*, *rap game*, *Neuf-trois*, or *tier-quar*. Finally, only the two *jazz/poetic* tracks made references to political awareness, which are illustrated in the following extracts:

Ils ont capté nos droits et installé la fausse démocratie
(...)
Il y a des satellites je cours si on m’alpague
(MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, “Carpe Diem”)

On nous cache des choses depuis Adam et Eve
 (...)

Des tas de secrets d'Etats sont là devant toi
 (MC Solaar, 2007, *Chapitre 7*, "Carpe Diem")

Like dissatisfaction with mainstream society, we can see that this theme in both tracks focuses on society at large again. Indeed, MC Solaar criticises the failures of democracy, the constant monitoring of people, and the untrustworthiness of political figures. These problems do not affect solely the disadvantaged youths from the *banlieue*. His target audience is much broader and, as a result, we observe a much lower reliance on NSL and especially slang, *verlan* and vulgarities.

The previous theme analysis of both videos and lyrics already clarified many diaphasic and aesthetic determinants with regards to theme performance but one last factor still needs to be taken into account. Rappers are famous for moving their hands profusely while rapping. As this practice is so widespread, this can lead researchers to wonder whether a link exists between certain words and the performance of gestures, especially in relation to NSL. Consequently, the last content analysis carried out for this chapter focused on the link between NSL and rap gestures. The four tracks that were studied are the two *ego trip* and two *jazz/poetic* tracks from the theme analysis. The next table summarises the percentage of NSL words that were emphasised by some type of gesture:

<u>Tracks</u>	% of gestures linked to NSL use
Carpe Diem	25% (5 gestures for 20 NSL words)
Le Davinci Claude	30% (3 gestures for 10 NSL words)
J'arrive en balle	50% (20 gestures for 40 NSL words)

Jalousie	49% (39 gestures for 79 NSL words)
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When analysing these results, it becomes apparent that the rappers in *ego trip* tracks relied approximately twice as much on such gestures in connection to NSL. This higher presence of emphasised NSL words is even more significant when considering that NSL words were 5 to 10 times more prevalent in these two *ego trip* tracks. This could be indicative of the greater importance of NSL in *ego trip*. In some cases, the employed



La Fouine, 2011, *Capitale du crime vol.3, "J'arrive en balle"* (1:00)

gestures look very meaningful. For example, in “J’arrive en balle”, La Fouine pretends to shoot with his hand while saying *J’arrive en balle et j’ai chargé mon Glock*. This type of gesture cannot be interpreted as random. The

rapper evidently wishes to stress this specific concept and chooses to do so by using emphasised NSL. In another example, La Fouine spells *S* and *L* in the air with his right finger while rapping *T’as toutes mes punchlines dans ton S-line*. In this same track, Fababy also uses meaningful gestures.

For instance, he rubs his thumb against his throat while saying *L’état nous rackette comme des pas nets*. Many meaningful gestures in these *ego trip* tracks have a rude or violent overtone.



Fababy in La Fouine, 2011, *Capitale du crime vol.3, "J'arrive en balle"* (1:00)

The rappers often pretend to shoot people using one or two hands in the shape of guns or machine guns, they punch and kick the air, they point their middle finger to the audience, or they make threatening gestures. This goes to show that violence is at the core of *ego*

trip and this violence, which is linked in many cases to NSL, goes beyond the lyrics to determine the artists' behaviours and gestures.

The gestures observed in the two *jazz/poetic* tracks were quite different. First, as mentioned before, NSL words were less numerous in these tracks and they tended to be less emphasised by gestures. Nevertheless, some NSL words were indeed accompanied



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, "Carpe Diem" (0:38)

by gestures. For example, MC Solaar rubs his thumb and fingers together to signify 'money' while saying *Et puis la carte de Moreno veut effacer le flouze*. Moreover, he crosses out the air with his arms while rapping *Il y a*

de l'info, de la désinfo, au-delà des infos, tout cela n'est pas faux. Despite these examples, most gestures in these two tracks have no connection to NSL. Yet this does not stop MC

Solaar from using gestures meaningfully. When he utters *Le Goretex prend la place du*

Duffle-coat, he brings his arms together and crosses them on his chest as if he were wrapping himself in a coat. He is also seen grabbing the air while saying *Ils récupèrent la foi, mettent des 4 par 3 du Christ* or



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, "Carpe Diem" (0:55)

spreading his arms away from his body like Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of the Vitruvian man while rapping *Je suis comme dans un chapitre du Da Vinci Claude*, to name but a few.

Second, the gestures with a violent overtone are also very different from the ones found



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, "Le Davinci Claude" (1:30)

in the two *ego trip* tracks. These violent gestures are much less directly threatening. They are not really threats but rather contextualised gestures.

For example, we can see MC

Solaar pretending to fight with a sword while uttering *La troupe arrive en force et je suis face à des gladiateurs*. He is not trying to warn or threaten people but simply illustrating how gladiators used to fight. He makes a similar gesture, as if he was cutting something with a machete, when rapping

Qu'ils ont bu du jus de coco qu'ils sont coupés au coupe-coupe. Again, this gesture poses no threat to the audience or potential enemies, it appears



MC Solaar, 2007, Chapitre 7, "Le Davinci Claude" (2:23)

merely to be an illustration of his lyrics. Even when he pretends to shoot with his hands, these gestures need to be interpreted very differently from those in the *ego trip* tracks. For example, MC Solaar shoots the air with his hands while rapping *Dans les Simpsons on sait qui a tué Kenny* and *Mais la question que l'on se pose est: "Qui a tué Kennedy?"*. It is apparent in these two extracts that the artist is not trying to threaten anyone or to display aggressive behaviour but simply, again, illustrating his lyrics.

Finally, it must also be observed that not all gestures have such meaningful interpretations. Sometimes the artists are only seen waving their hands or fingers as they pronounce a particular NSL word or a regular sentence. These gestures do not seem to

carry extra linguistic meaning and are only there as a form of dancing or to emphasise the *beat* and the rhythm.

3. Conclusions

In this chapter, the diaphasic determinants of NSL use in the corpus were explored and analysed, mostly with a focus on the aesthetics and genres of these tracks. The analysis looked at three genres in particular: *ego trip*, *knowledge* and *jazz/poetic* rap. It can be concluded from both the quantitative data and qualitative analyses that the genre of the tracks is a strong determinant of NSL use. To be more specific, whether a track belongs to *ego trip* proves to be crucial, as this genre is much more likely to contain high quantities of NSL, i.e. three to four times as much as the other genres according to the quantitative results. When it comes to the qualitative analysis, the depiction of themes in the tracks can be singled out as the main diaphasic determinant of NSL in *ego trip*. As the goal of many *ego trip* tracks is to attack other rappers and convince the audience of the rapper's superiority, these tracks often contain adversarial themes and narratives to criticise the competitors and street elements to convince the audience, which translates into higher occurrences of NSL words that are associated with violence, materialism, misogyny and life in the *banlieues*. Rhymes, sound echoes and figures of speech play a role as well but their impact is much less direct and irrefutable. *Ego trip* rappers do use more NSL in their rhymes, and usually more rhymes on average, than their counterparts, but both *jazz/poetic* and *knowledge* tracks have shown that it is possible to concentrate many rhymes, sound echoes and figures of speech in short extracts without necessarily seeing an increase in NSL, which demonstrates that the correlation between the two is weak.

This chapter has shown that French rap has a high aesthetic dimension. The rappers' lyrics can be seen as manifestations of this aesthetic imperative, as they contain numerous

rhymes, sound echoes and figures of speech as well as specific words and metaphors that relate to the themes of the tracks. This applies to videos as well, which feature many stylised elements such as clothing items, meaningful settings (e.g. surrounded by graffiti) and narratives (e.g. committing crimes), or various gestures that can be linked to the lyrics. Furthermore, power relations are central to the depiction of these aesthetic components, especially in *ego trip* tracks that contain many references to life in the *banlieue* and the inequalities that people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods have to face in their daily lives. In this regard, the notion of performance is essential because, as Kirsch (2011, p.419) argued, rappers actually play a role in their tracks. This is particularly visible in *ego trip* when rappers talk about the *banlieues*, as the glorification of violence, crime and hyper-masculinity cannot be analysed as biographical elements, but rather as common aesthetic performances and narratives in the genre. Finally, further research would be useful to consolidate the current findings. Such research could focus on the issue of theme depiction in French rap to repeat the qualitative analysis from this study in a larger corpus to see whether the same correlations would be found.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyse NSL use in a corpus of selected francophone rap tracks with the aim of researching, defining and discussing the various factors that determine its use. The first research question that will be tackled in this conclusion is the extent to which rap artists use this NSL and the form that it takes in the corpus. It can be concluded from the overall quantitative results that on average French rappers use a high quantity of standard words (around 93%) with mostly colloquial words (2.73%) and foreign borrowings (2.06%), especially English (81.41% of all borrowings). This observation shows that for the average rapper, many of the myths surrounding language in French rap turn out to be unfounded, such as the belief that French rappers use a lot of vulgarities, slang and incorrect French (Pecqueux, 2009, p.41). Although these myths are clearly incorrect when taking the whole French rap movement into consideration, the wide variety of results found from one artist to the next in some sections of the corpus demonstrates that such stereotypes are not completely groundless. Some rappers actually use up to 20% NSL in their tracks, with a strong reliance on slang, *verlan*, Arabic and vulgarities, hence the central place given to the determinants of this variation in the thesis.

When it comes to the form that this NSL takes in the corpus, it can first be observed that these words usually refer to specific types of words over others. For example, colloquial words are often related to money, illegal activities, everyday expressions, or body parts, while vulgar words centre on direct insults, interjections and sexual or scatological words. The study also shows that the use of foreign languages in the corpus, i.e. borrowings and code-switching, is not completely similar to that of everyday life because language in rap music is part of a performance and therefore not spontaneous, which is apparent in the widespread tendency to borrow words from American rap. Then the use of slang

illustrates again how French rappers' language is not necessarily cryptic, since many artists rely on common, long-established French slang, although non-standard resuffixations and modern *banlieue* slang are not unusual. Furthermore, French rappers may not employ much *verlan*, but it nevertheless comes from a variety of sources, which include monosyllabic and polysyllabic French words as well as other NSL categories, such as English or slang. Finally, the previous tendency to combine categories is even more pronounced when it comes to abbreviations, which are composed of either initialisms, acronyms, apocopes or aphereses, with apocopes being much more common than aphereses.

The above findings are of interest, but only in terms of the scope of the quantitative approach. These overall results mostly confirm what other researchers had previously concluded from studying smaller corpuses or from their intuition. The originality of this research lies in its findings concerning the focus on the determinants of NSL variation in the corpus, which relates to the second research question. When looking at all the results of the analyses of diachronic, diatopic, gender and diaphasic determinants, it can be concluded that two determinants stand out from the others regarding their quantitative impact on NSL: the diachronic and diaphasic determinants. To be more precise, high NSL use in the corpus is most prevalent in 2011 for the generational analysis and in the *ego trip* genre. These two elements should not, however, be regarded as completely separate determinants, they actually work hand in hand. French rappers in 2011 had to face much more competition, which translates into higher NSL use to stand out and appeal to new and more specific audiences, among other factors. Then the focus of *ego trip* tracks on appearing the best, criticising competitors and convincing audiences, leads to higher NSL use because these rappers typically rely on violence, materialism, misogyny, hyper-masculinity and *banlieue* themes to achieve their goals. We can therefore see that the

reasons why NSL increased with time are very similar to the reasons why many *ego trip* tracks contain more NSL: the need to stand out from the competition and appeal to audiences at all costs.

In fact, the increase in NSL in 2011 can be correlated with the presence of *ego trip* themes in these tracks. When looking at the contents of the 2011 tracks, we quickly realise that five out of the seven tracks contain strong *ego trip* elements. Nevertheless, it would be too simplistic to conclude from this that time was actually irrelevant and that *ego trip* is the most determining factor. The contents of the other tracks in the diachronic generational analysis invalidate such a hypothesis because all seven of the 1990/1991 tracks and five of the 2001 tracks contain equally pronounced *ego trip* elements. In reality, it is much more productive to look at time and *ego trip* as mutually determining. It is only when these two determinants are taken together that they can explain the presence of very high NSL use in the tracks. Indeed, the corpus contains examples of *ego trip* tracks from 1990/1991 with little NSL and from 2001 with less NSL than in 2011, while it is also apparent that many tracks from other sections of the corpus that were released close to 2011 did not contain much NSL. The mutual influence of these two determinants makes sense because the higher competition in the movement in 2011 could be seen as a motivating factor for many of these rappers to use *ego trip* tracks with more and more violence, hyper-masculinity, *banlieue* themes and high NSL to produce shocking content that would help them stand out and make a name for themselves, which could have created a trend in the genre around that time.

The second original contribution of this research is the observation that the other determinants have much lower quantitative impacts on NSL use in the genre. The main reason for this is that the identity performances and narratives that relate to these

determinants are too complex, contextual, fluid and temporary to make oversimplifications and generalisations in their regard. The concept of performance is central to NSL use in the corpus: French rappers, as narrators, actually play roles in their tracks and individual and contextual variations in these performances are too great to produce marked differences between whole sections of the corpus, except for the strong impact of modern *ego trip*. Even when it comes to modern *ego trip*, these performances and narratives were still found to be fluid and temporary and not at all related to expressions of individual identities, since most rappers who create *ego trip* tracks with high NSL use are equally capable of making tracks from other rap genres with low NSL use. This further explains why the previous diachronic and diaphasic determinants stood out compared to the others. They were not based on identity (e.g. being a man/woman or living in a particular department) and could therefore reflect trends in artistic performances in the genre. The quantitative analyses of diatopic and gender determinants, on the other hand, were based on sections of the corpus that were created with identity criteria. Some of these determinants produced quantitative differences (e.g. less NSL and *verlan* in Marseille or more vulgarities by male rappers), but not in a generalised manner or to the same extent as modern *ego trip* compared to the beginnings of French rap or other rap genres.

So we see that identity performance plays a key role in NSL variation in the corpus, which partially answers the fourth research question regarding the roles of identity, recognition and aesthetics in the corpus. This research also revealed that recognition and aesthetics were central to NSL use in all sections of the corpus. Recognition, which was involved in several qualitative analyses, can be understood as the desire that many rap artists have to become famous, successful and to be recognised for their talent in the whole country, but it is not the most determining aspect of this concept in this research. This notion is

especially significant because it is crucial to many French rappers' identity performances, as many want their artistic narratives to be validated by their peers. This desire then relates to the notion of authenticity, which was also a determining factor. On many occasions, rappers gain recognition from their fellow artists only once they are deemed "authentic", i.e. when their performance creates a corresponding fit with their origins. Accordingly, recognition and authenticity were central to NSL use, as many of the rappers who used a lot of NSL (e.g. with *banlieue* slang, *verlan* or Arabic) were drawing on their origins to make these performances appear authentic.

Then it was found that both identity performance and recognition influence aesthetics in the genre and are influenced by it in return. Since these notions are fictive and fluctuating, artists can play with them to produce different aesthetic results. For example, the conflicting identity performances and narratives, with opposite peer expectations in terms of recognition and authenticity, that are required for the same artist to produce both *ego trip* and knowledge tracks can be explained by their strong desire to create tracks with different aesthetic properties. These opposite performances may weaken certain aspects of their authenticity, but they serve the important role of providing aesthetic diversity to their audiences. This diversity is often accompanied by changes in language registers and hence higher NSL uses, as we saw. Moreover, aesthetic dispositions are socially embedded so that they will differ from one community or place to the next. These varying aesthetic expectations are also part of group identities and represent linguistic determinants for NSL use. Lastly, aesthetics was also found to be determining with regards to power relations, rhymes and figures of speech, and theme depictions because rappers will change how they perform them depending on the type of track they want to create and their aesthetic goals.

Now that the last three research questions have been discussed, this conclusion will move on to the impact and the implications of this research, which will simultaneously provide an answer to the first research question concerning how this linguistic analysis relates to other approaches and disciplines in the literature on French rap. Since this study offers a detailed quantitative analysis of NSL use in the corpus, it is clear that past and future linguistic studies of this genre can benefit from the findings of the general overview of NSL provided in chapter 1. Indeed, it can help to refine the conclusions from existing broad linguistic studies of language in French rap, such as the ones carried out by Hassa (2010) and Paine (2012), and it complements many more specific analyses, such as Westphal's (2012) study of the use of *verlan* in Paris or Sarkar's studies of code-switching in francophone rap music (e.g. Low, *et al.*, 2009; Sarkar, 2008a/b). This research could also inspire similar large studies of French rap's linguistics. It would be particularly relevant, in this regard, to look at the most prevalent NSL category in French rap, colloquial words. This could take place in the form of a comparative analysis, contrasting, for example, everyday colloquial language with French rappers' performances.

With regards to historical approaches, the diachronic section of the corpus and the results discussed in Chapter 2 can help researchers (e.g. Perrier, 2010; Hammou, 2009; or Béthune, 2003) to refine their understanding of French rap and its evolution. This would be particularly relevant for modern historical accounts of French rap that are missing in the literature, even though strong linguistic changes were shown to have taken place since the early 1990s. Researchers could use the diachronic section of the corpus, the interviews and the findings from this thesis, in conjunction with analyses of newspapers and websites dedicated to French rap, to continue the history of the genre while taking into account the importance of generational diachronic determinants. Furthermore, the insights from other disciplines could help refine some of the diachronic findings, such as a more systematic

and thorough look at recent French history to see if any other determinants can be found. This could also apply to the section of the corpus that centres on Akhenaton. Researchers that specialise on the history of Marseille and its socio-cultural traditions could focus on the findings from this research to investigate whether some of Akhenaton's NSL uses can be explained differently.

What is more, many of the existing sociological studies of French rap (e.g. Martin, 2010b; or Sberna, 2002) could be developed with some of the conclusions from this thesis. For example, the conclusions regarding the crucial role of fluid and temporary identity performances will provide additional insights to the works of other researchers who focused on this aspect of French rap in their research (e.g. Marc Martínez, 2011; Martin, 2010b; Pecqueux, 2007; Sberna, 2002; or Boucher, 1998). These researchers could use some of the findings of this research, and particularly the essential role of *ego trip*, to study further how identity performance impacts language use in this music genre. Indeed, the size and variety of the corpus, together with the valuable information obtained from the rappers' interviews, provides a basis for carrying out a complex study focusing on identity in French rap only. Other researchers could enhance the investigations of the social networks of French rap (e.g. Hammou, 2005) by taking into account their impact on NSL use and the importance of diachronic changes in their regard, in relation to strong- and weak-ties relationships.

Finally, this thesis offers ideas and suggestions on how to conduct new literary analyses of French rap lyrics or how to reinterpret existing studies. For example, Barret's (2008) very thorough analysis of rhymes and figures of speech in French rap does not look systematically at the link between non-standard words and poetic elements in the lyrics. As a result, his research could be strengthened by drawing on the results from chapter 5.

The same could be said about Liu's (1997) study of what makes MC Solaar's work original, which could use information from chapter 5 to obtain additional insights into MC Solaar's rap. Moreover, such researchers could use their expertise to refine the effect of the aesthetic determinants of NSL use, by carrying out, for instance, more widespread lyric analyses.

In conclusion, this linguistic study of French rap has led to the isolation of one main determinants of high NSL use: the role of modern *ego trip*. In addition to this, the complexity of contextual, varying and temporary identity performances was also found to be determining, although it did not correlate with equally strong quantitative differences. These findings contribute to the literature on French rap, both by starting to fill in some gaps in knowledge and by opening up the way for further studies of these two crucial determinants. This research has indeed laid the foundations for additional comparative analyses that would expand upon these findings, either by focusing on one determinant only in larger corpuses (e.g. comparing more artists, years, cities or rap genres) or by applying the insights of other disciplines to these determinants.

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2. Interviews

I personally interviewed the following rappers as part of the qualitative research of this thesis:

In person:

HENROTTE, F., 2013.

L. SINISTROS, 2013.

SEMJI, 2013.

WHOOPY JONES, 2013.

On the telephone:

BLACK BARBIE, 2013.

EL MATADOR, 2013.

SHURIK'N, 2013.

SCYLLA, 2013.

By email:

DISIZ, 2013.

AKRO, 2013.

Discography

1. References

1995, 2011. La source. *La source*. Indépendant.

ÄRSENIC, 1998. *Quelques gouttes suffisent*. Hostile.

BLACK BARBIE, 2009. *Barbieturique*. Negative Music / Satellite Music.

BOOBA, 2008. B2OBA. *0.9*. Universal Music Division AZ.

MC SOLAAR, 1994. Séquelles. *Prose Combat*. Polydor.

SNIPER, 2006. Brûle. *Trait pour trait*. Up Music.

SOPRANO, 2007. A la bien. *Puisqu'il faut vivre*. Hostile.

SVINKELS, 1997. *Police*. Universal Music (AZ).

X KALIBUR and BLOOD, 2009. Nettoyer au Kärcher. *De la poudre au rap 2*. Hustlaz.

2. Corpus

Diachronic section

a. Generational change

a.1. 1990/1991

a.1.1. NTM, 1990. Le monde de demain. *Le monde de demain*. Epic.

a.1.2. NTM, 1991. Authentik. *Authentik*. Jive Epic Group.

a.1.3. EJM, 1990. Eléments dangereux. *Rapattitude*, EMI Marketing.

a.1.4. New generation MC, 1990. Toutes les mêmes. *Rapattitude*. EMI Marketing.

a.1.5. Assassin, 1990. La formule secrète. *Rapattitude* EMI Marketing.

a.1.6. Ministère A.M.E.R., 1991. Traîtres. *Traîtres*, Hostile.

a.1.7. MC Solaar, 1991. Qui sème le vent récolte le tempo. *Qui sème le vent récolte le tempo*. Polydor.

a.2. 2001

a.2.1. Sniper, 2001. Sniper processus. *Du rire aux larmes*. East West France.

a.2.2. Salif, 2001. Dur d'y croire. *Tous ensemble chacun pour soi*. Four My People.

a.2.3. Kery James, 2001. Si c'était à refaire. *Si c'était à refaire*. Wea.

a.2.4. Triptik, 2001. Bouge tes cheveux. *Microphonorama*. Next Music.

a.2.5. Rohff, 2001. La Vie Avant La Mort. *TDSI*. Hostile.

a.2.6. La Caution, 2001. Aquaplanning. *Asphalte hurlante*. Kerozen.

a.2.7. Rocca, 2001. C'est mon monde. *Elevation*. Barclay.

a.3. 2011

- a.3.1. 1995, 2011. La Source. *La source*. Independant.
- a.3.2. Sexion d'Assaut, 2011. Qui t'a dit?. *Les chroniques du 75 vol.2*. Jive Epic Group.
- a.3.3. Guizmo, 2011. Normal. *Normal*. Because Music.
- a.3.4. Still Fresh, 2011. J'perds le contrôle. *Mes rêves*. Because Music.
- a.3.5. Sultan, 2011. Ils sont pas prêts. *Ils sont pas prêts*. Jive Epic Group.
- a.3.6. Youssoupha, 2011. Menace de mort. *Noir désir*. Mis.
- a.3.7. Mister You, 2011. J'regarde en l'air. *Dans ma grotte*. Ulm.

b. Akhenaton

b.1. "de la planète Mars" (1991)

- b.1.1. IAM, 1991. Planète Mars. *De la planète Mars*. Hostile.
- b.1.2. IAM, 1991. Elvis. *De la planète Mars*. Hostile.
- b.1.3. IAM, 1991. Le nouveau président. *De la planète Mars*. Hostile.
- b.1.4. IAM, 1991. Attentat. *De la planète Mars*. Hostile.

b.2. "Sol invictus" (2001)

- b.2.1. Akhenaton, 2001. Sol invictus. *Sol Invictus*. Hostile.
- b.2.2. Akhenaton, 2001. Chaque jour. *Sol Invictus*. Hostile.
- b.2.3. Akhenaton, 2001. Entrer dans la légende. *Sol Invictus*. Hostile.

b.3. "We luv New York" (2011)

- b.3.1. Akhenaton & Faf Larage, 2011. Le sens du mot flow. *We luv New York*. La Cosca.
- b.3.2. Akhenaton & Faf Larage, 2011. Euh... *We luv New York*. La Cosca.
- b.3.3. Akhenaton & Faf Larage, 2011. M.R.S.. *We luv New York*. La Cosca.
- b.3.4. Akhenaton & Faf Larage, 2011. PPDLM. *We luv New York*. La Cosca.
- b.3.5. Akhenaton & Faf Larage, 2011. Zoom sur la ville. *We luv New York*. La Cosca.

Diatopic section:

c. Cities

c.1. Brussels:

- c.1.1. Scylla, 2009. BX Vibes Remix. *Immersion*. Abyssal.
- c.1.2. Scylla, 2009. Le voile des mots. *Immersion*. Abyssal.
- c.1.3. Scylla, 2009. BX Vibes. *Immersion*. Abyssal.
- c.1.4. Convok, 2006. Compil Konvictions. *Compil Konvictions*. Independant.
- c.1.5. 13hor, 2010. 1960 gravé dans nos cœurs. *Cris du cœur*. Samesame Productions.
- c.1.6. B-Lel, 2008. Un Gars à part. *Un gars à part*. Handek Records.
- c.1.7. BD Banx, 2007. Claque des doigts. *Rap street vol.2*. Aks Records.
- c.1.8. A6mil, 2011. Un bic et deux feuilles. *L'agonie du silence*. Independant.
- c.1.9. ZA, 2009. I love music. *Brutal music*. Independant.
- c.1.10. L'AB7, 2009. Tous dans le même bateau. *To bitch or not to bitch*. Not On Label.

c.2. Marseille:

- c.2.1. Soprano, 2007. Halla Halla. *Puisqu'il faut vivre*. Parlophone France.
- c.2.2. IAM, 2007. Une autre brique dans le mur. *Saison 5*. Universal Music Division Def Jam Recordings France.
- c.2.3. IAM, 2007. Nos heures de gloire. *Saison 5*. Universal Music Division Def Jam Recordings France.
- c.2.4. Fonky Family, 2006. C'est plus comme avant. *Marginale musique*. Jive Epic.
- c.2.5. Fonky Family, 2006. La guerre. *Marginale musique*. Jive Epic.
- c.2.6. Psy4 de la rime, 2008. Les cités d'or. *Les cités d'or*. Universal Music Division Def Jam Recordings France.
- c.2.7. La Swija, 2009. Monde des merveilles. *Au sourire levant*. Import.
- c.2.8. Kenny Arkana, 2008. La rage du peuple. *Entre ciment et belle étoile*. Because.
- c.2.9. El Matador, 2007. Génération wesh wesh. *Parti de rien*. Import.
- c.2.10. Mino, 2007. Le fruit de mon époque. *Il était une fois...* Phantom Sound & Vision.

c. 3. Paris

Average results from the section on Parisian *départements*.

d. Ethnicities

d.1. French origins:

- d.1.1. Orelsan, 2011. Le chant des sirens. *Le chant des sirens*. 3eme Bureau.
- d.1.2. Orelsan, 2011. Mauvaise idée. *Le chant des sirènes*. 3eme Bureau.
- d.1.3. Don Choa, 2007. Inflammable. *Jungle de béton*. Sony.
- d.1.4. Rockin' Squat, 2008. Illuminazi 666. *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*. EMI Music France.
- d.1.5. Rockin' Squat, 2008. France à fric. *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*. EMI Music France.
- d.1.6. Don Choa, 2007. Vies de chien. *Jungle de béton*. Import.
- d.1.7. Hocus Pocus, 2010. 16 pièces. *Putain de mélodie*. On And On Records.

d.2. Algerian origins:

- d.2.1. El Matador, 2009. Pète sa mère. *Au clair du bitumen*. Up Music/WM France.
- d.2.2. El Matador, 2009. Aïe aïe aïe. *Au clair du bitume*. Up Music/WM France.
- d.2.3. Aketo, 2007. Déceptions. *Cracheur 2 venin*. Desh musique.
- d.2.4. Rim K, 2007. L'espoir des favelas. *Famille nombreuse*. Rimkofficiel.
- d.2.5. Sinik, 2006. Descente aux enfers. *Sang froid*. Sixonine.
- d.2.6. Médine, 2008. Peplum. *Arabian panther*. Because Music.
- d.2.7. Médine, 2008. Don't Panik. *Arabian panther*. Because Music.

d.3. Senegalese origins:

- d.3.1. Alpha 5.20, 2010. Un monde tout blanc. *Scarface d'Afrique*. Ghetto Fabulous.
- d.3.2. Alpha 5.20, 2010. Où est ton cœur négro?. *Scarface d'Afrique*. Ghetto Fabulous.
- d.3.3. Booba, 2008. Ecoute bien. *Temps mort*. 45 Scientifc.
- d.3.4. Booba, 2008. Boulbi. *Temps mort*. 45 Scientifc.
- d.3.5. Sefyu, 2006. Senegalo Ruskov. *Qui suis-je?*. Because Music.
- d.3.6. Disiz la peste, 2006. Une histoire extraordinaire. *Les histoires extra-ordinaires d'un jeune de banlieue*. Universal Music International Div.

d.3.7. Disiz la peste, 2006. Inspecteur disiz. *Les histoires extra-ordinaires d'un jeune de banlieue*. Universal Music International Div.

e. Départements

e.1. Seine-Saint-Denis (93)

- e.1.1. Alibi Montana, 2008. Inspiration guerrière. *Inspiration guerrière*. Because.
- e.1.2. Alibi Montana, 2008. Street fight. *Inspiration guerrière*. Because.
- e.1.3. Joey Starr, 2006. J'arrive Gare. *Gare au jaguar*. Sony.
- e.1.4. Joey Starr, 2006. Métèque. *Gare au jaguar*. Sony.
- e.1.5. Tandem, 2005. 93 Hardcore. *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*. Kilomaitre / Because Music.
- e.1.6. Tandem, 2005. Le monde est stone. *C'est toujours pour ceux qui savent*. Kilomaitre / Because Music.
- e.1.7. La Caution, 2008. Thé à la menthe. *Thé à la menthe*. Maison Closed / Kerozen Patrimoine.

e.2. Hauts-de-Seine (92)

- e.2.1. LIM, 2007. Si on réussit. *Délinquant*. Tous Illicites Production.
- e.2.2. LIM, 2007. En bas de chez moi. *Délinquant*. Tous Illicites Production.
- e.2.3. Saïan Supa Crew, 2005. Jungle. *Hold up*. Parlophone France.
- e.2.4. Sultan, 2011. Badaboum. *Ils sont pas prêts*. Jive Epic.
- e.2.5. Saïan Supa Crew, 2005. Zonarisk. *Hold up*. Parlophone France.
- e.2.6. Sultan, 2009. Quoi qu'il arrive. *La sul'tendance*. Musicast l'Autreprod.
- e.2.7. Booba, 2008. Indépendants. *Temps mort*. 45 Scientific.

e.3. Val-de-Marne (94)

- e.3.1. ROHFF, 2010. Rien à prouver. *La cuenta*. Capitol.
- e.3.2. ROHFF, 2010. C'est comment?. *La cuenta*. Capitol.
- e.3.3. Rim K, 2012. Portrait robot. *Chef de famille*. Import.
- e.3.4. Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007. Guerre. *Jusqu'à la mort*. Menace Records.
- e.3.5. Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007. Tout est possible. *Jusqu'à la mort*. Menace Records.
- e.3.6. Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007. Val 2 meurtre. *Jusqu'à la mort*. Menace Records.
- e.3.7. Mafia K'1 Fry, 2007. Survivor. *Jusqu'à la mort*. Menace Records.

Gender section

f.1. Female rappers

- f.1.1. Casey, 2010. Regard glacé. *Libérez la bête*. Autre.
- f.1.2. Casey, 2010. Créature ratée. *Libérez la bête*. Autre.
- f.1.3. Casey, 2010. Rêves illimités. *Libérez la bête*. Autre.
- f.1.4. Princess Aniès, 2008. Au carrefour de ma douleur. *Au carrefour de la douleur*. Believe.
- f.1.5. Princess Aniès, 2008. Trop despee. *Au carrefour de la douleur*. Believe.
- f.1.6. Black Barbie, 2008. Underground. *Black Barbie style*. Bomaye musik.
- f.1.7. Black Barbie, 2008. La reine du 93. *Black Barbie style*. Bomaye musik.
- f.1.8. Keny Arkana, 2006. J viens d'l'incendie. *Entre ciment et belle étoile*. Because Music.
- f.1.9. Keny Arkana, 2006. J me barre. *Entre ciment et belle étoile*. Because Music.

- f.1.10. Keny Arkana, 2006. La mère des enfants perdus. *Entre ciment et belle étoile*. Because Music.
- f.1.11. Amy & Bushy, 2010. Zoulettes. *I life*. Wagram Music / 3ème Bureau / Foolek Records.
- f.1.12. Amy & Bushy, 2010. Attends. *I life*. Wagram Music / 3ème Bureau / Foolek Records.
- f.1.13. Amy & Bushy, 2010. Douleur. *I life*. Wagram Music / 3ème Bureau / Foolek Records.
- f.1.14. Diam's, 2006. La boulette. *Dans ma bulle*. EMI France.
- f.1.15. Diam's, 2006. Ma France à moi. *Dans ma bulle*. EMI France.
- f.1.16. Diam's, 2006. Jeune demoiselle. *Dans ma bulle*. EMI France.
- f.1.17. Diam's, 2006. Dans ma bulle. *Dans ma bulle*. EMI France.
- f.1.18. Enigmatik, 2007. Ici ou ailleurs. *Un nouveau souffle*. UGOP.
- f.1.19. Lady Laistee, 2005. Second souffle. *Second souffle*. Barclay.
- f.1.20. Lady Laistee, 2005. Corda. *Second souflé*. Barclay.

f.2. Male rappers

Average results from the male tracks.

Diaphasic section

g.1. Jazz/poetic rap

- g.1.1. MC Solaar, 2007. Carpe Diem. *Chapitre 7*. Import.
- g.1.2. MC Solaar, 2007. Le Davinci Claude. *Chapitre 7*. Import.
- g.1.3. Hocus Pocus, 2007. Quitte à t'aimer. *Place 54*. Motown.
- g.1.4. Oxmo Puccino, 2010. Le soleil du nord. *L'arme de paix*. Cinq 7.
- g.1.5. Oxmo Puccino, 2010. Véridique. *L'arme de paix*. Cinq 7.
- g.1.6. Rocé, 2006. Amitié et amertume. *Identité en crescendo*. New Mood Jazz.
- g.1.7. Rocé, 2006. Je chante la France. *Identité en crescendo*. New Mood Jazz.

g.2. Ego trip rap:

- g.2.1. L'Skadrille, 2008. Soldat universel. *Des roses et des flingues*. Up Music/WM France.
- g.2.2. Sefyu, 2011. Mr Molotov. *Oui je le suis*. Because Music.
- g.2.3. La Fouine, 2011. J'arrive en balle. *Capitale du crime vol.3*. Banlieue Sale.
- g.2.4. La Fouine, 2011. Jalousie. *Capitale du crime vol.3*. Banlieue Sale.
- g.2.5. Busta Flex, 2006. Sauvage. *La pièce maîtresse*. Up Music/WM France.
- g.2.6. Booba, 2006. Le duc de Boulogne. *Ouest side*. IMS.
- g.2.7. Sefyu, 2011. Top Gunz. *Oui je le suis*. Because Music.

g.3. Knowledge rap

- g.3.1. Médine, 2008. RER D. *Arabian Panther*. Because Music.
- g.3.2. Médine, 2008. A l'ombre du mâle. *Arabian Panther*. Because Music.
- g.3.3. Sniper, 2011. Blood diamondz. *A toute épreuve*. Mezoued Productions.
- g.3.4. Kery James, 2009. Avec le Coeur et la raison. *Réel*. Up Music.
- g.3.5. Axiom, 2006. Ma lettre au président. *Axiom*. Ulm.
- g.3.6. Keny Arkana, 2006. Nettoyage au Karcher. *Entre ciment et belle étoile*. Because Music.

g.3.7. Rockin'Squat, 2008. Le pouvoir secret. *Confessions d'un enfant du siècle (vol.2)*.
Livin'Astro.

Appendix I: questionnaire

0. Pourriez-vous parler de votre chanson [insert track] et ce qui a influencé votre langage dans cette chanson?
1. Comment décririez-vous votre emploi du langage non standard et qu'est-ce qui en influence le plus l'usage?
2. Est-ce que votre vocabulaire et manière de rapper varie beaucoup d'une chanson ou d'un thème à l'autre?
3. Quelles sont, selon vous, les influences sur l'emploi du langage non standard dans le rap français et francophone?
4. Est-ce que vous croyez que l'emploi du langage non standard dans le rap a changé ces 20 dernières années? Comment et pourquoi?
5. Est-ce que votre manière de rapper et d'employer le langage non standard a changé durant votre carrière? Quelles ont été vos plus grandes influences?
6. Est-ce que vous croyez qu'il y a une différence entre les rappers et les rappeuses au niveau du langage non standard?
7. Y a-t-il des différences marquées entre les villes et les départements? Quelles sont les influences?
8. Quel est le rôle de l'origine ethnique dans l'emploi du vocabulaire non standard, selon vous?
9. Est-ce que le style (ex: ego trip, rap engagé, etc.) a une influence sur le langage employé dans le rap francophone et dans votre propre rap?

10. Quelle est la place selon vous de l'emploi de l'anglais et de l'arabe dans le rap francophone? Et les autres langues étrangères? (La tendance qu'ont les rappeurs à employer ces langues dans leur propre textes)

11. Quelle est la place de l'emploi de l'argot et du verlan?

Appendix II: quantitative results

1. Overall quantitative results

Non-standard language	Number of words	% (of total word count)
Corpus word count	68024	100
Total NSL	4988	7.33
Abbreviations	613	0.9
Slang	776	1.14
Colloquial words	1860	2.73
Foreign borrowings	1404	2.06
<i>Verlan</i>	259	0.38
Vulgar words	453	0.66
Combinations	362	0.53

Foreign borrowings	Number of words	% (of total foreign borrowings)
English	1143	81.41
Arabic	172	12.25
Spanish	23	1.63
Romani	20	1.42
Latin	18	1.28
Bambara	14	0.99
Mandinka	3	0.21
Italian	3	0.21
Russian	2	0.14
Chti	2	0.14
German	1	0.07
Wallonian	1	0.07
Hebrew	1	0.07
Aramaic	1	0.07
Provençal	1	0.07
Lingwala	1	0.07
Unknown	1	0.07

Grammatical categories	% (of total NSL words)
Nouns	51.76
Combinations	22.63
Verbs	13.03
Adjectives	6.61
Interjections	5.03
Adverbs	0.36

Unknown³⁰	0.26
Prepositions	0.18
Pronouns	0.1
Number	0.02

2.1. Diachronic determinants (1): Ile-de-France rappers

NSL categories (% of total word count)	1990/1991	2001	2011
Total NSL	3.12	7.11	12.38
Abbreviations	0.21	0.65	1.47
Slang	0.18	1.34	2.32
Colloquial words	1.15	2.58	3.51
Foreign words	1.24	1.91	4.47
Verlan	0.03	0.65	1.13
Vulgar words	0.53	0.65	1.05
Combinations	0.21	0.62	1.53

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	1990/1991	2001	2011
English	100%	87.50	81.65
Arabic	0	6.25	13.29
Spanish	0	1.25	1.26
Romani	0	2.50	1.26
German	0	1.25	0
Bambara	0	1.25	1.26
Russian	0	0	1.26

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	1990/1991	2001	2011
Noun	47.17	47.47	48.74
Verb	7.54	15.82	19.45
Adjective	11.32	5.39	9.38
Adverb	0	0.33	0
Interjection	10.38	8.08	4.80
Pronoun	0	0.22	0
Combinations	23.58	22.22	17.39
Unknown	0	0.67	0.00

³⁰ Unknown stands for words that could not be assigned a grammatical category because their meaning was too unclear, even in context.

2.2. Diachronic determinants (2): Akhenaton throughout his career

NSL categories (% of total word count)	1991	2001	2011
Total NSL	6.21	3.67	8.79
Abbreviations	0.91	0.37	0.86
Slang	0.23	0.45	1.36
Colloquial words	2.68	1.35	3.28
Foreign words	2.34	1.65	2.97
<i>Verlan</i>	0	0	0
Vulgar words	0.28	0	1.24
Combinations	0.23	0.15	0.93

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	1991	2001	2011
English	95.12	95.45	91.66
Arabic	0	4.54	0
Spanish	2.44	0	2.08
Romani	0	0	2.08
Latin	2.44	0	4.16

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	1991	2001	2011
Noun	50.45	65.31	49.29
Verb	7.34	4.08	19.01
Adjective	10.09	4.08	5.63
Adverb	0	18.36	1.40
Interjection	2.75	0	2.81
Pronoun	0	0	0
Combinations	29.35	8.16	21.83

3.1. Diatopic determinants (1): ethnic origins

NSL categories (% of total word count)	French	Algerian	Senegalese
Total NSL	7.23	9.94	9.73
Abbreviations	1.03	0.83	1.34
Slang	0.72	2.12	1.09
Colloquial words	3.09	2.8	3.82
Foreign words	1.55	3.31	2.6
<i>Verlan</i>	0.27	0.54	0.34
Vulgar words	0.89	0.88	1.34

Combinations	0.31	0.51	0.78
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Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	French	Algerian	Senegalese
English	97.73	57.35	92.77
Arabic	2.27	36.76	2.41
Spanish	0	0	1.2
Romani	0	1.47	1.2
Bambara	0	0.73	0
Chti³¹	0	1.47	0
Mandinka	0	1.47	0
Italian	0	0.73	0
Aramean	0	0	1.2
Provençal	0	0	1.2

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	French	Algerian	Senegalese
Noun	50.95	42.15	49.52
Verb	18.09	8.58	10.61
Adjective	7.62	5.15	9
Interjection	0.95	7.6	8.36
Pronoun	0	0.24	0
Combinations	22.38	35.53	22.51
Preposition	0	0.73	0

3.2. Diatopic determinants (2): cities

NSL categories (% of total word count)	Marseille	Ile-de-France	Brussels
Total NSL	5.25	9.15	8.47
Abbreviations	0.43	1.26	1.72
Slang	0.71	1.94	0.79
Colloquial words	2.53	3.11	2.6
Foreign words	1.16	2.09	2.78
<i>Verlan</i>	0	0.75	0.29
Vulgar words	0.47	0.95	0.82
Combinations	0.05	0.91	0.48

³¹ Although Chti, like Wallonian in other tables, is a dialect rather than a proper language, it was counted as foreign borrowing to avoid overcomplicating the analysis.

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	Marseille	Ile-de-France	Brussels
English	58.46	82.34	88.46
Arabic	23.07	12.74	8.33
Spanish	12.31	2.42	1.28
Romani	1.54	1.05	1.28
Latin	3.07	0	0
Wallonian³²	0	0	0.64
Bambara	0	1.08	0
Italian	0	0.34	0
Hebrew	1.54	0	0

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	Marseille	Ile-de-France	Brussels
Noun	53.46	55.71	59.62
Verb	12.21	12.37	10.99
Adjective	5.28	5.91	4.02
Adverb	0.33	0.18	0.423
Interjection	3.3	3.65	4.65
Pronoun	0.33	0.08	0
Prepositions	0.33	0.21	0
Combinations	24.75	21.86	20.29

3.3. Diatopic determinants (3): départements

NSL categories (% of total word count)	Hauts-de-Seine (92)	Seine-Saint-Denis (93)	Val-de-Marne (94)
Total NSL	10.13	8.31	9.01
Abbreviations	1.44	0.95	1.38
Slang	2.38	1.66	1.77
Colloquial words	2.73	3.48	3.13
Foreign words	2.52	1.41	2.34
Verlan	1.09	0.58	0.57
Vulgar words	1.44	0.8	0.6
Combinations	1.44	0.52	0.76

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	Hauts-de-Seine (92)	Seine-Saint-Denis (93)	Val-de-Marne (94)
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³² Wallonian covers in reality many different types of French dialect from Belgium but was treated as one dialect to facilitate the analysis.

English	68.88	93.47	84.69
Arabic	27.77	4.35	6.12
Spanish	0	2.17	5.1
Romani	1.11	0	2.04
Bambara	2.22	0	1.02
Italian	0	0	1.02

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	Hauts-de- Seine (92)	Seine-Saint- Denis (93)	Val-de-Marne (94)
Noun	55.94	48.88	62.33
Verb	11.01	12.59	13.53
Adjective	6.67	6.29	4.77
Adverb	0	0	0.53
Interjection	4.93	4.44	1.59
Pronoun	0	0	0.26
Preposition	0	0.37	0.26
Combinations	21.45	27.41	16.71

4. Gender determinants:

NSL categories (% of total word count)	Men	Women
Total NSL	7.61	6.91
Abbreviations	1.01	0.73
Slang	1.21	0.99
Colloquial words	2.75	3.2
Foreign words	2.04	1.72
<i>Verlan</i>	0.4	0.28
Vulgar words	0.76	0.31
Combinations	0.54	0.31

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	Men	Women
English	79.62	74.7
Arabic	14.1	15.06
Spanish	1.66	0.6
Romani	1.19	3.01
Bambara	0.47	4.21
Latin	1.66	0.6
Wallonian	0.12	0
Hebrew	0.12	0

Chti	0.24	0
Mandinka	0.24	0.6
Italian	0.24	0.6
Aramean	0.12	0
<i>Provençal</i>	0.12	0
Linguala	0	0.6
Unknown	0.12	0

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	Men	Women
Nouns	53.46	49.77
Combinations	23.66	19.67
Verbs	12.05	13.77
Adjectives	5.66	8.77
Interjections	4.42	6.81
Prepositions	0.28	0
Adverbs	0.19	0
Numbers	0	0.15
Pronouns	0.09	0.15
Unknown	0.16	0.91

5. Diaphasic determinants:

NSL categories (% of total word count)	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Jazz/poetic</i>	<i>Ego trip</i>
Total NSL	2.32	3.18	10.22
Abbreviations	0.37	0.24	1.11
Slang words	0.17	0.28	1.81
Colloquial words	1.19	1.95	3.47
Foreign borrowings	0.42	0.63	3.3
<i>Verlan</i>	0.06	0	0.83
Vulgar words	0.18	0.1	0.94
Combinations	0.09	0.03	1.25

Foreign borrowings (% of total borrowings)	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Jazz/poetic</i>	<i>Ego trip</i>
English	84.21	50	91.58
Arabic	0	0	6.31
Romani	0	0	1.05
Latin	15.79	50	0
Unknown	0	0	1.05

Grammatical categories (% of total word count)	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Jazz/poetic</i>	<i>Ego trip</i>
Nouns	52.38	49.45	52.72
Combinations	28.57	32.97	20.75
Verbs	7.62	10.99	15.65
Interjections	7.62	2.2	2.38
Adjectives	2.86	4.39	5.78
Unknown	0	0	1.7
Prepositions	0.95	0	0.68
Adverbs	0	0	0.34