

# The Construction of Identity: Language Symbols in German Hip-Hop Culture

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In our contribution we will focus on the questions (i) how youth identity within Hip Hop culture is constructed by symbolic means (language use), and (ii) how members of that particular subculture evaluate the attitudes of themselves and others. As a foundation to this we regard language as central to the concept of identity and how people present themselves to others and fellow group members. . Being part of a group means being part of a system of symbolic terms. We will follow the question: How do members of Hip Hop groups express group membership by language markers and what effect does that have on their sense of social identity?

## 1 A brief history of Hip Hop culture

Before we explain how (and why) identity in German Hip Hop culture is constituted we will give a brief history of Hip Hop in general and its development in Germany for orientation purposes.

The term 'Hip Hop' originates from Rap-music, around 1974. 'To rap' is a verb that nowadays mainly signifies singing or speaking rhythmically, it still has some other meanings, but throughout its history it has been widely used in different settings. From an etymological perspective 'to rap' signifies the following: it was used in the seventeenth century by the Afro American community to describe different ways of producing rhythmic sounds e. g. clapping or drumming. There is evidence that since the 1870's 'to rap' signified the actual act of speaking. In the early 1910's a 'rapper' could well be a police informer; rapping was used by radio discjockeys of the 1940's to promote their shows, and even the heated discussions of politicians were described as 'rapping'. In 1971 Clarence Major explained 'rap' as holding conversation, or a long, impressive monologue.<sup>1</sup>

Today 'to rap' at somebody's window or door still has the same meaning known by the average speaker of everyday language.

But what grabs the attention, is that in all these contexts 'rapping' is always related to rhythm. So we can see that 'rap' is not a new term which was invented by the Hip Hop community but has existed for quite some time.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1970's a new kind of music-rhythm, the 'breakbeat', evolved. This was after looping (stopping a spinning record (1) switching to another record (2) which had the same instrumental passage playing this and then moving back to the meanwhile backspun (1) and playing (1) again and so on) was invented. Looping was used to create an ongoing beat that lasted longer than just 15 seconds to 5 min. So the melody was not the main priority of the track anymore it became superfluous to the rhythm.

Firstly this rhythm specificum was used solely, to do what music always does: entertain people at parties and later on in disco's and make them dance. From early on the DJs were shouting animating phrases like "dance", "rock it" or "move your ass", but these were relatively short speeches. When scratching (stopping a spinning record and moving it back and forward while listening to it) was invented and with it a whole means of producing sounds

that were unique yet being produced from pre-recorded sounds from a record, thus djing became more and more of an art form, requiring a great deal of dexterity and skill.

Later, due to the emergence of increasingly more sophisticated ways of producing this new music with two record players and a 'beatbox' (a small simple computer that produces a variety of beats, invented for drummers to practice), people stopped dancing and preferred to observe the fascinating skills of the performing DJ. Since this questioned their existence, or purpose, as DJs, they looked for a way to bring people back to the dancefloor.<sup>3</sup>

So on the one hand there was a need for vitalising the lethargic crowd, and also to praise the performing DJ, due to the constant competition between DJs. In the ongoing process these texts developed an increasingly specific and complicated form which required a very high degree of concentration. So mixing the records, handling the beatbox and singing simultaneously became a little too complicated – making a division necessary.

The breakbeat required a form of singing that could follow the complex beat structures, thus rapping was a corollary. As singing to this kind of rhythm was not really viable, or at least very complicated, instead the easier, more practical method was chosen.

Originating from a community that was very male dominated and comprised the striving for respect, and the striving for the alpha position, as a core phenomenon, the now present rappers named themselves Masters of Ceremony (or short: MC). This term means that the rapper 'mastered the ceremony' of at least one meeting when discjockeys and rappers performed together and the rapper had the so-called *skills* (besides the well-known meaning, it is also a *terminus technicus*) to entertain the crowd. Somebody's *skills* were used at first to praise the discjockey, which later led to the *battling* with other MCs.

In *battling*, two (or more) contestants gather for victory by breaking: they break the music, they break the letters in their graffiti or virtually their bodies in breakdancing.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to understand that, since battling is used in every aspect of Hip Hop culture and is a non-violent way to solve problems or to settle hassles which is maybe the most remarkable aspect of this culture. Battling stopped the sometimes life-threatening violence between the gangs and offered a new solution for the need to vent aggressive behavior (which seems to be a core constituent of human nature according to the psychoanalytic theories of Freud)<sup>5</sup>.

The first rappers of the Hip Hop culture were the 'Furious Five', who first praised the skills of 'Grandmaster Flash', a discjockey who was involved in the invention of *looping* and later of *scratching*, before they went on glorifying themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The etymology of the term 'Hip Hop' is not certain. According to a Hip Hop historian it was 'DJ Hollywood' who, while djing shouted sentences like 'To the hip-hop the hippy hippy hippy hop and you don't stop.'<sup>7</sup> Another opinion is that the term originated in the 1960's and 'DJ Africa Bambaataa' redefined it. Africa Bambaataa sees himself as the creator of the term<sup>8</sup>, so the precise place or time of its emergence is uncertain. Yet the fact remains that the term originated in the 1960's to the 1970's in the United States of America. It signified a specific kind of music, which included a specific kind of rhythm and 'singing'.

As soon as the music spread over the city of New York (and later North America and the majority of the Western World) different aspects of social life also became involved such dancing, art and fashion. A special form of dancing evolved that was guided by the breakbeats: breakdancing.

Though graffiti were long existent – as the latin term for 'wall pictures' shows – parallel to the emergence of Hip Hop a new style in graffiti developed. Nowadays a 'graffito' means mainly the special form of Hip Hop influenced painting style as the different pictures show. Elements of the music, the fashion and the breakdancing are used quite often in the pictures. Strictly speaking every painting that is produced on a wall of a building or a toilet wall or door etc. can be a graffito but in Hip Hop culture it means a special form of graffiti. This should be kept in mind when we look at some interviews with some sprayers.

In rapping, 'dissing' was the way to battle against others, in breakdancing it was the increasingly broken up movement. In graffiti battling took place via *crossing*, that is if a picture is not as good as the one the artist is planning to create he will paint over the old one. Also battling took place with *burning*, a more sporting way as the artist tries to create a better picture near the old one and/or quotes parts of the other graffiti, rather than painting over it. The point is, that the youth gangs developed a new form of conflict solving: they moved away from the nearly omnipresent violence in the ghetto of New York, towards art, dancing or music with a certain attitude.

So, nowadays, 'Hip Hop' stands not only for the music but the whole lifestyle including the ideology, breakdancing, graffiti, the specific fashion and so on.

In Germany the recognition of Hip Hop music in German language was not given until 1991 when a group named 'Die Fantastischen Vier', after Marvel Comics well known 'The Fantastic Four', was the first to be commercially successful. There were groups performing in German before, but after the 'Fantastischen Vier' it became more of a public phenomenon. It should be mentioned that Hip Hop in German is not an invention of the 'Fantastischen Vier' but due to their work the acceptance in the music scene and in public increased. Today we can observe a wide variety due to an extreme diversification that constitutes current German Hip Hop. Every fraction has its own specific traits and we are aiming to show how identity inside the fractions of German Hip Hop culture is constituted and maintained. For this we will show within interviews with sprayers of graffiti from Osnabrück and an underground Hip Hop band how their point of view helps them to establish a sense of self among the great range of different approaches from young people towards the *trueness* in Hip Hop.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to that we will show that a band from Hamburg uses Hip Hop specifics to make their music more commercially successful, but not necessarily less 'undergroundly'. Important to the two bands is their 'street credibility' which both try to achieve and or maintain through different means.

Furthermore, data of spoken language from a lokal radio station in Hanover is showing that in a specific section of Hip Hop culture, the underground, named this due to its not operating via mass media and referring more to the core of the ideology of this subculture, a stand is being taken against the commercially successful Hip Hop, which differs in many aspects from their approach, and tries to maintain identity and self respect.

## **2 Graffiti or how to get ,fame'**

In a project with students from the university of Osnabrück and from Ratsgymnasium in Osnabrück, on the language of youth cultures (Schlobinski/Heins 1998) one research group has focused on illegal graffiti (Schmiedel/Förster/Thöle/Nelkowski 1998). The group collected and analyzed graffiti from different places in Osnabrück – the graffiti can be viewed under <http://www.fbfs.uni-hannover.de/sdls/schlobi/jugend/graffiti/>. Furthermore interviews with sprayers (they call themselves ,writers'), policemen and home owners were carried out to get background information. In the following section we will only focus on the linguistic aspects of these graffiti and the results from the interviews with writers.

Graffiti based on writing differs by style and content. We have found graphemes, abbreviations, isolated words, phrases and sentences. There exist a wide range of linguistic repertoires:

- sound words like RHAAAA; HöHö.
- exclamations like Cool! [,cool' is an often used intensifier by young people.]
- requests like Drück mich! (Squeeze me!); Also fragt nach Marc (Ask for Marc!).
- (rhetorical) questions like Was macht der da? (What is he doing?).

- greetings like Hey Butze (Hi Butze!).
- sequences from music like RUN DMC; RAP; Beastie Boys; Rage Against the Machine.
- catchwords like Nazizeit (Nazi time); Nigger!
- slogans (mostly with political aspects) like Nazis raus (Nazis get out); Saddam ich komme (Saddam [Hussein] I will come).
- aphorisms like Brot für die Welt, Seife für die Kellies! (Bread for the world, soap for the Kelly family!); Wie Adolf Hitler sitz ich hier, die braune Masse unter mir! (???)
- dialogues, which emerge step by step from an initial graffito, e. g. Nadine grüßt alle Hyde-Parker! – Danke. Hiermit grüße ich zurück. – Cool, Julia. Gehst Du auch in den Park? – Muß wohl so sein, oder? (Greetings to all Hyde-Parkers from Nadine [Hyde Park = name of a disco] – Thanks. Greetings back. – Cool, Julia. Do you go to Park ,too? – Off course, or not?)

A special feature is the so-called ‚tag‘, the signature of a writer. The signature is based on an assumed name and is graphically marked by ornamental lines, symbols, numbers for example 2bias = Tobias, a German first name. By his tag a writer breaks free of social anonymity and at the same time of being nameless:

‚Ich war hier, und die Leute, die mich kennen, die seh´n das dann, das ist wie ein Photo ..., jedesmal, wenn sie meinen Namen sehen, dann müssen sie auch an mich denken. [...] man [ist] irgendwie aus dieser Anonymität ´raus ..., und deswegen ist auch mein Problem, damit aufzuhören [...].‘ (I-W-6:208/210)

A successful writer is one whose graffiti are respected by others and whose graffiti and tags can be seen on many walls. Most important for writers is to get so-called ‚fame‘:

‚Ja, ich glaube, Fame ist das Wichtigste bei der Sache [...], es geht mir halt darum, daß ich mir dadurch Respekt verschaffe, also das ist auch die Grundlage von allem, also, es geht darum, daß man Respekt bekommt, ohne sich irgendwie ..., ja, zu prügeln und so weiter, also ... ja.‘ (I-W-5: 195)

‚Ich geh malen, damit ich Fame kriege. Ja, das ist halt der Sinn des ganzen. Das ist Graffiti ..., damit die Leute dich kennen ..., damit ..., wenn du durch die Stadt gehst, und dann kommt so´n Penner auf dich zu und fragt dich: „Sag, bist du nicht der und der?“ Und du kennst den gar nicht ... das ist immer cool dann ...‘ (I-W-2: 152)

To get fame means first of all to get respect from other members of the in-crowd (so-called ‚crew‘). The membership to a specific crew as part of hip hop culture is most important for writers:

‚Ja, einmal halt von den Sachen, die da gemacht werden, hängt damit zusammen. Breakdance, Singen, also ´ne Band, Scratches und Sprühen, also die ganze HipHopkultur und Freundschaft halt, Zusammenhalt, also an sich diese Crew, die man hat, wo man Rückhalt findet und ..., ja, halt ´ne Riesengemeinschaft ist das Ganze.‘ (I-W-5: 193)

To some extent the crew is regarded as ‚a second family‘, that means, that the laid down concept of family which is essential for the personal development of individuals in western societies is continued and transformed into the new pattern of youth subculture:

‚Also, erstens fällt man mehr auf, wenn man in ´ner Crew ist, weil, ´ne Crew gehört einfach dazu, von Anfang bis Ende. Das ist eigentlich so ziemlich das Wichtigste für mich, und wenn dich irgendein Maler einer Crew zuordnet, dann kriegst du auch durch die Crew ..., wenn die restlichen Maler alle genug Fame ..., für genug Fame sorgen, dann kriegst du auch Fame ab, also, das ist ´ne zweite Familie.‘ (I-W-2: 152)

On the one hand graffiti is a modus of communication and a form of specific in-group behaviour to get respect from other crew members. The crew is important for the individual orientation, for the presentation of self and the development of social and personal identity. On the other hand this process has to be seen in contrast to main stream culture. Writing graffiti is illegal and stigmatized by the public and though writers express no political ideas they believe that graffiti express opposition against social norms and structures:

„[...] nein, also, auch wenn wir als Subkultur gelten, es ist eigentlich so weit verzweigt, daß sie eigentlich irgendwo doch integriert ist, obwohl sie halt ´n Gegenspieler ist. Gegen die Gesellschaft.“ (I-W-5: 201)

„Ja, das ist doch automatisch, weißte, die Sache ist doch schon mal, daß wir links sind, weil rechts könn´ wir schon gar nicht mal sein, weil wir ja liberal [... sind] und eigentlich gegen das System gerichtet.“ (I-W-1: 142)

„Na ja, das ist bei uns ziemlich allgemein gegen das System, weil, ich weiß nicht, es gibt irgendwie, außerdem sind da manche Sachen da, die nicht da sein sollten, und ich kann das jetzt auch nicht konkretisieren ...“ (I-W-3: 170)

Graffiti are not only symbols of group affiliation but also markers of social distinction. They signify shared meanings, values, norms and points of agreement. Graffiti are linguistic markers of a group identity based on Hip Hop culture, they constitute a kind of register which represents its way of identifying those objects important for Hip Hop crew behavior.

### **3 Midnite Sonz and Gangster Rap**

It is well known that music is a central mode of expression for adolescents: „Für die Jugend ist Musik auch und vor allem Mittel der Abgrenzung von anderen Generationen und Altersgruppen. [...] Sie hat vielfältige Funktionen bei der Suche nach der eigenen Identität.“ [For young people music is a special means of marking distinction from other generations and age groups. Music has many different functions in searching their own identity.] (Mark 1998: 64). As we have shown in the first part of our paper the history of Hip Hop is a relatively long one. In Germany there is an extreme diversification within Hip Hop culture from commercial Hip Hop on the one hand and underground Hip Hop on the other. In the following section we will focus on the local band from Osnabrück Midnite Sonz (from ‚midnight sons‘). Midnite Sonz with their front man Tom Kat have produced an own CD „Böses Erwachen!“ (Böses Erwachen = ???). The fact that the CD is for 18 year olds and upwards only, contributes to the presented image of gangster rap as something criminal and bad:

[...] Midnite Sonz: das bedeutet – wie der Name schon sagt – die Mitternachtssöhne, das bedeutet so gesehen ... Ihr kennt bestimmt von den Fantastischen Vier dies’ Lied „Sommer, Sonne, Sonnenschein“ oder Dinger in der Art jetzt ... Wo die Leute einfach nur, sag’ ich mal, singen, wie schön alles ist und weiß ich was ne ... und dann geht man hier vorne auf die Straße und was sieht man für Leute rumstehen oder was hört man: Handgranaten hier, Handgranaten dort. Und das alles wird von denen aber immer so schön, sag ich mal, an die Seite gepackt: Keiner will ’s wissen, keiner will ’s seh’n. Jeder sagt sich nur: ‚joah, wir leben nicht im Ghetto und wir haben nichts mit dieser amerikanischen Gangster-Mentalität nichts zu tun.‘ Aber wenn de raus gehst, dann siehste mal das Gegenteil davon. Und Midnite Sonz ist eigentlich genau das Gegenteil von das, was die anderen machen, wir [...] repräsentieren sozusagen die Schattenseite, [...] da, wo keiner hingucken will, da kommen wir her und darüber singen wir auch .... (from an interview with Midnite Sonz )

An example of the implications of this presented image can be taken from the song *Mittanacht* (*Mitternacht* = midnight). A detailed analysis is given in Feser/Hillebrand/Macke/Schlobinski 1998, text and music is documented at <http://www.fbfs.uni-hannover.de/sdls/schlobi/jugend/musik/>.

Topic of the song is the description of violence as reflection on the social conditions in Germany, especially Osnabrück, which is directly mentioned<sup>10</sup>. The language is extremely provocative, full of vulgare vernacular and sexism. Semantic fields are linked to fields of violence, drugs and business:

- physical violence: wenn die Faust in deine Fresse kracht, l. 1)
- horror: Blut und Entsetzen, sehe Hirn und Eingeweide hängend in Fetzen, l. 65),
- street fighting: Schalt ich hoch in den Dritten und fahr sie über den Haufen, l. 91),
- sex: doch bist du heiß, daß die Muschi brennt, l. 73),
- rape: Mein Homes hat dich gefickt, genau wie mein Bruder, also stell dich jetzt nicht an, mach die Beine breit, Luder!, l. 17),
- drugs: manchmal geb ich mir den Kick und rauche eine Bong, l. 116),
- business: Ich bin ein großes Tier im Geschäft mit Immobilien, habe drei Häuser mit je zehn Familien, l. 30).

The text deals with violence, and is itself verbalized violence. The relationship to American gangster rap is explicitly marked by using the terms "Ganksta-shit", "Ganksta" and "Gangsta-Fick" (l. 20f.), and implicitly by borrowing from American slang like Pusher, Power, Punch. The translation Mutterficker (l. 13, 55) from 'motherfucker' is interesting. In American English 'motherfucker' is semantically bleached and to some extent part of the ritual, stereotyped speech. The German translation is absolutely aggressive and sexist and reinforces signalling the attitude of gangster rap. The group members of *Midnite Sonz* identify themselves with what they call gangsta rap and with what is in contrast to commercial rap:

„Die Plattenfirmen in Deutschland wollen keine Gangster haben, die wollen keine Player haben, die wollen den Leuten nicht zeigen, es gibt solche Subjekte in Deutschland. Solche Leute, die wollen wir mit ihren Sachen nicht noch sponsorn, wer weiß, vielleicht verrohen die unsere Jugend. Dabei sehen die Trottel gar nicht, daß es schon soweit ist.“ (from an interview with *Midnite Sonz* )

On the other hand they admire 'players' like:

„Jay-Z, der hats gebracht, der hat sein Geld gemacht oder so, der hat einen besseren Weg eingeschlagen, sag ich mal, und kann sich halt alles leisten: seine Goldringe, sein Cabrio, seine Frauen und so ... ja, da wollen wir auch hinkommen, das ist klar ... und wir machen denen auch eins unmißverständlich klar: ohne Knete kannst du gar nichts erreichen.“ (from an interview with *Midnite Sonz* )

It is apparent that *Midnite Sonz* is orientated towards the example of American gangster rap. On the other hand they use German slang expressions, local topics and they decontextualize patterns of Black English culture. The process of decontextualization and recontextualization in the German context leads to reinterpretations, new symbolizations and connotations. From the inclinations to favour attitudes and values from gangster rap emerge a specific life style with which recipients can identify. *Midnite Sonz* opens a communication channel that gives rise to a specific cultural area of hip-hop.

#### **4 The song 'Dein Herz schlägt schneller' by 'Fünf Sterne Deluxe'**

This band is an example for a group which established street credibility without using as much vulgarisms, or being as sexually explicit as the 'Midnite Sonz'. Clearly distancing

themselves from the so-called 'gangsta-rap', they produce texts in which other, more traditional aspects of Hip Hop culture are highlighted. So the 'my gang is rather good and yours rather not' theme is used, a game which has been played within the Hip Hop culture since the beginning.

This emerged from *battling*, which as mentioned previously, is a major factor in participating in Hip Hop culture. If gangster elements are taken out of their surroundings and imported into Germany, a certain aspect of the general situation is lost. Criminality is a status quo inside a ghetto and sometimes the reference to it is used to gain respect from others. An example of the omnipresence of the awareness of achieving respect out of being criminal can be seen in how even the Pop performer Michael Jackson made the song "Bad". In this he told the story of a ghetto citizen who tried hard to get out of the ghetto by going regularly to school etc., but was unable to maintain the respect of his fellow ghetto dwellers. So he tried to make it clear that he was as "Bad" as the next man when he was back in his ghetto environment.

In Germany the ghetto situation (if there is one at all) is not comparable to the American. So the explicit lyrics, as shown do not work too well in a German context as they do not reflect the living circumstances but only the need of teenagers to revolt against the conformity of society in general. This has been brilliantly done before (see for example "The Wall" of "Pink Floyd", or the whole punk culture). So we can see that, although revolting or making a bad impression or to shock the establishment works as a theme, it is unique to Hip Hop culture.

Hip Hop has more to offer than revolting against any injustice or different point of view, although this is a very important part of the original American Hip Hop texts. It is true that aggression and anger, hate and other negative connotated aspects of life are part of this culture but what is important is that this is not the only point of Hip Hop. The bands who distance themselves from gangster rap argue that the social context is missing in Germany and that other aspects of Hip Hop culture which have the backing of the sociological circumstances should be cultivated.

What is nearer to the core in Germany, for these groups, is an aspect of Hip Hop culture that can be transported into another cultural surrounding nonetheless: the eloquent and the art of battling, which has found a new attitude in Hamburg. It was in the beginning that bands like Rödelheim Hartreim Project calumniated other bands who were more involved with pop themes that were not truly dissing but more a clever move in financial politics, as record sales reached ever higher rates. Dissing in Germany evolved later on.

To achieve fame it was necessary to show where one's roots lie, it was necessary to be honest so that street credibility could develop. This is not all: the beat structure had to be inventive and the rhymes clever. Under these aspects a very productive scene emerged from 1994 to 1998 in Hamburg.

Among others were the "Fünf Sterne Deluxe". They recruited from Hip Hop performers from various projects. The song "Dein Herz schlägt schneller" deals with some of the aspects which can be used to establish street credibility. So the opening phrase, the intro is "Hier kommt die Band, die bald so bekannt ist wie Neger Kalle auf'm Kiez, Hamburg, das ist richtig wir ha'm die fetten Beats" (Here comes the band who will be as famous as Neger Kalle to the Kiez, Hamburg that's right we've got the fat beats.) In the video Neger Kalle, who is a very well known red light district criminal in Germany, is giving a suitcase to the members of the band. They get into an old Mercedes Benz and drive off. This is a clear reference to gangster scenes known from various movies especially the film noir genre. The fact that Neger Kalle is quoted and that he is actually participating in the video signifies the importance of this band. But this is more of an amusement than really a proof that "Fünf Sterne Deluxe" are to be respected because of their criminal background. It should be regarded as a sign of respect from the criminal towards the "Fünf Sterne Deluxe". Furthermore this is a joke about the gangster rappers because they show that the "Fünf

"Fünf Sterne Deluxe" do not need to talk about any imagined crimes. Street credibility is achieved through personalities of the street who give their respect.

The theme of the song is mainly about how the listener is blessed with their music "Unser Rap kommt kühl wie ein edles Holsten" (Our rap is coming cool like a high-class Holsten, Holsten is a famous beer mainly drunk in Hamburg); "Cool wie Kühlung, flows kommen frisch wie Odol, die Ohrenspülung mit Beats treiben wie Aerosol mit viel Soul aus meiner Seele für den Style warum der so geil ist bleibt geheim wie ein X-File" (cool like cooling flows coming fresh like listerine, the ear rinsing with beats pushing like aerosol with a lot of soul out of my soul for the style, why this is so hot stays secret as a X-file); "if you need a fix baby, hier ist deine Spritze" (if you need a fix baby, here is your syringe).

They felicitate themselves for their skills "Es stimmt dass unser Scheiss fett ist, nicht nett ist, sondern derbe; Albert Einstein ist tot und wir ham sein Erbe." (It's true that our shit is fat, not nice but rough; Albert Einstein is dead and we entered into his heritage).

A few topics deal with issues specific to Hamburg. "Hier ist Sellout? Nicht das ich wüßte, ich weiß nur da geht was bei uns an der Küste." (There's sellout? Not that i would know, i just know there is something going on at us at the coast.).

The quotation of other hamburgian bands is a very important fact "Doch Dynamite Deluxe, Doppelkopf, Fünf Sterne, ABs und Eins zwo sind im Norden verantwortlich für'n hohes Niveau" (However Dynamite Deluxe, Doppelkopf, Fünf Sterne, ABs and Eins Zwo are responsible for a high niveau in the north). This helps to show how the band tries to maintain the importance of themselves and their fellow groups with which they share the same city and the same approach to Hip Hop. Street credibility is maintained through the mention of their surroundings and their friends in other groups.

Further on they refer to their beat structure "wir ham die fetten Beats" (we've got the fat beats); "Dein Herz schlägt schneller, kriegst du unsere Infusion, deine Boxen brennen durch, hörst du unsere Produktion" (Your heart beats faster, if you're getting our infusion, your speakers burn when you're listening to our production).

It is apparent that the "Fünf Sterne Deluxe" do have objections against sexually explicit lyrics, to them it is probably too easy and with too little verbosity, at least they try to make pleasant or funny and convincing texts. It seems that they do not want to shock anybody with their texts. They try to convince through intelligent texts and a very unique verbosity. They would probably warrant the opinion that gangster rap is not the approach with which a true identification in the german Hip Hop culture is possible due to the lack of a criminal underground getto situation.

In Germany this style of Hip Hop, as in battling, referring to the city, referring to other groups, seems to work commercially and in the underground, better than the gangster rap. The videos have a higher profile, the CDs and records sell better, they have got more public attention. Even on the underground scene the recognition is maintained because the "Fünf Sterne Deluxe" keep on doing what they did before and have not changed their style in music or in their texts from the beginning. This is a factor which we would like to call the trueness factor. So, using common phrases which transport a 'diss' with very unique and high-brow passages and intricate rhymes, is a different approach from the 'gangsta-rap' which works as well or from a commercially prespective even better for achieving and maintaining identity within German Hip Hop culture.

## **5 Identity defense via radio**

In Hanover a local radio station is broadcasting two radio shows named 'Da flavor' and 'The Hip Hop Warm Up Show' which offers a wide range of Hip Hop themes. Mostly these shows are hosted by 'Hawkeye' with varying partners. They present the latest releases, publish

dates, festival venues, known as 'jams', give the opportunity to 'freestyle' via telephone where listeners can call and rap live to beats provided by DJs in the studio, and a lot of background information.

The station is a non profit making one which is important as it allows the various hosts of the shows to do as they like. The lack of professionalism provides the sociolinguist with plenty of exciting material as due to the amateur status of the shows a rich variety of ordinary language can be found here, e. g. specific lexicology, specific syntax and specific phrases and so on.

In the Hip Hop shows a wide range of youth language is present. Furthermore the way of treating the listeners as equal partners produces a way of 'speaking/talking' nearer to the original, everyday communication than anything else transported via the mass media.

From these shows we would like to present a relatively intricate complex with which we hope to show how a core constituent of Hip Hop is, unknowingly, attacked and how the radio hosts take up the fight and defend the important word and its significance against the onslaught of the freestyling listeners.

It may sound a little exaggerated to use such lexemes but as you will see there is some seriousness behind this altercation. According to Lakoff/Johnson the metaphor 'arguing is war' has quite some significance.<sup>11</sup>

In the show of the 28.4.1999 freestylers greeted their fellow listeners as usual except in this show a border was somehow crossed.

What was different in the 'giving probs' (greeting) was that in this show so many pseudonyms – all with the title MC before it – were given that 'Hawkeye' remarked that he would like to see some of the many MCs greeted by the listeners.

It was obvious that it seemed to 'Hawkeye' that the greeted people did not exist, that it was simply a trick to create non-existing crews either to achieve a higher acknowledgement from others or simply to make the act of greeting look funny. Hence they unintentionally ridiculed parts of the show.

The idea that there is a constant war between the listeners/callers and the hosts is fuelled by the different, sarcastic and explicit remarks from the freestylers. With these the freestylers most probably tried to react (unconsciously) to the dissing from the hosts.

As a matter of fact the funny dissing is a constituent of the show it is not a harsh and aggressive dissing as it is in rapping, it is more of a game here. In this dissing the hosts always have the better position because they can simply push the button and the participant is offline.

This could, understandably, lead a desire for revenge from the listeners, in order to make the hosts look ridiculed instead. Yet this does not pose a problem due to:

„... in general it is quite funny when you're calling and ehh trying to take us for a ride and we're riding you ...“ 28.4.Tr. 18

(Hawkeye: ... dass is ja auch eigentlich alles ganz lustig wenn ihr hier anruft und ähh ihr versucht uns hopszunehmen und wir nehmen euch hops ...)

It is not the ridiculing that causes the problem it is the mere act of funny greeting which 'Hawkeye' regarded as a viable disrespect towards the term MC which has a definite meaning.

„... maybe a blink more seriousness would be(.) quite easy (.) I mean mc fuxi and mc rochen and dj whoknowswhatever i mean folks thass real superfunny but ...“ 28.4.Tr. 18

(Hawkeye: ... vielleicht sone nummer ernsthaftigkeit wär vielleicht (.) doch ganz locker (.) ich meine mc fuxi und mc rochen und djey (.) weissdergeierwer ich meine leute dassis ja alles superfunny aber ...)

These phrases may seem to be reasonable and appalling to the listeners as sensible and respectful people. However, the carelessness with which these phrases are spoken implies a warning. Referring to the listeners as reasonable beings suggests that the joviality should cease and more respect towards others, such as the hosts, should be shown.

If somebody were to persist with the procedure of trying to establish non-existent MCs he would automatically set himself up as ridiculous or laughable.

This can function as a clear signal to stop the making of funny names and simply put a MC in front of it. Later on he decides to take even more drastic steps and says that:

Hawkeye: also dass is genau die sAche wenn ihr irgendwie dopeskills habt (.) dann geht auf die bühne ihr habt hier (.) in dieser stadt zurzeit noch die möglichkeit ((...))

gEht auf die bühne sAgt euren namen represEnted (.) dAs ist hip hop wenn ihr hier nur anruft und nur hier represEnted und dann halt mit den lustigen fix und foxi namen undas ist ja auch alles ganz lustig (.) nee is nicht wirklich lustich (.) es hat sich jetzt einfach ausgelustigt ((...))

28.4.Tr. 18

„that´s exactly the point: if you would be having dopeskills then go on stage you´re having the oppurtunities at the present moment in this city ((...))

go on stage say your names represented that´s hip hop when you´re only calling here and represent here and then with the funny fix and foxi names and that´s all quite funny (.) nope it´s not really funny (.) it´s simply outfunned now.“

28.4.Tr. 18

The wish of ‘Hawkeye’ (to see some of the MCs) is clearly a way of making the ongoing process known and in the same way to play the ball, now the freestylers have to react. Beeing not so equal in direct comparison (the freestylers are usually somewhat younger, less eloquent and are only trying to be cool and ‘Hawkeye’ definitely is the cooler person in comparison) the ‘answer’ to the reproach of ‘Hawkeye’ was an acknowledgement of ‘Hawkeyes’ position as the coming weeks have shown.

In the following shows freestylers called and declared to be MCs but they wouldn´t truly be so honourworthy to wear the title MC so they wouldn´t call themselves so.

Hawkeye: halloo

Rochen: yoo hier is der rochen

Hawkeye: ehha jaaa sAUber (.) mc rochen (..)

Rochen: jaa bin ich drauf

Hawkeye: du bist drauf du bist on air

Rochen: ohh schEIsse na gut okay soll ich rappen oder was

Hawkeye: wieso (.) wieso scheisse

Rochen: ja ich weiss nich ich bin halt voll wack ich kann ich rap erst seit vier wochen

Hawkeye: du rApst seit vier wochen

Rochen: ja

Hawkeye: okay und und dann genau jetzt hier frage des tages

Rochen: ja

Hawkeye: ähhm das habe ich dich letzte woche schon gefragt wir ham uns da nich länger weiter drüber unterhalten aber deswegen können wir das jetzt hier machen

Rochen: ja

Hawkeye: also ich hab dir ja gesagt das ich ein problemirgendwie damit hab das überall mcs aus jedem loch krabbeln

Rochen: jayeah genau

Hawkeye: ja genau und das liegt daran das ähh das mc das dieses mAster of ceremonY das hat ne bestimmte bedeutung nso

Rochen: ja

Hawkeye: und

Rochen: ja is schon klar

Hawkeye: und jemand der sich so nEnnt der sollte auchn mc sein und

Rochen: ja und ich bin kein mc

Hawkeye: ja aber du nennst dich mc rochen

Rochen: ja nicht mehr ich nenn mich jetzt rochen

Hawkeye: äch jetzt nennst du dich nur noch rochen

Rochen: yeah mann

Hawkeye: jaa (.) is doch okay (.) dann (.) toll jetzt hatter mir den wind aus den sEgeln genommen

5.5.99 Tr 5



## 7 Notes

1. See Major, Clarence. (1971), p. 96.
2. Compare with Major, Clarence. (1994), p. 376f.
3. See George, Nelson (1993), p. 44ff.
4. This is a quote out of the movie "Style Wars".
5. Compare Freud, Sigmund almost anywhere.
6. The real names of the discjockeys and Mc's are not always given, so we use their pseudonyms, knowing and accepting that this may seem a little bit enthusiastic or helpless. We don't want to be enthusiastic but are as a matter of fact a little bit helpless.
7. Fab Five Freddy (1992), p. 32.
8. Fernando, S. H. (1994), p. IX.
9. „War HipHop in den USA noch [...] das ‚CNN der Schwarzen‘ gewesen, so präsentierte sich das, was die deutschen Wortspucker abließen, als pointensichere Flüsterpost der Mittelstandsjugend.“ (Der Spiegel 19/1997, p. 216).
10. The naming of places in songs is typical for gangster rap.
11. Lakoff, George/Johnson, Mark (1980), p. 8ff.

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