

3 Contesting Stereotypes

Language, Body, and Belonging – Northern and Southern Perspectives

*Rajend Mesthrie, Toril Opsahl,
and Unn Røyneland¹*

Introduction

In this chapter we discuss cases where there appear to be a mismatch – or a potential dissonance – between expected language practices and embodiment. Dissonant expressions and narratives of belonging evoke important questions about indexing the local versus the global and notions of identities. Complexities over the relationship between colour, language, and identity are evident in the South African context and widely recognized. For instance, the author, television host, and comedian Trevor Noah notes that language was heavily implicated in the political culture of the apartheid era:

Language brings with it an identity and a culture, or at least the perception of it. A shared language says, “We’re the same.” A language barrier says, “We’re different.” The architects of apartheid understood this. Part of the effort to divide black people was to make sure we were separated not just physically but by language as well.

(Noah 2016, 58)

Within the Norwegian context, questions of ethno-racial classification have not been part of official policy since the “Norwegianization” campaign against the Sámi and Kven populations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Lane 2009). Still, questions about “racial” or “ethnic” origin are often thematized in the public debate (e.g., Tyldum 2019) and are in fact included in the official application form concerning data privacy requirements (NSD 2019). Recent research indicates that there exists a stereotype securing the notion of “Norwegianness” as being strongly connected to embodiment, i.e., “whiteness,” and language practice (the use of a local dialect) (e.g., Røyneland and Jensen 2020).

We start by presenting some of the socio-historical conditions responsible for stereotypical notions of language and embodiment within the Norwegian context. These are further illustrated by displaying the linguistic performances and identity negotiations of three young men taking part in three different popular national TV programmes. The results are based on

analyses of dialect features as well as of interactions, narrations, and meta-pragmatic reflections on experiences related to language use and embodiment. The Norwegian cases will be juxtaposed with an account of changes in the South African context. During the apartheid era, there was not only an expectation that people classified in a particular way would have “typical” repertoires and accents, but that these in turn would feed into physical racial classifications in cases of official doubt. However, post-apartheid fluidities now call into question any easy equation of language and dialect with personal and group identities (e.g., McKinney 2007; Mesthrie 2012, 2017). These include the key term “coconut,” which encapsulates the theme of embodiment, referring in a mostly critical way to people alleged to be “Black on the outside, White on the inside” because of new socio-cultural and linguistic traits. These include, in particular, having English as a dominant part of their repertoire or speaking it with an accent that used to be considered “White.” How young people handle language and accent in a now freer South African society is thus worthy of consideration. Hence, both the Norwegian and the South African contexts involve cases where expectations of stereotypical linguistic behaviour are negotiated or contested, reflecting social change over the last three decades. We find, for example, in the Norwegian context that the term “Kinder Egg” is used as a highly offensive epithet in a manner parallel to the South African “coconut.” A Kinder Egg is a hollow, brown chocolate egg lined with a layer of white milk-cream, which contains a plastic toy, thus “Black on the outside, White on the inside.”

Theory, method, and data

This chapter addresses the ways in which “bodies and embodiment are central to the production, perception, and social interpretation of language” (Bucholtz and Hall 2016, 173). Violation of expectations connected to the combination of particular speech and particular (racialized) bodies may cause reactions, such as surprise, amusement, sympathy, uncertainty, resentment, anger, etc. (Røyneland and Jensen 2020, 7). Theories regarding negotiation of identities in interaction and membership categorization have served as a useful backdrop for our analyses (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Stokoe 2012). The view of identities as something that is continuously co-constructed and contextually bound is widely recognized in contemporary sociolinguistics. Identities may be negotiated through evoking common categories, activities, and attributes, like explicit mentioning of membership categories or labels (like “Coloured,” “coconut,” “foreigner,” or “Norwegian”), or mentioning of specific attributes or practices associated with specific categories (like “dressing gangsta,” “eating Indian food,” “speaking white,” or having a specific skin colour). A critical dimension is added through the inclusion of raciolinguistic perspectives, where we recognize how such perspectives highlight the contestation of racial and linguistic

power formations (Alim et al. 2016; Rosa and Flores 2017). Moreover, we have found theoretical assumptions connected to ideologies of authenticity to be useful (Coupland 2003; Woolard 2016). According to the ideology of authenticity, the value and legitimacy of a variety lie in its social and geographical rootedness and are tied to specific speakers and their individual voices. Finally, this theoretical framing takes the commodification of varieties into account. Commodification concerns how a specific object or process is rendered available for exchange in a market (Heller, Pujolar and Duchêne 2014, 545). Heller (2010, 102–103) claims that globalized markets contribute to language commodification in two ways: language is perceived as a *technical* skill and as a sign of *authenticity*, useful as added value for niche markets as a distinguishing feature – for products or people. In the Norwegian part of our study, we see for instance how dialect figures as an important sign of authenticity upon which individuals establish and “sell” themselves as rooted in rural or urban Norway, as an artist or a successful comedian.

The Norwegian part of this study draws on a compilation of previous sociolinguistic work. In addition, we present three single-case, qualitative analyses of media performances, with an emphasis on dialect use and identity projection, acquired through close readings of three TV shows. The most prominent case is *Sondre*, one of the successful contestants in a prime-time musical TV competition (2019). The second case is the character *Ola Halvorsen* created by a Norwegian comedian for a popular comedy drama (2019). The third case features Jonis Josef, who created and stars in a series portraying teenage life in a multiethnic suburb (2019). We aim at demonstrating that such case analyses are helpful in displaying the rather complex reality surrounding language, colour, and identity in present-day Norway. The South African section is also primarily discursive in nature, drawing on various strands of research that are cited in the accompanying references. It presents data on how the old apartheid preoccupation with the physical body and racial classification to some extent lingers on; but is mostly controverted by young peoples’ use of metaphors that help them make sense of, and navigate through, a complex post-racial present. Information concerning evaluations of new migrants from other African countries to South Africa is presented, showing a surprising degree of “othering.”

Language and embodiment: Norwegian perspectives and realities

Background

Previous research indicates that “whiteness” (still) is perceived as an essential part of what it means to be “Norwegian” (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Røyneland 2018), and that “whiteness” may be mitigated in the case of immigrants’ acquisition and use of local dialects, which are typically seen

as an index of integration and “Norwegianness” (Røyneland and Jensen 2020). The use of local dialects is generally highly acclaimed in Norway, dialect diversity is seen as an egalitarian and democratic ideal, and an ideology of authenticity building on a strong relationship between dialect and place is characteristic of the Norwegian linguistic landscape (Røyneland and Lanza 2020, 9). Dialects are generally used within all social domains, and there is no oral standard proper in Norway. However, the spoken variety in Oslo and its surroundings has high prestige and is often referred to as “Standard” or “Urban” Eastern Norwegian (e.g., Mæhlum and Røyneland 2012). The language education programs for migrant “new speakers” of Norwegian only to some extent include training in the use of traditional dialect features (Røyneland and Lanza 2020, 13). As such, the ideological expectation tends to be that migrants with a skin color darker than the stereotypical Norwegian (white, blond, and blue-eyed) would speak another language, L2 accented Norwegian, multiethnolectal Norwegian, or Urban Eastern Norwegian, but not a rural Norwegian dialect.

Immigration to Norway dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when migrant workers – particularly from Pakistan – started arriving. Today, 14.7% of the Norwegian population are labeled as “immigrants,” and 3.5% are labeled as “Norwegian-born to immigrant parents” (SSB 2020). Gullestad (2002) shows how the term ‘migrant’ typically invokes images of people with dark skin, often of third-world origin, with values that differ from those of the Norwegian majority. The majority of migrants to Norway today, however, come from Eastern European EU countries, such as Poland and Lithuania. Still, the conceptualization of “migrant” described by Gullestad remains salient (cf. Cutler and Røyneland 2015), and some migrants themselves take part in constructing the Norwegian society as ‘white’ (Guðjónsdóttir 2014, 180). Dark skin color, therefore, seems to be a prominent factor in the connotations associated with “immigrant” in Norway, mirroring the stereotypical notion of ‘whiteness’ as an integral part of the concept “Norwegianness.” Notably, adolescents with only a slightly darker skin colour than the traditional Norwegian, such as young people with an eastern-European or Middle East background, may be labelled and self-label as ‘black’ and as ‘foreigners’ (Røyneland 2018, 160). It should be noted, however, that the very notion of a Norwegian skin colour has been extensively and critically debated for some time (e.g., Sibeko 2019). In the next section, we turn to three case studies of how “Norwegianness,” “whiteness,” and “dialect” are intertwined and connected to stereotypes which may – or may not – be contested.

Performing the authentic local

It is just incredibly beautiful when you sing in that dialect of yours ... and when you enter the room and stuff, I’m thinking: “OK, who’s

that?” like “Cool guy!” So, I believe that you’ve got it, and this feels completely authentic and real.²

(Guest judge, NRK, *Stjernerkamp*, episode 6, 43,12)

This quote is only one of several instantiations of the juxtaposition of body (“when you enter the room”), dialect performance (“when you sing in that dialect of yours”), and notions of authenticity (“completely authentic and real”) presented by the national public broadcaster, NRK. The quote is an excerpt from the feedback presented to Sondre, a contest participant, by one of the guest judges in the eighth series of the musical talent show *Stjernerkamp* (*Battle of the Stars*) (2019). Further inspection of discourses and interactions involving Sondre reveals a case where stereotypical notions of identity are both contested and confirmed. In the show, ten artists are invited to perform in a variety of musical genres, from heavy metal to hip-hop to opera. Performers continue or leave the programme based on votes cast by the television audience. The contestants represent a diverse group of artists and genres, and the number of different local dialects represented in the series is striking.

At the time of the TV programme, Sondre had already been an active musician for some years on several online platforms and had gained recognition by a larger audience in 2016 when he participated in *The Stream*, a talent show. Sondre was born in Kenya, but after his mother died a Norwegian missionary couple adopted him and his twin sister. When they turned six, the family returned to Norway and lived in a small inland municipality in the southeastern part of the country. According to Sondre, the transition from Kenya to Norway included several experiences of exclusion and harsh feelings of otherness. In a photograph (Figure 3.1) taken from the programme, Sondre talks about his rationale for choosing to perform the song “Butterfly in Winterland.” According to him, the song symbolized the contrast he and his sister felt coming to Norway – the bodily experience of being different and being bodies that did not belong.

Sondre’s Norwegian hometown is traditionally a farming and logging community, which is known in recent times for recreation and ski tourism. The valley where the town is located, Gudbrandsdalen, is a region with rich traditions, and the idea of being a *døl* (person from the valley) has always yielded abundant connotations with respect to history, legend, and stereotypical notions of Norwegianness. The strong traditions of the valley are also evident in the local dialect, which for a long time has managed to resist strong forces of standardization. Although the dialect is marked by some levelling, a number of characteristic dialect features are still in use by young people in the area (e.g., Mæhlum and Røyneland 2012).

Sondre lives and works in Oslo. He has hopes of an international breakthrough and often chooses to sing in English. During his appearance on *The Stream* (2016), he spoke Urban Eastern Norwegian, practically without any trace of dialect features. However, when he appeared on *Stjernerkamp*



Figure 3.1: “We felt the contrast. The two of us were the butterflies coming to the winterland.” (Screenshot from *StjerneKamp*, NRK, episode 6, 39:02) (Rights purchased from Monster Productions and approved by the artist).

three years later, it became clear that his repertoire also included mastery of the traditional dialect of Gudbrandsdalen. Close reading of the show reveals that this part of his linguistic repertoire was strategically used as a commodity – both by the television producers and by Sondre himself – to portray a certain persona related to the idea of being an authentic *døl* – and by extension “Norwegian.”

Repeated narratives and interactions during the programme establish Sondre as a dialect expert and authentic local. In the very first episode, the series’ host introduces Sondre as an ambitious and talented artist, for whom music had been a safe haven in times of trouble. More importantly, the host presents him as an artist from Gudbrandsdalen. After Sondre’s performance of Bruce Springsteen’s “Dancing in the Dark,” the local valley persona is shaped in several ways. One of the two regular members of the three-judge panel expresses enthusiasm about “how he moves” and says, “You charmed me deeply,” before ending her comment with an attempt to use a traditional expression from Gudbrandsdalen: “*Kolossalt frekt, eller?*” (“Exceptionally good, or what?”). Sondre corrects her with a smile and utters the actual traditional dialect expression, “*Abraksle frekt,*” which is followed by laughter and applause from the audience. His effort is further evaluated by the two other judges: the guest judge, a musician from a neighbouring area, states, “I thought I knew the dialect before you said that thing,” while the second regular judge remarks, “I didn’t even understand what it meant,” after which they both go on to praise

Sondre's performance. The host then asks Sondre where he had acquired his confidence. While looking flirtatiously into the camera, Sondre says with a strong dialectal tone, "*Ja det kjæm vel frå oppi dar'n de' vettu*" ("Yeah, that probably comes from up there in the valley, you know"), which stands out from what he had presented up to that point, creating an impression of stylization. The host immediately echoes him in an equally stylized manner.

As discussed by Woolard (2016), the value and legitimacy of a dialect and its speakers are typically measured against degrees of authenticity. In this case, we may observe how Sondre is co-constructed as an authentic dialect user in order to secure his identity as a legitimate local. The establishment of Sondre as an expert dialect user also illustrates a duality characteristic of his appearance throughout the show, whereby certain stereotypes are contested and confirmed at the same time. It is simultaneously a contestation of the stereotype of the traditional dialect user being a white person, and a confirmation of the stereotype of the "trustworthy and good-natured fellow from the valley." It also has the very important effect of situating Sondre firmly as a local Norwegian, thereby subverting the label "foreigner" – something which may be beneficial in the effort to collect votes from the TV audience. During previous series of *Stjernekamp*, accusations of racism had been levelled in (social) media debates because contestants of visible mixed or non-Norwegian backgrounds tended to leave the show early after receiving the fewest votes (e.g., VG Debate, 2017). In Sondre's case, initially the pattern seemed to be repeated; however, he reached the semi-final.

Whatever its effect on Sondre's fate in the program may have been, it is striking that embodiment and identity remained an explicit theme of his participation. Another example is his use of the phrase "*brun og blid*" ("brown and blithe"), which is the slogan of a chain of tanning salons. It is deployed by Sondre on two occasions to describe himself, both times evoking a strong and immediate positive response from the audience. While there may be humour in this recontextualization of the familiar slogan, Sondre is drawing on a range of stereotypes typically invoked by the category of "Norwegian." This is evident, too, when at one point he gestures toward his own body and remarks that it is evidently not made for the harsh temperatures of the local winter. In these performances, Sondre makes explicit the tension between stereotypical expectations produced by his physical appearance and those produced by his speech. His performance illustrates how the stereotype of Gudbrandsdøl as dialect user is deployed to work against the stereotype of Norwegian as white, while also serving to highlight Sondre's individuality and the complexity of his identity and belonging. However, as pointed out by Bucholtz and Hall (2005, 602), complex identities like the ones negotiated here may be vulnerable to denaturalization or illegitimization. When an identity violates ideological expectations, it may be accused of being inauthentic or even false.

Performing the immigrant persona

Unlike Sondre, Ola Halvorsen is a fictional character. He was created by Herman Flesvig, a comedian and actor, and is one of the main characters in the very popular TV series, *Førstegangstjenesten* (*Compulsory Military Service*) (2019), in which Flesvig himself portrays all of the main roles. The Ola Halvorsen character, a rapper from a multiethnic suburb in Oslo, soon became popular and has appeared on several occasions outside of the TV series in short, often humorous clips commenting on current affairs. Most recently, he appeared in a witty campaign video, encouraging people to obey infection control measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ola's fair skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes add to the impression of a "stereotypical Norwegian." However, his hairstyle, which includes dreads, braids, and pearls, as well as his clothing, such as oversized tracksuits, create strong connotations in the direction of other stereotypes. An urban, hip-hop-inspired (wannabe) "streetwise" persona is underscored further by a laidback physical style and posture, a preference for exaggerated handshake routines, dabbing, and gestures typically associated with (gangsta) rappers.³

The dialectal features used by Ola are not associated with traditional rural dialects, as was the case with Sondre, but with Norwegian urban, multiethnolectal speech styles (e.g., Svendsen and Røynealand 2008; Opsahl 2009). A connection between hip-hop culture, the use of multiethnolectal features, and the play on gangster stereotypes to establish a sense of belonging in multiethnic urban settings is well documented (Cutler and Røynealand 2015; Opsahl and Røynealand 2016). The linguistic characteristics that Flesvig uses to build his character are first and foremost loan words and slang from immigrant languages as well as salient discourse markers and fixed expressions, such as "*wallah*," "*helt ærlig*" (quite honestly), and "*bror*" (brother); but he also uses characteristic staccato intonation and the exaggerated pronunciation of certain vowels. The clash between Ola's body and appearance, on the one hand, and his striving to belong among "the cool, streetwise foreigners," on the other, is further reinforced by his first name. "Ola" is a traditional name used as a national personification of male Norwegians, used to describe trends in the population (akin to "average Joe"), or used as a placeholder name, such as Ola Nordmann (Ola Norwegian, which is like John Doe).

The Ola Halvorsen character and the speech style that he allegedly promotes have also received criticism. In a much quoted TV interview, the Norwegian-Ghanaian rapper Britz asserts that Ola's lack of authenticity and inaccurate speech style feed harmful stereotypes: he claims that nobody speaks like that, and it frustrates him that youth from multiethnic suburbs are constantly forced to contest it (Haus 2020). In response to the criticism, the producers state that the exaggeration in style is intentional, and "missing the target" and a lack of authenticity are exactly what create the comic effect of this wannabe character (Midtskog 2020). While this may be true,

it would be hasty to conclude that Ola thereby contests the stereotype of the foreign-looking, multiethnolectal speaker. Rather, the effect of the pathetic display of illegitimate crossing (in the sense of Rampton 1995) may itself be perceived as an implicit affirmation that the body-language stereotype exclusively belongs to those who look foreign.

Performing the other and hierarchies of class

The third example we would like to discuss is from yet another highly popular comedy series broadcast on NRK in 2019, *Kongen av Gulset* (*The King of Gulset*), a fictionalized portrayal of the teenage life of Jonis Josef, a Norwegian-Somali comedian and creator of the series. He grew up in a multilingual suburb marked by pronounced class and ethnic distinctions, where language was an important marker of group identity. Several linguistic practices are displayed in the series, including Somali and a wide range of Norwegian varieties. In addition, there are constant switches from the multiethnolectal speaking voices of teenage Jonis and his friends to the Urban Eastern Norwegian speaking voice of young-adult Jonis. In a humorous yet critical manner, Josef describes the conflicts between his own group, “the working-class foreigners,” and “the upper/middle-class Norwegians.” His own group, “the foreigners,” does not consist only of people with an immigrant background. One of the main figures in his group, Don Tommy, is a white boy described as a “100% Wigga.” The term “Wigga” is often used to derogatorily refer to white teenagers who unsuccessfully emulate the perceived style, language, and fashion associated with urban black (hip-hop) youth. In Don Tommy’s case, it is used more as an honorific. He is a highly valued member of the group – a “bro.” He is also the only white kid at the school who studies Norwegian as a second language and who, like Ola Halvorsen, speaks multiethnolectal Norwegian. Another cherished member of the group, and Jonis’s best friend, is Charky. Although Charky is described as “the darkest member of the gang,” he is often mocked as “white,” and labelled a “Kinder Egg.” In the series’ first episode, Jonis describes how the very worst thing anybody could call you is a “Kinder Egg” – it is the equivalent of being a “Quisling”⁴ a traitor of the worst sort. As such, we see two types of crossings portrayed in the series. Whereas crossing from white to black is positively presented, movement in the opposite direction is deemed traitorous.

The attempt to cross by adopting salient competing identity features may be taken as an act of disowning and rejecting a certain group identity. However, the social significance and perception of such crossings depend on dynamics of power and status as well as the direction of movement in terms of hierarchies of class. In the eyes of a privileged majority, such identity crossings may be regarded as mostly comical. In contrast, when seen from the point of view of a minority, the implicit devaluation of recognized characteristics of the group carries a potential threat insofar as the value of these

features is already made precarious by social and economic disadvantage. These findings support claims that it is necessary to situate multilingual practices, such as crossing, within a broader economic analysis that seeks to understand how practices reinforce and challenge racial and class inequities (Rosa and Flores 2017).

The identity features displayed by Jonis and his group reflect and thematize their status as members of a minority. Much of the show's power and humor lies in its display of how these features are harnessed in the production of an identity with a positive valence, a form of *cool*. A deliberate attempt to establish group membership by invoking these features may be perceived as an inauthentic pose or even as a form of cooption and exploitation, as the term "Wigga" typically conveys. However, if conditions are right, it may also be accepted as an act of solidarity, as in the case of Don Tommy. Yet, both Don Tommy and Charky pay a price for their identity crossings, which serve to illustrate a fundamental motif of the programme: *body matters*.

Contesting and confirming stereotypes

In different but overlapping ways, Sondre, Ola Halvorsen, and Don Tommy contest existing stereotypes and ideological expectations of identities connected to language use and embodiment within the contemporary Norwegian context. Both Ola and Don Tommy use linguistic features, fashion, and body movement in an attempt to belong in a community of 'foreigners'. Sondre, on the other hand, has an appearance that at first sight indexes as "foreigner," but he uses linguistic features to negotiate belonging in a local "Norwegian" community. Both Ola and Sondre use exaggerated, extreme, or stylized versions of their chosen linguistic repertoire. To different degrees, they both take part in some level of parody or at least performance. By doing so, they succeed in creating a strong sense of belonging within the mainstream Norwegian community, where a dominant cultural model foregrounds valorization of monolectal and traditional geolectal behaviour. The balance is restored, so to speak, and the ideology of authenticity still prevails when a young man from a rural valley speaks a traditional dialect or when a young man from an urban multiethnic suburb speaks "Kebab-Norwegian" (a lay term for multiethnolectal speech).

The ability to juggle and switch between different varieties of Norwegian (and other languages) is typical of contemporary language practice in Norway. Nevertheless, these speakers are forced to suppress this ability to be able to succeed in their striving for belonging and success in the mainstream entertainment market. Although we may say that both Sondre and Ola contest body-language stereotypes ("white/Norwegian dialect speaker" and "black/foreign multiethnolectal speaker") through their linguistic behavior, they clearly use these same stereotypes to create surprise and amusement. Moreover, by using stereotypes of the "good-natured,

harmless dialect speaker” and the “streetwise multiethnolectal speaker” to this effect, they simultaneously offer a certain confirmation of the stereotypes’ power. In Josef Jonis’s semi-autobiographical series, many stereotypes are simultaneously contested and confirmed, not least with regard to Don Tommy. Throughout the series there is constant switching between the multiethnolectal speaking voice of 13-year-old Jonis and the Urban Eastern Norwegian speaking voice of the young-adult Jonis who provides an overarching narrative. Thus, built into the very framing of the show is a demonstrable command of a wide linguistic repertoire, countering the idea of the multiethnolectal, single-repertoire speaker.

While all of these artists and comedians appear to be able to juggle and switch between different personae, the colour of their skin remains a constant and important factor in ideological expectations regarding their respective linguistic behaviors. These complexities have some obvious, and perhaps some less obvious, parallels in the South African data to which we now turn.

Embodiment and language: South African perspectives and realities

In this section we have three foci: (a) past practices, expectations, and stereotypes under apartheid as a brief backdrop to current changing practices; (b) post-apartheid fluidities in respect of embodiment and language; and (c) new migrant perspectives and complexities compared to Norway. Our treatment of these themes will be discursive; the detailed sociolinguistic work behind many of the observations will be given in the accompanying references. Comparisons with Norway work in terms of the acquisition of Norwegian, but they become much more complicated (and interesting) if we factor in the essentially multilingual nature of South Africa’s population (and its 11 official languages). The writings of Trevor Noah (2016) will be cited as a bridge between issues of race, colour, language, and the body in Norwegian and South African contexts.

The Apartheid era and language embodiment

Between 1948 and 1994, South Africa enshrined in law a rigorous system for the social separation of groups identified allegedly by skin colour and historical background. Such compartmentalization was hardly watertight since neither pigmentation nor history can be easily separated into four (or any other number of) groups without entanglements, especially since relationships and marriage across colour lines were not precluded prior to 1948 or going back to the start of the colonial era in the seventeenth century. Though the groupings were tinkered with in different Acts, they were essentially Whites, Coloureds, Blacks, and Indians (sometimes “Asiatic”). Race was constructed as an essential rather than a contingent category. As Posel

(2001, 64) put it, “Bodies became signifiers of status, power, and worth in a hierarchy that privileged whiteness (as both a biological and social condition) at its apex.” Language was not part of a direct definition of the groupings, but there was an expectation that Whites spoke English and/or Afrikaans, Coloureds spoke mostly Afrikaans and/or English, Blacks spoke a Bantu language, and Indians spoke an Indian language (such as Tamil or Hindi) plus English. In fact, a word misused by the regime was “Bantu” (from Nguni *abantu* [people]), which was generalized to mean “a Black person” expected to speak a Bantu language (isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, etc.). The regime tried to block off economic and social mobility for Black people by limiting access to English and a good education (see Hartshorne 1995). It tried instead to promote Afrikaans, resistance to which led to the famous Soweto Uprisings of 1976 and, in fact, expedited the road to ultimate liberation.

Mention must be made of two phenomena relevant to the themes of language and the physical body: “passing” and “folk race-testing.” The harshness of restrictions on people of colour meant that people occasionally tried to subvert the race classifications. The difficulties experienced by those who tried to “pass” unofficially as White were documented by Watson (1970). Some people classified as “Coloured” applied for official reclassification if they had straight hair and fair skin. The South African colloquialism that arose out of this was “to try for White.” To do so they had to convince the authorities that they had European ancestry (Portuguese ancestry was a popular possibility) and spoke English. It was a soul-destroying exercise that often meant having to disown or sever ties with family and links to the Afrikaans dialect, which had gained particularly strong cultural and identity value in the Cape context. One of the hurdles was a so-called “pencil test,” which, contrary to its name, was not a test of literacy but of hair texture. Passing a pencil through the hair allegedly gave an indication of whether the person had European or Coloured hair, which depended on whether the writing implement in question stayed in place or rolled to the floor (Watson 1970). Another complementary test was equally famous for its crassness. Rather than conducting a sociolinguistic assessment of the vernacular, the candidate was given a sudden pinch to evoke an exclamation of pain. If the involuntary cry was “ouch,” a claim to be “English-speaking” White was apparently upheld; whereas *eina* placed one in the Afrikaans-speaking and therefore Coloured camp. There was a small measure of “passing” and reclassification from the Bantu grouping to “Coloured” too, mainly for economic reasons. The linguistic correlate was that one had to demonstrate a knowledge of Afrikaans and disavow adherence to an indigenous African language.

Sociolinguistically speaking, apartheid policy constrained social networks and, by doing so, minimized the sustained social interactions that result in dialect and language acquisition and convergence. To some extent the stereotypical link between speech and ethnicity that the policy espoused

then became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Where English was concerned, there were about five easily recognizable sociolects and main groupings: (a) L1 English-speaking Whites, (b) L2 Afrikaans English (of White Afrikaners), (c) L2 Black South-African English, (d) Coloured bilingually based English in most parts of the country, and (e) Indians involved in special kinds of bilingualism with an Indian language or in various degrees of language shift.

Post-apartheid fluidities of language and embodiment

The statutory end of apartheid in 1994 finally delivered a free democracy to South Africa. It also freed the body. In theory there were no longer restrictions requiring the carrying of documents “establishing” one’s race and, hence, the right to visit, live, or work in particular areas. There was a new freedom of association, and segregated schooling was no longer enforced. A policy of Black empowerment also saw the rise of a class and status hierarchy that was stronger than what had been the case under the old order.

The most visible linguistic correlate of the sweeping changes was found in middle-class English speech. In the mid-1990s a number of terms arose among working-class Black students to describe their new middle-class counterparts, who were often well-heeled and clothed, were comfortable in multiracial social groupings, and spoke an English that sounded White (see Ngcobo 2007). The terms that arose to describe this new class were sometimes humorous, sometimes mocking, and occasionally envious. They included: “model Cs,” “cheeseboys” or “cheesegirls,” and, above all, “coconut.” The “model Cs” label refers to the middle classes metonymically in terms of the former “Whites-only” schools that they attended, where they absorbed their ethos, ethics, and accents. The “cheeseboys” and “cheesegirls” labels mockingly associate new, young, middle-class-to-be individuals with a type of food connected with the middle classes, because, for reasons of cost, cheese was not traditionally part of Black schoolchildren’s sandwiches. Trevor Noah (2016, 243) gives some salient descriptions of the posturing that took place in some townships over who was “hood” and who was “cheeseboy.” The term “coconuts” refers to individuals who have allegedly assimilated to the ethos of White schools and Western values to the extent that they are no longer culturally Black. They remain Black on the outside but purportedly White on the inside. (The term has analogues elsewhere: e.g., “Oreo” [biscuits] in the USA “choc-ice” in the UK, and “Kinder Egg” [chocolate] in Norway). The “coconut” label thus speaks to the theme of authenticity, which was outlined in the first part of this article, more in terms of ethnicity than region. It encapsulates, for the first time in Black South-African life, a very salient class split and also a metaphoric split in the body (see Blommaert and Makoe 2011). Social change among young people became a salient theme in young Black writing, notably in the novel *Coconut* (Matlwa 2004) and

in the accounts of Ngcobo (2007) and Noah (2016). To link with the first half of this paper, a major achievement of the “coconut generation” (as we might call them) was to challenge the old associations of race, language, accents of English, and the embodiment of language. They may be credited with deracializing South-African English, or at least middle-class English, since it could no longer be associated with only one ethnicity (Whites) (Mesthrie 2017). On the other hand, there is the counter-charge that this has come at the cost of fluency in an African language and the loss of traditional culture (i.a., Mesthrie 2017; McKinney 2007; Blommaert and Makoe 2011).

At the time of South Africa’s transition, the new class accent among young Black people was novel enough to attract frequent comment. Today it is unremarkable (more so for females, as demonstrated in Mesthrie 2017). The terms invented by young people are not limited to Black-White relations and expectations; they appear in Coloured and Indian communities as well. Take, for example, the word “twang.” Rather than denoting a particular feature of an accent (as in an older established sense), the term “twang” is used as a critical comment on the adoption of a more-or-less White way of speaking.⁵ To speak with a twang is to go against past racial expectations, which as we have seen are largely (but not solely) based on physical appearance. But speaking with a twang also goes against an older sense of loyalty to specific communities. More positively, from a gender perspective it grants young women (mostly of the new middle classes) the opportunity to experiment with and forge new styles that raise the possibility of greater independence and freedom from old racial, community, and gender arrangements.

Speaking with a twang is highly indexical of participation in a new societal order, especially among younger people. Following Carmen Fought (2006) and others referred to there, we might think of this as “re-racing.” This process, which is underwritten largely by changes in economic possibilities, is manifested in sociolinguistic projection (accompanied by changes in gesture, posture, dress, and so forth). In this way the old certainties of race in South Africa have been contested and overturned – at least at the middle-class level. While the working classes may initially resist these crossovers and/or simply lack the means that foster entry into new social networks, the lifestyle often proves desirable and attractive, particularly given the force of the commercial world and its advertising wing. Caroline McKinney (2007) noted the term “Luis Vuitton English,” which emphasizes the allure and prestige of Black middle-class females’ English as well as the envy felt by other young Black women. This change, which goes beyond the body to include its accoutrements and accessories, saliently speaks to the theme of commodification of accent and style previously outlined in this article. It is the English used in television advertising to promote the most upmarket products, such as fashion and credit cards. Accent, dress, accoutrements, accessories, style, and consumption come together simultaneously in the make-believe world of advertising and marketing.

A final term worthy of consideration is “litchi,” which extends the fruit metaphor in a playful and mostly tolerant way and cautions against the heavy pursuit of a political or ideological analysis. Mesthrie (2017) provides a lively recital of the coining of this term by a young Indian female and her peer group in Durban when they were talking about a male school friend, who was White but, according to the account, desperately wanted to be “Indian.” He was highly knowledgeable about Indian culture, loved the (vegetarian) food, dressed in Eastern-style clothes, and knew more about Hinduism than the young Hindus in class. He was, in short, a *litchi* – white on the outside, dark on the inside, and turns red in the sun. “Litchi” may also be a suitable term for describing Ola Halvorsen, the Norwegian character discussed earlier. The parallel is ambivalent, however, since the mainstream perception of the character as playful and harmless has been met with critique from “insiders,” who point to his linguistic practices as being illegitimate and potentially harmful, thereby evoking what we refer to in the next paragraph as the fine line between participating and stereotyping.

The changes evinced in the English of young, Black members of the middle class (or the middle-class-to-be) reflect a crossover (and not just temporary crossing into a new accent space). The trajectory of change does seem to be one “from above” in the sense used by Labov (1972). One might wonder whether there are counter-flows, given that South Africa has its Black majority in parliamentary power, and in charge of the media. The country has seen a major swing in the last 30 years from the prominence of Whites in public media spaces to the predominance of Black people. To authentically perform “Blackness,” one would have to demonstrate an “African multilingualism” (one which demonstrates proficiency in at least one Bantu language, and an openness to others via township experiences). Trevor Noah (2016, 66–67) again proves an exemplar *par excellence*:

language even more than colour, defines who you are to people. So I became a chameleon. My colour didn’t change, but I could change your perception of my colour. If you spoke to me in isiZulu, I replied in isiZulu. If you spoke to me in Setswana, I replied to you in Setswana. Maybe I didn’t look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you.

Where English is concerned, such “chameleon-crossing” (to marry Noah’s insights with those of Rampton 1995) is more difficult if one is White. The individual’s multilingualism would have to involve subtle influences from a Black-oriented English (hence the older L2 variety) as well as proficiency in an African language. This is not so easy, especially given that there is a fine line between participating and stereotyping. If, for example, L2 English features are used by an L1 speaker, there is a risk of stereotyping. One striking example of chameleon-crossing is the late musician-cum-anthropologist Johnny Clegg, “the White Zulu” (*le Zoulou blanc*) as he came to be known internationally for his immersion in the world of African music, culture,

and language. The physical body is indexed by the colour term (“White”) whereas culture and identity (and not, strictly speaking, color) is inherent in the term Zulu (rather than “black” or African). Other cases are not so common. Trevor Noah (2016, 174) himself speaks of colour and the body as being relative to place, community, experience, and expectations (at least in his own case as a young boy of black and white ancestry): “In Soweto I was the only white kid in a black township. In Eden Park I was the only mixed kid in a coloured area. In Highlands North I was the only black kid in a white suburb.” Noah has introduced a new differentiation here between “mixed kid” and “coloured,” showing the latter to be a term concerning culture and community, as against race implicit in the former.

Multilingualism, embodiment, and migration

The South African situation cautions against overgeneralizing from monolingual expectations (as in the US) or multilingualism in which one language is clearly dominant (and associated with the nation, as in Norway). In much of Africa and Asia there is little reason to assume that bodies are associated with a single language. In urban settings – and elsewhere – people have multilingual repertoires and seldom keep their languages apart in casual styles and “insider” speech. In postcolonial contexts, particularly, it is expected that educated and urban citizens command an indigenous language as well as the ex-colonial language. There is no expectation of language shift; equally, there is no expectation of language “purity” in everyday speech (see Blommaert’s 2007 account of variation in Central Africa).

In his book *On the Postcolony*, cultural critic Achille Mbembe stresses that people can “be several in a body” (2015, 202). For Mbembe the post-colonial African “subject” has inherited a position from which one had to juggle between the traditional world and that imposed by the colonizer. This juggling involves handling “several temporalities,” including the “compacted time” of a traditional past, slavery, colonialism, and now postcolonialism. It therefore spawned an ontology that persists into the present as these selves “proliferate” and produce the “chaotically pluralistic” nature of the postcolony (Mbembe 2015, 102). For Mbembe (2015) this pluralistic world is a highly creative one involved in “flouting, repudiating, [and] remaking European templates.” Migration to a Western country forces some of these identities and traditional African “templates” to be played down. As the Norwegian section of this chapter shows, local language and dialect integration is expected, often leading to language shift. Movement into the upper-middle classes, as embodied in the South African coconut theme, is a parallel of sorts. In the next paragraph we turn to a discussion of current xenophobia in South Africa, which links in unhappy ways to the theme of the absence or presence of integration of African migrants.

The fall of apartheid also resulted in an opening of the borders to the rest of Africa. For mainly economic reasons, South Africa proved an

attractive destination to millions of migrants (some of them temporary or cyclic migrants) from neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe and Malawi but also further afield from the Congo (DRC), Cameroon, Nigeria, and so forth. Expectations of being welcomed as fellow Africans, many of whose countries had contributed to the anti-apartheid struggles, were not exactly met. Matters of language and embodiment are part of the stereotyping of migrants, though again issues of economics and class are at the core. Many Black South Africans (mainly of the working and under-employed classes) considered the newcomers as unwelcome competitors for jobs, often at lower rates than for which the locals had fought hard, via trade unions and collective bargaining. Unexpectedly, outsiders were stereotyped in terms of language and, amongst other things, skin colour. Newcomers from the equatorial regions were felt to be “dark skinned” – in this context a darker shade of black (Mesthrie, Nchang and Onwukwe, 2020). They were labelled *amakwerekwere* – an apparently onomatopoeic word meant to mimic the foreign sounding utterances. Here the theme of indexicality turning to a stereotyping iconicity, as raised by Bucholtz and Hall (2016), seems relevant.⁶ Mesthrie, Nchang, and Onwukwe (2020) dwell on the consequences of such poor relations for language learning and societal integration.

Concluding reflections

The reinforcement of specific stereotypical links between speech and ethnicity was a mode of operation of the apartheid regime. A politically controlled naturalization of perceived relations between language and embodiment served as a tool to enforce policies of ethnic separation and repression. In the wake of the statutory end to apartheid in 1994, rapid and complex social change is reflected in dynamic and ongoing change in the indexicalities and metaphors marking expectations of connections between language and body. Perhaps surprisingly, the Norwegian context, with its dramatically different social history, provides an illuminating parallel. Arguably, expectations of the relation between language and embodiment were both deep and largely unthematized – and in that sense naturalized – in Norway prior to the onset of large-scale immigration in the second half of the twentieth century. This situation did not significantly change until the first generation of Norwegian-born children of immigrant parents came of age and in a range of ways – directly and indirectly, deliberately and not – challenged and thereby made visible linguistic mechanisms of social regimentation and exclusion. Thus, in Norway as well, rapid social change has made visible the plasticity and even fluidity of expectations of language-body relationships. Indeed, in both of these settings, the types of performances, crossings, and labels that we have presented would have been difficult to conceive a generation earlier. At the same time, the power of such expectations as simultaneous agents of change and instruments of social control – when contesting

and confirming stereotypes – attests to their significance as determinants of human interaction. We have seen that to authentically perform “Blackness” in some contexts one has to demonstrate multilingualism, while “Whiteness” may be performed through (dialectal) monolingualism. Yet we have also seen that such expectations may be inverted and denaturalized. The practices and performances highlighted in this chapter are a strong reminder of the inseparability of language from the racialized body. However, as we have discussed, individual embodiments and language practices must be situated in relation to broader structures and patterns of power. As such, in the contemporary Norwegian and South-African contexts, speaking voices can creatively challenge stereotypes and thereby contribute to a denaturalization of the language/body relationship. Returning to the initial quote by Trevor Noah, one may say that the case studies presented in this paper, including that of Noah himself, show that language and racial barriers are there to be overcome.

Notes

- 1 This work was partly supported by the Research Council of Norway through its Centers of Excellence funding scheme, project number 223265. We are very grateful to the two reviewers and Bjørn T. Ramberg for comments and very valuable input.
- 2 «Det er jo heilt fantastisk vakkert når du syng på den dialekta di ... og når du kjem inn i rommet og sånn, så tenkjer eg: “Ok, kem e han? Kul type,” liksom. Så e meine at du har alt, og detta kjenst veldig ekte og reelt.»
- 3 A photo of the character Ola Halvorsen could not be included in the article because the artist’s agent did not approve of the reuse of a screenshot. However, the character’s style and bodily appearance may be observed on YouTube (Flesvig 2020).
- 4 The word ‘Quisling,’ a byword for ‘traitor’ in several languages, comes from Vidkun Quisling, the collaborator who headed the Norwegian Nazi government during World War II.
- 5 The phrase *Southern twang* from the USA is perhaps the best known of this usage. The word ‘twang’ was previously used in Britain to refer to colonial accents of English settlers abroad. Thus whereas ‘twang’ in the older established international sense comments largely on regional difference of accent, in South Africa it was co-opted by Black speakers to critique those who were imitating a White accent.
- 6 It must be emphasized that not all Black South Africans feel this way, and many have spoken out against the discrimination of fellow Africans.

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