

Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain

The use and the discursive functions of English in native-language online conversations among Dutch and German youth¹

Gebrauch und diskursive Funktionen des Englischen in muttersprachlichen Online-Gesprächen bei niederländischen und deutschen Jugendlichen

Wenn auch die meisten jungen Menschen in Europa Englisch in der Schule lernen, so bieten sich damit doch in den europäischen Ländern unterschiedliche Kontaktmöglichkeiten. Meinungs- und Nutzungsbefragungen deuten darauf hin, dass Jugendliche in verschiedenen Teilen Europas die englische Sprache unterschiedlich verwenden können. In Anbetracht dessen untersucht dieser Beitrag, wie niederländische und deutsche Jugendliche Englisch in ansonsten einsprachiger Kommunikation im Internet gebrauchen.

Die Daten für diese Untersuchung stammen aus Gesprächen zweier Internetgemeinschaften überwiegend von Jugendlichen: einer niederländischen und einer deutschen. Die Analyse bedient sich eines gemischten Modells quantitativer und qualitativer Methoden und konzentriert sich auf zwei Fragen: *Wie viel* Englisch verwendet die jeweilige Gemeinschaft, und *welche Funktionen* hat Englisch in der Interaktion? Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass unterschiedliche Sprachideologien die Art und Weise beeinflussen, wie Jugendliche der beiden Länder die englische Sprache sehen und verwenden.

Utilisation et fonctions discursives de l'anglais dans les conversations en ligne et en langue maternelle chez les jeunes néerlandais et allemands

Bien que la plupart des jeunes en Europe apprennent l'anglais à l'école, ils n'ont pas les mêmes modalités de contact avec l'anglais. Ainsi les sondages d'opinion et les études sur l'usage de l'anglais indiquent que les jeunes dans différents pays d'Europe auraient tendance à utiliser l'anglais différemment. Tout en tenant compte de ces différences, cet article explore les alternances de code linguistique des jeunes Néerlandais et Allemands qui insèrent l'anglais dans leurs conversations sur Internet lesquelles se font majoritairement ou en néerlandais ou en allemand.

Les données de cette étude sont tirées de conversations dans deux communautés sur Internet, composées principalement des jeunes : la première des Néerlandais, la deuxième des Allemands. Notre méthodologie pour cette analyse comprend des approches

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quantitatives et qualitatives et met l'accent sur deux questions : (a) *l'importance relative* de l'anglais et (b) *les fonctions* qu'il remplit lorsqu'il est utilisé par chacune de ces deux communautés. Les résultats suggèrent que des idéologies divergentes de langue influent la façon dont les jeunes dans ces deux pays considèrent et utilisent l'anglais.

1. Introduction

Computer-mediated spaces such as social media sites and blogs are becoming an important feature in the social lives of young adults. Their interaction within this medium appears to be provoking new forms of language use, and already there is a literature that has noted innovation: a mixture of speechlike and textlike features, elements that are exclusively computer-mediated (e.g. Herring 1996; Baron 2000; Danet 2001). However, little attention has been paid to such matters of computer-mediated discourse within the context of a theory of globalization (e.g. Blommaert 2010), despite the fact that the Internet is often cited as a primary globalizing factor (e.g. Jacquemet 2010).

As a contribution to filling this gap, this paper investigates a phenomenon that has been increasingly observed: the alternating use of English and the local language in online interaction among young people. In a study of social media communities in the Netherlands and in Germany on the livejournal.com blogging site, I compare the practices in the computer-mediated interaction of young Germans on the one hand, and young Dutch people on the other. The differences between the ways English is used in online interaction in the two countries serve to illustrate the different legacies that the two communities bring to globalization.

2. Previous Research

European youth are coming of age in a world in which communication for EU governance (Phillipson 2004; Kraus 2008), business (Nickerson 2000; Hilgendorf 2010), and higher education (Erling/ Hilgendorf 2006; Smit 2010) are all increasingly taking place in English, even among speakers of the same, non-English, local language. In addition, the advertising these young people absorb (Hilgendorf/ Martin 2001; Gerritsen et al. 2007), the media they consume (Berns/ de Bot/ Hasebrink 2007: 89-101) and the music they listen to (Berns/ de Bot/ Hasebrink 2007: 101-110) are all increasingly influenced by English as well. While the resulting influence from English on European languages may not have been as strong as many non-linguists have feared (Barbour 2005), a shift is in fact taking place in at least some European countries toward more codeswitching between the local language and English in many of these domains (Blommaert et al 2012). In fact, Preisler (1999: 244) goes so far as to argue that an informal use of English in these countries "has become an inherent, indeed a defining, aspect of the many Anglo-American-oriented youth subcultures which directly or indirectly influence the language and other behavioural patterns of young people generally."

However, the amount of contact youth have with English is far from uniform across the continent. For example, we know that English-language media are dubbed in Germany, while they are subtitled in the Netherlands (Berns/ de Bot/ Hasebrink 2007: 32-33), and the two countries also differ with respect to how much English is used as a medium of instruction in higher education (Berns/ de Bot/ Hasebrink 2007: 27-30). Survey research even suggests that these differing opportunities may be correlated with differing English proficiencies and attitudes toward the use of English (Berns/ de Bot/ Hasebrink 2007: 111-119). Yet it is impossible to draw conclusions about differences in the ways English has taken root in individual European countries based solely on surveys of use and attitudes. What is missing to date is a systematic examination of how European youth incorporate English into their everyday, otherwise local-language interactions, and a comparison of its scope and its functions among youth from different countries. Such an effort requires an approach to bilingual language use that can take interactional phenomena as well as linguistic phenomena into account. The most fruitful approach has proven to be the one outlined by Auer (1998, 2000), which focuses on the ways in which speakers switch between languages in order to alert others to the social and situational context of the conversation. Such switches serve as *contextualization cues* (cf. Gumperz 1983) that are used either to structure conversation (by highlighting elements of conversation such as asides or topic shifts), or as a tool for identity construction (by drawing on the social meanings of different languages) (cf. Hinrichs 2006: 86-127). Although it was designed for the spoken language, many studies have successfully adapted this approach to computer-mediated contexts (e.g. Georgakopoulou 1997; Androutsopoulos/ Hinnenkamp 2001).

Also central to this study is the concept of *language ideology*. Defined by Silverstein (1979: 173) as "sets of beliefs articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived structure and use," language ideology draws attention to the way that language use always has a political dimension. In this paper there are three distinct ideologies at play. First, there is the debate over the ideologically-led nature of English in the world today (Seargeant 2009: 217) which centres on whether English is the tool of American-led neo-liberalism (Phillipson 2006) or an increasingly denationalized lingua franca (Jenkins 2009; Seidlhofer 2005).

The second relevant ideology is nationalism. It is relevant here that the two nation-states in which the two communities' members are rooted have different traditions of nationalism. Within the Dutch nation-state, the experience has largely been one of civic nationalism, with an emphasis on citizenship ties rather than ethnic solidarity. Thus one might expect that the Dutch would be comparatively open both in terms of which languages and language forms they themselves are willing to learn and use, and in terms of their acceptance of outsiders into their language community (Geddes 2003). Such a stance may also derive from the fact that the Netherlands, as a small country, has needed to interact transnationally and that the Dutch have long been accustomed to the need to learn foreign languages (Beerkens 2010).

By contrast, the nationalism that has dominated throughout most of Germany's history is ethnic nationalism, in which membership within the national group is inherited and there is a link between ethnicity and language. Ethnic nationalism of this sort has of course

come under fire in Germany since 1945, and such ideologies have also been weakened in practice by the 2000 legislation that widens the right to German citizenship (just as, indeed, it can also be argued that the Dutch have stepped back to some extent in recent years from their traditional ideology of civic nationalism). However, it would be surprising if that these traditional Herderian perspectives did not continue to colour language ideology in the German context, at least to some extent (cf. Wright 2004).

In this paper, I view language ideology as "a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk" and examine the ways that it "significantly influences social, discursive, and linguistic practices" (Woollard 1992: 235). My aim is to present evidence that different groups of European youth have different linguistic practices such as language adoption, language maintenance, and language mixing (cf. Barrett 2006; Jeon 2008), and to begin to explore to what extent these practices may result from different language ideologies. It seems likely that differing language ideologies may affect the way different communities incorporate English into their daily interactions, and through that, the extent to which English plays a role in their daily lives.

3. Data and Methodology

The two social media communities that have been chosen for this study will be referred to here as 'unserekleinestadt' (or 'our little town', the German-using community) and 'vragenuurtje' ('question time', the Dutch-using community), although these names (as well as user names and other identifying information such as the cities in which participants live) have been changed or obscured to protect the participants' privacy. Both communities are located on livejournal.com, which is "a large hosting website with social networking and blogging functionalities that allows users to exchange information and advice, as well as engaging in other types of communication" (Kouper 2010: 1). This site enables users to create their own journalling blogs similar to those found on other blogging platforms such as Blogger or Wordpress, i.e. frequently-updated websites with *posts* arranged in reverse chronological order and *comments* below each post (Herring et al. 2004; Rettberg 2008). However, livejournal blogs are also different from those kinds of conventional blogs in two ways that make them more similar to social networking sites like Facebook: *interconnectivity* (i.e. bloggers can *friend* other livejournal users and read all of their friends' recent posts by clicking on a single page), and *social spaces* (i.e. alongside their own blogs, users can create *communities* in which anyone who keeps a blog at livejournal.com may join and participate.) Both 'unserekleinestadt' and 'vragenuurtje' are examples of these. In addition, the user interface organizes the conversations that result from posts into *threads* that are easy to follow, and sends users email notifications about any responses they receive to their posts or to the comments they make. These features promote back-and-forth interactivity in a way that other blogging services do not, making the study of interaction in these blogs and communities more fruitful than the study of interaction in more conventional blogs.

Although livejournal.com's origins are in the United States, it is currently owned by Russian company SUP Media (Kouper 2010: 1), and while English remains the dominant

language on the site as a whole, it is international in scope, with users from many countries keeping blogs and participating in communities in their native languages. Although the precise demographics of both 'unserekleinestadt' and 'vragenuurtje' are not (and cannot be) known, due to livejournal's largely anonymous and ever-changing user base, livejournal.com's published user statistics indicate that a plurality of the site's users are female and in their 20s. In addition, it can be assumed from publicly visible conversations in each community that most of the participants in the German-using community are German (with a smaller number of Austrian and Swiss users) and that most participants in the Dutch-using community are Dutch (with a smaller number of Belgian users), as locally specific items (e.g. media, shops, holidays) are regularly referenced without explanation.

The two communities exist entirely independently of each other, but they can still be easily compared, as both are concerned with asking, answering, and discussing (personal) questions. Some of these questions are posted purely to promote member interaction (e.g. "What are you making for dinner tonight?"), some are informational in nature (e.g. "Does anyone know where I might be able to buy a shirt that looks like this? [picture attached]"), and some are requests for advice (e.g. "My boyfriend is driving me crazy, here's what he's doing, how can I get him to stop?"). These practices have resulted in two groups that fit the six criteria for online communities outlined by Herring (2004: 351-2):

- a) active participation and a core of regular participants;
- b) a shared culture;
- c) solidarity and reciprocity;
- d) criticism and conflict;
- e) self-awareness as a distinct entity;
- f) distinct roles.

This paper is therefore well suited to address the lack of research on "ethnographically-based, linguistically-oriented fieldwork of digital transnational spaces" lamented by Jacquemet (2010: 61-62).

The data analyzed in this paper consist of the 500 most recent (at the time the data was retrieved, in early 2010) publicly available posts and discussions resulting from those posts in each community, a total of 1000 online conversations. All instances of English in both data sets were coded with the help of the qualitative analysis software NVivo. 'English' language items are defined here conservatively as any words that are not sufficiently integrated into monolingual language use to appear in the most recent editions of the dictionaries *Duden: Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (for German) or *Van Dale groot woordenboek van de Nederlandse taal* (for Dutch). While an approach that asked participants themselves to define which English-origin words and phrases still qualify as English and which are now part of the local language would have been preferable, the unbounded and ever-changing nature of livejournal communities unfortunately makes that approach impossible here. In any case, since this research is mainly contrastive in nature, a conservative approach should be acceptable for measuring differences between the two communities as long as similar sorts of dictionaries are used as the final authority in each of them.

The analysis proceeded in several phases. First, the coded data was analyzed generally and qualitatively, aided by NVivo, in order to identify larger patterns and categories in the language alternation. Second, the English items identified in the first phase were analyzed in a more in-depth way through the use of Auer's (e.g. 1998, 2000) interactional analysis of language alternation, in order to gain more insight into the specific functions that English serves in these two communities. This was then supplemented by a quantitative analysis in order to ascertain the percentage of English use in each community and the percentage that fell into each of the identified subcategories. Third, an additional quantitative analysis was performed in order to identify differences between the two communities in the amount of flagging of language alternation, i.e. marking a switch as unusual in some way (cf. Poplack 1987), since this can indicate a lower degree of comfort with language alternation than unflagged switching.

4. Differences between the communities in types and amount of English usage

Using NVivo, I identified four categories of language alternation, ranging on a continuum from the kinds of switches that require the least amount of creativity with and knowledge of the English language, to more complex types that require advanced knowledge of not just the grammar of English, but of how the language is used in primarily English-speaking societies. These categories are the following, in increasing order of creativity and required knowledge:

- a) single-word or single-compound borrowings of terms not established as a regular part of the local language;
- b) interactional language use specific to the digitally mediated world;
- c) larger expressions or quotes lifted whole-cloth from everyday English-language interaction and used to effect in conversation;
- d) phrases or sentences in English original to the German or Dutch interactant and not borrowed from a particular other source.

The first category of single-word and single-phrase borrowings corresponds roughly to what Poplack/ Sankoff/ Miller (1988) have called "nonce borrowings," in that these are codeswitches rather than established loanwords fully integrated into the local language and used regularly by monolinguals of that language. This is the category of English language use that is most easily spontaneously borrowed into a local language, because, being single-word elements, they do not need to be incorporated into the local language's grammar or interactive patterns of use.

The second category of interactional language use specific to the digitally mediated world, as in the first category, also consists of single-word or single-compound borrowings. These are not, however everyday English words such as nouns or adjectives, but digitally mediated ways of representing gesture, changes in tone of voice, or facial expressions in text. They require a slightly more advanced knowledge of English language use than the first category because using them requires knowledge of how these expressions are used in digitally mediated interaction by English monolinguals.

The third category of larger expressions or quotes requires still more creativity and knowledge of English use in monolingual English contexts, in part because they are longer stretches of English that require more advanced proficiency in order to successfully integrate them spontaneously into the local language, and in part because, as with the second category, they require knowledge of how these phrases and quotes work interactionally in English.

Finally, the fourth category of entirely original phrases and sentences not borrowed from any particular English-language source corresponds to the kinds of intersentential and intrasentential codeswitching types common in bilingual communities, and which require a great deal of both proficiency in English and linguistic creativity (cf. Poplack 1980).

Having identified examples of each of the four categories in the corpus I then carried out a quantitative analysis of the four types of language alternation in each community in order to determine which types are more common.

4.1 Qualitative analysis²

4.1.1 Excerpt 1: Types of language alternation in the German-using community

- 00: *weltall*: ich bin auf der suche nach sogenannten **outdoor**-schuhen, in erster linie wohl für **geocaching**, spaziergänge, **'light'**-wandern, im grunde also nicht sehr anspruchsvoll - wasserfest, warmhaltend, eine ordentliche, griffige sohle. mir ist klar: ohne anprobieren geht das nicht, aber: welche marken - evt. auch modelle - könnt ihr empfehlen,
womit habt ihr keine guten erfahrungen gemacht? ähnliches für (3in1)jacken.
danke im voraus!
- 01: *captain_lisa*: Ich hab ein paar **"Boots"** von Landrover (wird über Deichmann vertrieben).
3in1-Jacken
Da hab ich mich ja in die Columbia-Jacken verliebt, damals während meines Aupairjahres.
Sind hier aber sauteuer.
-

² In the excerpts below (and throughout the paper), the English passages have been bolded for easier scanning; otherwise the formatting such as line spacing, underlining, and punctuation and spelling of each excerpt represent what could be seen in each original post and its comments. In the interest of space, however, any extraneous comments not relevant to the point at hand have been removed, some of the threading has been simplified, and the "icons" that livejournal users use to represent themselves visually have been removed except where they are made relevant in the conversation. The various turns in the thread are numbered with the original post (when present) bearing the number "00", and all following comments numbered accordingly, in sequential order of posting. The user names are italicized and appear before each turn (and correspondingly in the analysis as well). The translations follow each excerpt, divided from the original by a single line, preserving the bolding of the originally English words. Within the translations, explanations of unclear local-language elements are sometimes given in [square brackets].

00: *weltall*: I am looking for so-called **outdoor** shoes, probably first and foremost for **geocaching**, going on walks, **'light'** hiking, in other words essentially not all that special – waterproof, heat retaining, a durable, gripping sole, it's clear to me that I won't be able to buy anything without trying it on, but: what brands – or even types of shoes – can you recommend to me, what ones have you had good experiences with? and the same thing for (hiking) jackets.
thanks in advance!

01: *captain_lisa*: I have a pair of **"boots"** from Landrover (they sell them at Deichmann).
Hiking jackets
I fell in love with the Columbia jackets back when I was living overseas as a nanny.
They're totally expensive here, though.

In weltall's post in turn 00, she specifies that she's looking for "outdoor-schuhen" (outdoor shoes) and also talks about what she wants to use them for: "geocaching" and "light-wandern" (light hiking), among other things (the quotation marks will be discussed in the section on flagging below). All three of these switches into English have been coded as belonging to the category of single-word switches. In the comment in turn 01, too, user captainjenny talks about the "boots" she bought locally, which also falls into that category.

4.1.2 Excerpt 2: Types of language alternation in the Dutch-using community

00: *msp*: Gaat er hier iemand heel toevallig binnenkort iets bestellen van boohoo.com?

Ik MOET iets hebben, maar heb geen credit card :(

01: *geraldina*: **omg** wat is de **sale CHEAP!** OK ik lees even mee met dit **topic**, want ik wil ook wel bestellen! (en heb geen cc)

02: *tesvel*: Ik heb een creditcard en wil meebestellen! Dus geef die bestellingen maar aan mij door, dan plaats ik de order. En dan bij thuis laten bezorgen en dat jullie het hier ophalen? Is dat handig?

03: *tesvel*: In [city name] **that is...**!

04: *msp*: :D:D:D Heldin! [web address of item] "Poppy Cut Out Heart Dress" 20 pond :)

05: *tesvel*: Welke maat?

(Deze jurk vind ik ook heel mooi, maar dat wordt echt **too much of a boob fest** met mijn borsten hierin... :P)

06: *msp*: **Oh right!** Maat 16! :) Ik heb niet zo veel **boobness** dus dat zal bij mij wel loslopen.

00: *msp*: Is there anybody here who just happens to be about to order something from boohoo.com? I HAVE to have something, but don't have a credit card :(

01: *geraldina*: **omg** how **CHEAP** is the **sale!** OK I'm going to follow this **topic**, because I want to order too! (and don't have a cc)

02: *tesvel*: I have a credit card and want to order too! So just pass the orders on to me, then I'll place the order. And then I'll have it delivered at home and you guys can pick it up here. Is that convenient?

03: *tesvel*: In [city name] **that is...**!

04: *mSP*: :D:D:D My hero! [web address of item] "Poppy Cut Out Heart Dress" 20 pounds :)

05: *tesvel*: What size?

(I think this dress is gorgeous, too, but it would really be **too much of a boob fest** with my breasts in it... :P)

06: *mSP*: **Oh right!** Size 16! :) I don't have that much **boobness** so it should work out for me.

In the first comment in turn 01, user *geraldina* responds by expressing "omg how CHEAP is the sale," and saying that she's going to follow the "topic." The "omg" (oh my God) falls into category b, i.e. interactional language use specific to digitally-mediated spaces, while "cheap", "sale", and "topic" all fall into category a, i.e. the one of single-word-switches. Then *tesvel* responds to *mSP* in turn 02, saying that she will place the order, and adding as an afterthought in turn 03 that the others can then pick them up from her place "in [city name] that is". The "that is" switch into English has been coded as belonging to category c, i.e. of English language use that is a larger-than-one-word expression spontaneously borrowed into the local language. User *mSP* responds in turn 04 by giving the web address of the item she wants, and *tesvel* then asks her what size she wants. To this question, *tesvel* tacks on the parenthetical comment in turn 05 that she loves the dress too, but that it would be "too much of a boob fest" on her. This switch into English is coded as category d, i.e. original English use not borrowed from any particular other source. User *mSP* then responds in turn 06 with an "oh right" and gives her size, specifying that she doesn't have very much "boobness," so the dress should be all right for her. The "oh right" is coded as category c, i.e. a longer expression, but the "boobness" deserves further consideration. It is a single word, but instead of being a word common to English use, it's one created spontaneously by *mSP* herself by using the rules of English noun suffixing. Therefore, it was coded as category d, i.e. original to the interactant.

4.2 Quantitative analysis

The next step was to answer two additional questions: first, whether the findings seen here were representative of the entire data set, namely that more language alternation occurs in the Dutch community than the German; and second, that the instances of language alternation in the German community all fall into the first category, single-word switches, whereas the Dutch community exhibits all four types of language alternation.

To answer the first question, I counted the total number of words for each dataset and compared it to a count of the number of *English* words for each dataset.

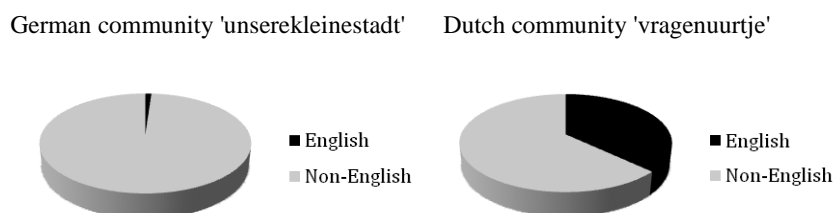


Figure 1: Percentage of English use in the two communities

As we can see in Figure 1, the German dataset contains a total of 459,782 words, of which 5051 (1.1%) are coded as English. The Dutch dataset, on the other hand, contains a total of 495,208 words, of which 183,829 (37.1%) are coded as English. The difference is striking: the Dutch young people not only use more English in their online interactions than their German counterparts, they use *massively* more of it. When looking not at the number of words, but at the relative frequency of separate instances of English use in the two communities, the differences are also present, but not quite as striking: 2617 instances of English use in the German community and 4242 in the Dutch community.

To answer the second question, the number of instances of each of the four categories of English usage was computed. This revealed additional differences. As we can see in Figure 2, the German community produces 2277 (87.01%) single-word switches (category a), 186 (7.11%) instances of interactional use of English specific to the digitally mediated world (category b), 152 (5.81%) switches involving longer English-language phrases or quotes (category c), and 2 (~0%) switches involving longer stretches of English that are entirely original to the interactant (category 4).

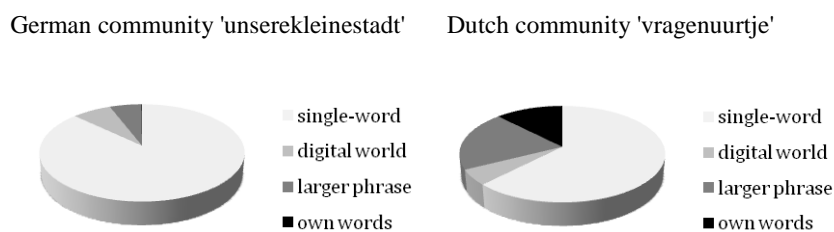


Figure 2: Percentages of use of the four categories of switching identified

The Dutch community, on the other hand, contains 2643 (62.3%) single-word switches, 222 instances of interactional use of English specific to the digitally mediated world, 855 switches involving longer English-language phrases or quotes, and 522 switches involving longer stretches of English that are entirely original to the interactant.

Despite the much larger number of instances of English use in the Dutch community, there are only a few hundred more single-word switches in the Dutch community than the German one. One look at the percentages explains the reason: single-word switches are a

much larger percentage of the total occurrences of English use in the German community than in the Dutch community. Both the number and percentage of all other types of English use are higher in the Dutch community, and the fourth category, which requires the most knowledge of and creativity with English, is rarely found at all in the German community, with only two instances in total.

5. Functions of English usage

This section deals with the main *functions* of language alternation that were identified in my initial NVivo-aided analysis of both communities, looking at how language alternation can serve as a contextualization cue that enables participants to alert others to certain elements of conversational or social structure. As mentioned earlier, analyses employing the approach proposed by Auer (1998, 2000) have shown that such switches can be used either for *discourse-related* purposes that serve to structure conversation or as a *participant-related* tool, for example, for identity construction. Certainly both of these types of functions can be found in the data analyzed here, though the discussion in this section will concentrate on the ways that switches help structure conversation.

5.1 Switching to English to mark an evaluative comment (German-using community)

Excerpt 3 shows one of the most common functions in the data of switches to English: marking an evaluative comment. It is part of the tail end of one thread in a longer conversation, initiated by user *mistermark*, about the fact that it is difficult to find other men on livejournal. In an earlier part of this thread, user *couleur* (who has been adding user icons depicting the female Japanese cartoon character "Hello Kitty" to each of his comments) has objected to the notion that *mistermark* is looking for male livejournal friends because their perspectives are inherently different from women's.

Excerpt 3:

01: *couleur*: Ich wehre mich doch nicht gegen den Unterschied sondern dagegen, ihn als qualitatives Merkmal zu benutzen. Das ist Sexismus. Und mich persönlich würds ehrlich gesagt stören irgendwo zu sein, weil ich ein Mann bin und nicht weil ich ich bin.



02: *mistermark*: Entschuldigung, aber das finde ich ein bisschen ... sonderbar. Wenn du also mit deinen besten Freundinnen einen Trinken gehst und nicht mit deinem guten Freund von nebenan, weil du gerne einen Mädelsabend veranstalten willst, dann ist das auch Sexismus?

03: *couleur*: Ähm... ja, das wäre es. Absolut. Eine sehr witzige Vorstellung auch.



04: *mistermark*: Oh je. Anscheinend also keine Freundin von "**Sex and the City**".

05: *couleur*: Sicherlich nicht.

Wieso ist das eigentlich so, dass man, sobald man auch nur einen Furz Rosa

im **Icon** hat, für eine Frau gehalten wird?

06: *_yvette_*: es ist nich *nur* rosa. es ist **hello-kitty-overkill!** (loving it though)

01: *couleur*: I'm not resisting that difference, but I am resisting using it as a qualitative characteristic. That's sexism. And personally, it would bother me to be somewhere because I'm a man and not because I'm me.



02: *mistermark*: Pardon me, but I think that's a little bit ... weird. If you go out drinking with your best girlfriends and not with your good male friend from next door, because you'd like to organize a girls' night out, is that sexism too?

03: *couleur*: Um... yes, it would be. Absolutely. A hilarious thought, too.



04: *mistermark*: Oh dear. I guess you're not a fan (female noun) of "**Sex and the City.**"

05: *couleur*: Of course not.

Why is it always that people think you're a woman as soon as you have even the slightest fart of pink in your **icon**?



06: *_yvette_*: It's not *just* pink, it's **hello kitty overkill!** (loving it though)

User *couleur* clarifies his objection in turn 01, and in the process, specifies that he is also a man. In turn 02, however, user *mistermark* overlooks that identification and formulates his assumption (whether based on *couleur*'s use of Hello Kitty icons or perhaps simply because there tend to be more female users on livejournal than male ones) that *couleur* is a woman. In turn 03, *couleur* uses the same Hello Kitty icon that he used in turn 01, and mocks *mistermark*'s assumption, but does not directly contradict it. In turn 04, *mistermark* formulates his assumption again by using the female form of the German noun for friend, 'Freundin'. User *couleur* responds in turn 05 by repeating the use of the exact same Hello Kitty icon for the third time and proposing that *mistermark* has been making assumptions about him due to his choice of user icons, which serves to underscore his characterization of *mistermark* as being bound by gender stereotypes. In turn 06, user *_yvette_* chimes in, making an evaluative comment about *couleur*'s repeated icon use by switching to English and referring to it as the negative-to-neutral "hello kitty overkill." Remaining in English, she then adds a second, more positive evaluative comment in a parenthetical: "(loving it though)". This use of English is quite different from the earlier uses in turn 04 (in which the English-language name was used to identify a particular American television show) or in turn 05 (in which the English word "icon" is used to refer to the pictures livejournal users employ to accompany their comments), and adds an additional evaluative layer to evaluative comments (whether positive or negative). This evaluative function of switches to English is ubiquitous in the Dutch community, but as can be seen in this excerpt, it can also be found (though less frequently) in the German community.

5.2 Switching to English to mark a transition (Dutch-using community)

Excerpt 4 occurs as a comment on the weekly "vraagvrije vrijdag" (question-free Friday) post that gets made in the Dutch community every Friday, and which allows users to make

any comments they want without having to ask questions first. User *geraldina* has responded to the initial post, which encouraged users to post whatever they felt like posting, with the following comment.

Excerpt 4:

01: *geraldina*: IS HET AL 2010 **OMG**. Laat dit jaar aub snel voorbij gaan verdomme.

But in good news, ik heb net betaald gekregen voor mijn eerste **freelance writing/translating job**. **YAY**.

02: *onderduiker*: **Oe**, gefeliciteerd! :D Dat voelt vast goed!

01: *geraldina*: IS IT 2010 **YET OMG**. Please let this year be over fast, dammit.

But in good news, I just got paid for my first **freelance writing/translating job**. **YAY**.

02: *onderduiker*: **Ooh**, congratulations! I'm sure that feels good.

User *geraldina*'s first switch to English in turn 01, "OMG" (oh my God), falls under the evaluative function already discussed in excerpt 3, as does the final evaluative "YAY." The switch in "but in good news," however, can be seen both as evaluative and as having an additional function of marking a transition, both in terms of a shift from one topic to another and in terms of one mood to another, as *geraldina* moves from a critical and negative formulation about her distaste for what has happened in the year 2009 and a positive formulation of her professional success. Marking both of these kinds of shifts is a common function of language alternation in spoken conversation (cf. Alfonzetti 1998: 197; Zentella 1997: 94), and they are very frequently marked by a switch to English in the data here as well, primarily in the Dutch community but also occasionally in the German one.

5.3 Switching to English to mark an aside (Dutch-using community)

A third major function of switches to English in the data, that of a switch to English to mark an aside, is illustrated by excerpt 5 below, taken from the Dutch community. The post by user *onderduiker* in turn 00 is about possible places to celebrate New Year's Eve and the cost.

Excerpt 5:



00: *onderduiker*: Met oud & nieuw organiseren 't Paard & Grote Markt in Den Haag samen een oud & nieuw iets. Feestje in 't Paard kost 25 eurie, een **combi-ticket** (zodat je naar beide feesten kan en een guldig armbandje krijgt om wachtrijen te omzeilen) kost 40 eurie. Er staat dat deze er maar beperkt zijn. Maar het is me niet duidelijk of ik met 't kaartje van 25 eurie ook naar beide feesten mag, zonder dat

guitige armbandje, zegmaar? ik heb er namelijk echt geen behoefte aan 40 eurie neer te tellen voor iets waarvan ik niet eens weet of 't wel leuk is.

Oh, en wie gaat het nog meer in 't Paard/Grote Markt vieren?

01: *lisa*: Volgens mij mag je dan niet naar beide feesten. Dus 't Paard is 25 euro, en Paard+GM=40 euro. Als je alleen 25 euro betaald mag je dus ook alleen in 't Paard blijven. Ik weet niet precies hoe ze dat gaan doen, de gm afsluiten, maar ik heb iets gehoord over een tent ofzo..

Ik ga het daar niet vieren omdat ik geen zin heb om 25 neer te tellen voor iets waarvan ik niet weet of ik het wel leuk vind. :) Ik heb er wel veel mensen over gehoord, maar die wisten het ook niet zeker vanwege die 25 euro.

02: *lisa*: PS i love your sheldon icon <3



00: *onderduiker*: [Paraphrase: There are two event locations in the Hague that are putting on New Year's parties. It's not clear to me whether you can go to both of them with the **combination ticket** that costs 25 euros, or whether you have to buy the full 40-euro version.]

01: *lisa*: [Paraphrase: You can't go to both parties for one price. I'm not going because it's too expensive.]

02: *lisa*: PS i love your sheldon icon <3

Both the original post, turn 00, and the first comment, turn 01, are completely in Dutch. However, as an addendum to her on-topic comment in turn 01, user *lisa* adds a second comment, completely in English, about her feelings about *onderduiker's* user icon representing the character Sheldon from the American television show "The Big Bang Theory." While this comment is clearly evaluative, and could therefore be analyzed under the evaluative function of a switch to English discussed in excerpt 3, together with the fact that it occurs in a separate comment tacked on to *lisa's* first one in turn 01, the switch also has the additional effect of marking the comment in turn 02 as an aside not relevant to the flow of the conversation. This is a common function of language alternation in spoken conversation (cf. Alfonzetti 1998 188-190; Zentella 1997: 94), and is common in the data here as well, especially in the Dutch community.

5.4 Switching to English to mark a closing (Dutch-using community)

An example of the fourth major use of switches to English in the data can be seen in excerpt 6 below. Here, user *mfpim* makes a short post to ask for help in finding a place to stay in London for herself and her boyfriend.

Excerpt 6:

00: *mfpim*: **yo**, ik ga met nieuwjaar naar london (**again**) 29-dec tot 3 jan. maar nu met ze 2tjes ik en me vriend, maar ik moet nu nog een hotelletje/hostel hebben **anyone** een idee?
thanks

00: *mfpim*: **yo**, I'm going to london for new year's (**again**) Dec 29 to Jan 3. but there's only going to be two of us me and my boyfriend, but I still have to find a hotel/hostel **anyone** got an idea?
Thanks

The post here begins with the African-American Vernacular English greeting "yo", switches to Dutch, and then uses a switch to English alongside the parentheses to mark the aside "(again)". This is analogous to the function of code-switching already identified in excerpt 5. However, a new function can be seen in the final "thanks", which serves to mark the end of the post. This is a common function of language alternation in spoken conversation (cf. Alfonzetti 1998: 194-195; Zentella 1997: 94), and it is also common, in both communities, in the data analyzed here.

5.5 Switching to English to mark lightheartedness among strong affect (Dutch-using community)

The fifth and final main function of switches to English is that of adding a certain lightheartedness or trivial nature to strong affect and thereby mediating what could otherwise be read as something much more serious. One example of this can be seen in excerpt 7 below, which, just as excerpt 4, occurs as a comment on the weekly "vraagvrije vrijdag" (question-free Friday) post that gets made in the Dutch community every Friday. In the first comment, user *dhr_waaromniet* uses the dedicated question-free space to point out to the other participants that popular child video blogger Tabby Ridiman has returned to video blogging.

Excerpt 7:

01: *dhr_waaromniet*: **tabby is back!!!!**
02: *ohnonotme*: **JEEEEEEEEEEEEEEJ** :D
03: *rainbow_*: **I LOVE TABBBBBYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY**
ben alleen wel benieuwd hoe ze op school is
04: *_seventeen_*: **you make me day haha**
05: *rainbow_*: **SHE'S HOMESCHOOLED**
this explains...so much.

01: *dhr_waaromniet*: **tabby is back!!!!**
02: *ohnonotme*: **YAAAAAAAAAAAAAY** :D
03: *rainbow_*: **I LOVE TABBBBBYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY**
I'm just curious how she is at school

04: *_seventeen_*: you make me day haha
 05: *rainbow_*: SHE'S HOMESCHOOLED
 this explains...so much.

This exchange is unusual, even in the Dutch community, for being nearly entirely in English. Turn 02 is an adaptation to Dutch phonology of the English exclamation "yay", but apart from that, the only Dutch here is in user *rainbow_*'s line "I'm just curious how she is at school" in the second half of turn 3. It is no accident that that line also stands out from the rest of the excerpt by being of a somewhat more serious nature than the expressed excitement over being able to watch Tabby's videos again. In each of the other turns, the use of English functions as a way of mediating the four exclamation points in turn 01, the use of all capital letters in turns 02, 03, and 05, adding a certain lightheartedness to the expressed affect. This is an extremely common use of English in the Dutch community, but is much less common in the German one.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide a quantitative analysis of these five discourse-structuring functions of language alternation in the two communities, since they are not a closed set of options, one and only one of which can be assigned to each instance of language alternation. Therefore, it is impossible to say definitively that these kinds of English usage are more common in the Dutch community than the German one. However, it can certainly be said impressionistically that the vast majority of the occurrences of the discourse-structuring functions of language alternation do take place in the Dutch community, as the excerpts analyzed above might indicate. This is not surprising, since most of the uses of English to structure conversation fall into categories b, c, and d, and as we know from the analysis, the vast majority of switches found in the German community are of a single-word nature. This impressionistic evidence is certainly an indication that the young people in the Dutch community are using language alternation in ways that more readily resemble the full spectrum of uses found in spoken language in bilingual communities than the young people in the German community seem to be doing.

6. Analysis: Differences in amount of flagging of uses of English

In spoken conversation, the "flagging" of an instance of language alternation often consists of conversational elements that are unique to spoken language, such as false starts, hesitations, or lengthy pauses (Poplack 1987: 54). In written conversations such as the ones that can be found in the two communities analyzed here, however, flagging takes somewhat different forms. Two examples of written-language flagging can be found in excerpt 1 above: in the post in turn 00, user *weltall* marks her first switch to English by talking about "so-called outdoor shoes," and one of her later switches by putting single quotes around the 'light' in " 'light' hiking". In the comment in turn 01, *captain_lisa* also marks her switch to English by putting double quotes around her own "Boots." One other possible way of flagging a switch found in the data includes *italics*. As discussed previously, all of these kinds of flagging mark an instance of language alternation as

unusual in some way, and consistent flagging within a community indicates a low degree of comfort with language alternation in general.

To ascertain the relative amounts of flagging in the two communities, each switch was tagged as being either flagged or unflagged, and the percentages of each were taken in each community. The results can be seen in Figure 3 below.

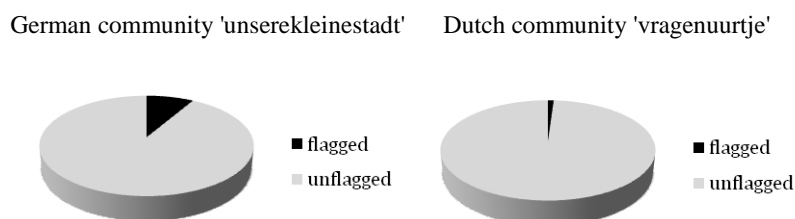


Figure 3: Percentages of flagged vs. unflagged switches in the two communities

As we can see, the flagging of instances of language alternation is relatively unusual in both communities. There are only 220 instances of it in the German community (8.39%) and 44 instances of it in the Dutch community (1.04%). However, despite its rarity, it is still interesting that a much greater percentage of flagged switches can be found in the German community. In fact, despite the greater overall number of switches in the Dutch community, there is even a larger number of flagged switches in the German community in terms of raw numbers. This difference is especially relevant given the much higher percentage of greater than single-word switches in the Dutch community, which one might expect to be more likely to be considered exceptional and worthy of flagging due to their greater length.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This analysis is obviously just one brick in a much larger wall, and there is indeed much more to be investigated. However, even from the limited data collected, it seems possible to differentiate between the language practices of the two communities. English appears to play a much greater role in the computer-mediated interactions of the Dutch young people than it does in those of the young Germans. The Dutch-using group not only uses substantially more English overall, but also more of the three types of language alternation that require greater proficiency and creativity in the English language. Furthermore, they use language-alternation more often in the kinds of discourse-related functions that serve to structure conversation in spoken conversation in bilingual communities. In addition, the German-using group flags their code-switches more, which seems to indicate that they are more conscious of their language switching and mixing.

Relating these differences in practice to the social and political structural differences in two nation-states where the languages are spoken is tempting, and several obvious explanations for these phenomena immediately come to mind. One might be that the

amount of English to which the two groups are exposed makes a difference. The Dutch have had types of contact with English that the Germans have not had, since, as already noted earlier, English-language media are subtitled rather than dubbed in the Netherlands and English is more widely used in higher education in the Netherlands than in Germany. A second suggestion might be that the relative sizes of the two countries could be a factor. With a population of around 82 million for Germany and less than 17 million for the Netherlands, there are simply many more speakers of German than Dutch. Third, the status of each of the two languages within the world system could also be argued to explain the difference, since German has the status of a more widely used lingua franca (de Swaan 2001). Finally, there is evidence that the Dutch have overall greater proficiency in English than the Germans do, which could also be an issue.

However, in the social sciences it is always dangerous to claim cause-and-effect relationships, and so it is important to exercise caution here. Certainly none of these factors can be identified as *explicitly* determining language practices. Nonetheless, it is legitimate to suggest that, although none of these are recognized reasons for the language choices made in the exchanges recorded here, they do all feed into the continuing development of the respective *language ideologies* regarding the role that the English language does and should play in the two countries' respective societies. I would like to propose that it is the differences in these ideologies that are at the root of the kinds of differences in the use of English that can be seen in the data. In particular, I would like to hypothesize that the "ownership" of the English language tends to be fuzzier in the Netherlands than it is in Germany, i.e. that Dutch young people are more likely to see English as an international language that "belongs" to everyone who speaks it in some way (and therefore to them, among many others), whereas German young people may tend to conceive of English mainly as the domain of English-dominant countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. While the Germans lean towards regarding English as a vitally necessary foreign language, the Dutch are perhaps constructing English as something different altogether: not as their "mother tongue," but not as something entirely foreign either. They see English as "belonging" to them as well, maybe not in exactly the same way it "belongs" to the British or the Americans, but in a way that is just as legitimate and just as real. Such a difference in language ideologies could account to some extent for the differences in the way the two communities use English, because if you regard English primarily as an international language that "belongs" to everyone rather than a foreign language that you need to use occasionally, you are much more likely to incorporate it as a vital part of your daily interactions and to feel able to play with its forms. The two countries' respective ideologies of English as a lingua franca/English as an additional language are then in turn further shaped by the role (in terms of its functional range and societal depth of use) that the English language plays in the respective societies.

Of course, none of the data analysed here present explicit evidence for the idea that it is differences in ideology that can best explain these differences in practice. For this reason, further investigation of developing attitudes is essential. This will involve, among other things, qualitative analysis of language attitudes and the ways in which these attitudes reveal differences in larger and more widespread ideologies. Similar research is already in progress in other communities (cf. Liebscher/ Dailey-O'Cain 2009), but it is needed here

as well. In the meantime, the present findings support the view that the spread of English is taking place at different speeds and in different ways in these two countries.

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