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'Chocolate munching wanabee rapper, you're out' – a Finnish footballer's Twitter writing as the focus of metapragmatic debates

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores, first, the use of stylized English in short Twitter messages (*tweets*) by Mikael Forssell, a Finnish football professional, and second, normatively oriented metapragmatic commentaries by Finnish football followers on such stylized language use. We focus on the contested category of 'gangsta' English and its perceived inauthenticity (Coupland 2003) *vis-à-vis* aspects of Forssell's career, allegedly middle-class-life-history characterized by mobility and translocality. His *tweets* show orientation to multiple centers and audiences, containing recurring linguistic features that can be associated with African American Vernacular English and the emically emerging register of 'gangsta' talk, emphasized by Forssell's cultural references to US hip hop culture as well as an overdriven sense of jocularity and performance. We follow the digital mediation chain to a prolific web forum of a community of Finnish football fans (Kytölä 2012, 2013), who initiate and maintain metapragmatic, often sarcastic commentaries and debates on the acceptability and authenticity of the language of Forssell's *tweets*. Our focus here is on the fans' evaluations of non-Standard English uses, many of which are interpretable to index 'gangsta' cultural features. Emic ascriptions of that style range from 'wannabe rapper', 'da ghetto' and 'unintentional comedy' to 'pathetic' or 'retarded', cutting across the social categories of class, age and ethnicity. However, Finnish football enthusiasts' metapragmatic evaluation simultaneously shows strong awareness of genre and register differences and a readiness to jocularly appropriate similar 'gangsta' features in their own online forum performance. Our discussion is an attempt to link this tension between purist normativity and playful appropriation online in the frameworks of authenticity (Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005; Coupland 2003, 2010; Westinen 2014) and, in our final conclusion, sociolinguistic superdiversity (Creese & Blackledge 2010; Blommaert & Rampton 2011).

keywords: African American Vernacular English, appropriation, authenticity, English, Finland, football (soccer), gangsta, hip hop culture, metapragmatics, non-Standard, normativity, performance, rap music, superdiversity, Twitter, web forums

1. Introduction

This paper discusses, firstly, the Finnish footballer Mikael "Miklu" Forssell's *Twitter* writing, his uses of markedly non-Standard English and his explicit references to (African) American hip hop culture and rap music, and secondly, the ways in which such stylized writing elicits Finnish football followers' online responses and language attitudes. We analyze normatively oriented metapragmatic commentaries by Finnish football fans at *Futisforum2.org* - the main Finnish online hub for interactive football discussions - on the language use in Forssell's short Twitter updates (*tweets*), with a specific focus on the emically emerging category of 'gangsta' English and its perceived (in)authenticity - when used by Forssell and two other Finnish footballers who have a ('White') middle-class life trajectory. Moreover, we discuss how

normativity regarding language use emerges in these *metapragmatic* debates, i.e. the ways in which "language users engage in meta-level discussions about the language used in the particular context" (Kytölä 2013: 101; see also Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 8-10).

Normativity, for us, denotes various ways of evaluating, judging and policing (possibly sanctioning) the semiotic conduct of others. Along with explicit, institutionally imposed norms on, for example, language use (see Blommaert 1999), normativity can also be "imposed from *below* - by oneself or one's peers" (Varis & Wang 2011: 73; see also Kytölä 2012). Here, we engage with the specific "micropolitics of language and/or cultural policing that can be found in all interactions in different social spaces and contexts" (ibid.), both physical and virtual. Similarly to Leppänen and Piirainen-Marsh (2009: 261), we see (micro-level) language policing as "continually evolving, emergent and influenced by norms of specific communities and cultures". In Internet contexts, rules for communication, sub-culturalization, and identity construction can either be set *a priori* (e.g. specific rules on a discussion forum where moderators control people's communicative behavior) or they can be emergent, i.e. "re-worked in the process of engagement" (Varis & Wang 2011: 75), amongst peers in various online spaces. Thus, members of a given community "actively and sensitively negotiate the norms and policies relevant to them" (Leppänen & Piirainen-Marsh 2009: 261). Instead of overarching criteria for normativity, then, we are dealing with *micro-hegemonies*, valid within specific areas of life, according to which individuals modify their behavior and practices (Blommaert & Varis 2015). Often, normativity and norms can be understood as both existing *a priori* in communities and societies at large, and, at the same time, as constructed in discourse in a given moment (see Kytölä 2012; 2013: 124-125). It is important to bear in mind that "people differ in their normative sense of what should carry where" (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 10), i.e. people have different normative expectations of which sound, word, grammatical pattern, discourse move or bodily movement fits which context (ibid: 12-13), as illustrated in our analysis. We are therefore dealing with *indexical* distinctions, where linguistic distinctions at different layers of language use become reflected in social, cultural and ideological patterns and values (Blommaert 2007, 2010: 5-6).

Authenticity, in the present context, relates both to authenticity as a (well-off) footballer and as a rap and hip hop fan. This is illustrated in this professional footballer's language use, which on the surface may appear to draw on features of the 'original' and 'authentic' language use of African Americans, but on a metapragmatic level, as judged by Finnish football fans, forms a severe mismatch of social class and, to some extent, also of race and ethnicity. Different views of authenticity are at stake: some of the online commenters who essentialize authenticity (Bucholtz 2003), and see it as an inherent quality of language or culture, and, in contrast, authenticity as *authentication*, a discursive process "through which people can make claims about their own or others' statuses as authentic or inauthentic members of social groups" (Coupland 2010: 105).

Coupland argues (2003: 425-7) that in late modernity, authenticity is "in crisis" (van Leeuwen 2001: 395), listing a number of points that have transformed the notion of authenticity in the past decades:

- memberships of communities are increasingly complex
- communities can coalesce around local and/or global activities
- electronically mediated social interaction provides new means for sociality and intimacy

- dialect-styles tend to be used more productively and creatively
- performance as a site for the construction of identity and community
- performance implies control and deployment of communicative resources
- identities are "projects in the articulation of life-options" ... "constructed as developing personal narratives".

These insights resonate with the revisions of the 21st-century sociolinguistic agenda set forth by Rampton (2006, 2011) and Blommaert (2003, 2010). With the heightened metapragmatic reflexivity associated with contemporary (late modern) social arrangements (Kytölä 2013), sociolinguistic choices have become more strategic. With this in mind, we will describe a digitally mediated communicative context that emerged after Coupland's (2003) retheorization signposts. As we will see, all of them characterize an even more recent mediation context (Twitter and web forums combined), but we would like to add that digitally mediated interaction does not only "provide...new means for sociality and intimacy" but also creates new complex and layered combinations for the circulation of different (in)authenticities and, importantly, metapragmatic evaluations of such (in)authenticities.

Our paper aims to address normativity, the construction of authenticity and semiotic resources in the following way. First, if we consider *how authenticity is constructed and negotiated,* we can observe that Forssell does not attempt to portray himself as (an) authentic (rap artist or user of 'Black' English), but 'only' as a fan of American rap music. He distances himself somewhat from the issue by means of humorous stylization (Rampton 1999; Coupland 2007: 154; Bucholtz 2011; Lehtonen 2011). However, some Finnish football *aficionados* in the *Futisforum2* community ('forumists') take an issue, strongly questioning his authenticity. Our shared interest in *semiotic heterogeneity* (Leppänen et al. 2014), besides the significance of layout and design in most internet-based communication platforms, can be seen, for instance, in the images that are posted on Twitter. In addition, emoticons and pictures posted in forums' discussion threads can be important contextualization cues as to how to interpret the messages. Moreover, Forssell (and other professional footballers) are active users of Instagram, a photograph- and video-based social media platform, which allows cross-connections to Twitter and other social networking sites.

As to *how authenticity is normatively regulated*, we notice how there are mismatches in the comparison of Forssell's language use to 'original' (= African American) (re)sources. The forumists may not necessarily see the 'gangsta English' as an inferior style/variety *per se* - although such voicings too can be observed - but it is ascribed as inferior when used by Forssell (and his footballer colleagues). The specific ways in which authenticity is normatively regulated are the features used in the fans' meta-commentary with overtly negative overtones. Finally, in considering *what kinds of participants are construed as authentic representatives of particular socio-cultural groups*, we can observe in relation to 'gangsta' English that the 'legitimate' users of this variety 'must be' African Americans and perhaps teenagers, as opposed to Finnish ('White', middle-class-background) professional footballers in their late twenties. Overall, we can pinpoint how identities are *constructed in an interplay between the use and the uptake (including the policing) of semiotic resources.*

2. Football as a transcultural and polycentric domain

The domain of football (soccer) offers a rich terrain for the analysis of sociocultural and sociolinguistic change in late modernity (and *superdiversity*; see Discussion) due to its highly transnational and polycentric nature (Giulianotti & Robertson 2009; Kytölä 2012). Actors in this field - players, managers, journalists, fans and followers - often have mobile life trajectories, hybrid sociocultural practices and sociolinguistic repertoires, i.e. biographical complexes of functionally organized resources (Blommaert 2010). In global and translocal aspects of football culture (Kytölä forth.), there is much mixing of features from various languages and their varieties, manifest in the organization and transmission of linguistic features in flows (Pennycook 2007a), and the growing complexity of mediation, including digital channels such as the internet or social media (Leppänen et al. 2014).

Elaborating on the concept of *polycentricity*, a 'center' is to be understood as an evaluative authority people orient towards and according to which they behave in communication. Polycentricity is a key characteristic of any human communication. Whenever we communicate with one another, we orient towards various centers of norms, which can be individuals (teachers, parents, idols), collectives (peer groups, subcultural groups) or abstract entities (the nation state, the church, consumer culture). In addition to our most immediate interlocutors, there is always what Bakhtin (1986) called a 'super-addressee' present in the interaction. This center, or super-addressee, 'provides' the norms and the level of appropriateness in a given context. Of course, there is never a single center in communication but rather multiple norm-providing centers, hence the term '*poly*centricity'. (Blommaert 2007; 2010: 39–40.)

In orienting towards various centers of norms, people operate in different spaces and times (Blommaert 2010; Westinen 2014). In local contexts, they may see their own group of friends or a football club as one of the norm centers as regards their communication, language use and habitus. In more global contexts, they may look up to, say, globalized (African) American hip hop culture, adopting aspects of related cultural and semiotic expression. People always behave with reference to such evaluative authorities, i.e. centers – "an authority over clusters of semiotic features, including thematic domains, places, people (roles, identities, relationships), and semiotic styles (including linguistic varieties, modes of performance, etc.)" (Blommaert 2010: 39). Certain topics and contexts require certain semiotic styles, roles and relationships. For example, a footballer speaks as an expert when s/he is using a particular football register, thereby indexing his/her membership in this community – and in other contexts, s/he may speak as a novice about other topics (see Blommaert 2010: 39–40; Westinen 2014). And as Kytölä (2013: 19-20; 180-181) points out, the polycentricity of football can also be reflected in multilingual, mixed and hybrid linguistic and communicative practices; English is only one broad resource among others in the polycentric, transcultural constellations of football culture. And with regard to English, its compatibility and integratability with other linguistic and semiotic resources (such as drawing from hip hop culture) can vary greatly from context to context, depending on the salience and power of particular norm centers in a given communicative situation.

The Finnish professional striker Mikael Forssell and his Twitter updates are selected as the empirical focus here, because he, on the one hand, illustrates a typical life trajectory from a European middle-class junior football talent to a fully professional translocal working life, and because, on the other, in his multilingual Twitter writing the resources of non-Standard

English, and hip hop and 'gangsta' features are highlighted in a way which directs uptake and reactions in a more language-oriented, metapragmatic direction than seems to be the average in footballer's online publicity.

3. Twitter and web forums – mobility of text and multisemiotic discourse

Twitter, an online social networking and microblogging service was created in 2006 (Twitter 2014; Cain Miller 2010). In the history of technologies, the growth of Twitter around the turn of the decade also marked the growth of small mobile devices (tablets, touchpads, smartphones, etc.) that facilitated and mobilized internet use and its 'quick' social media applications. In Twitter, registered users can publish *tweets*, entries of 140 characters (almost identical to the limit of 'traditional' text messages), as well as photos and videos in multisemiotic combinations. Anyone online can read registered users' tweets. Twitter now has approx. 500 million registered users (about half of which are monthly active); some 500 million tweets are sent per day (Twitter 2014). Tweets and photos are by default public but users can also send private, direct messages to each other. Users can be 'followed' on Twitter by their closest friends but also by people they have never met. Many celebrities also use Twitter for the purpose of sharing news, doing their public relations, or for general 'socializing' purposes. Thus, Twitter offers them one medium for constructing and performing their image and identity online – via multisemiotic discourse. The most 'followed' celebrities on Twitter currently include the pop singers Katy Perry and Justin Bieber, along with the President of the United States, Barack Obama (Twitter Counter 2014).

People's various transnational backgrounds and life trajectories are reflected in their use of Twitter – this Finnish footballer is also a case in point. Footballers have a multiplicity of audiences in various countries (e.g. family, friends, colleagues and fans) and they address (and refer to) multiple contexts and topics via their multisemiotic online activities (see Marwick & boyd 2011: 140). As is typical of social media, also Twitter "creates a 'context collapse' (boyd 2008, as quoted by Marwick & boyd 2011) in which multiple audiences, usually thought of as separate, co-exist in a single social context" (Marwick & boyd 2011: 145). According to Marwick & boyd (2011: 139), celebrity in Twitter is "practiced through the appearance and performance of 'backstage' access (drawing on Goffman 1959)", i.e. "giving the impression of uncensored glimpses into the lives of the very famous" (Marwick & boyd 2011: 140). Celebrities, or *celebrity practitioners* (to use Marwick & boyd's term), "reveal what appears to be personal information to create a sense of intimacy between participant and follower, publicly acknowledge fans, and use language and cultural references to create affiliations with followers". They call this process of publicly performing a connection between practitioners and fans *affiliation* in which language, cultural symbols and conventions are deployed (ibid.: 147). Language use in Twitter (and also in other social media) can be characterized as polyphonic (Bakhtin 1981), i.e. making use of multiple voices; polygeneric, i.e. making use of multiple genres, and polylingual (Jørgensen 2008; Jørgensen & al. 2011), i.e. making use of various available (linguistic) features and resources in the same interaction even if those are associated with different languages.

The other digital communication format discussed here is web (discussion) forums. They are interactive, multi-authored, participatory websites enabled and automatically, iteratively generated by purpose-built software, visualized in versions of a relatively uniform and

recognizable general appearance. They are often organized in thematic discussion areas (or subforums), in which users can initiate discussions (start 'topics'), read existing discussion threads, or contribute to them (Androutsopoulos 2007; Kytölä 2012, 2013: 113-120, 148-151; Kytölä & Androutsopoulos 2012). Depending on the focus and target audience of each forum, there may be language preferences and a sense of community building (Androutsopoulos 2007; Kytölä 2013), reflected in (loose or strict) rules and moderation procedures for keeping to them.

Futisforum (ca. 1997-2008) and *Futisforum2* (since 2006) have been key sites for constructing Finland-based football following and fandom for the past two decades. Their member count is around 40,000 each (including shared members), of which some thousands of members have been active writers. Whereas the original *Futisforum* thrived in the first years of the 2000s, *Futisforum2* has been the main online hub for Finnish football enthusiasts since 2006. Careers of Finnish professional players have been a passionate point of interest for both *Futisforums;* and Mikael Forssell, due to his early-age development and professional success, has been one of the most eagerly followed footballers (more on the career of Mikael Forssell later). This article focuses on *Futisforum2's* discussion topics devoted to Mikael Forssell, and particularly those sequences related to his idiosyncratic language use.

Although web forums are not always included in the narrower definitions of 'social media' or the markedly-2000s phenomenon 'Web 2.0' (or social networking sites) due to their earlier emergence in the late 1990s, they share many of the tenets and premises of the newer inventions: they can provide a reference point for community construction and translocal identifications; they allow rhizomatic, translocal and transcultural traffic of cultural and multi-semiotic material with their associated identifications, styles, normativities and ideologies (Leppänen et al. 2014; Kytölä forth.). Furthermore, as seen in the analysis below, social action on web forums can be organically interwoven and interlinked with social action in newer social media: they can be part of the same rhizomatic networks of digital discourses circulating around.

4. 'Gangsta' English and hip hop culture

By 'gangsta English', we refer here to an emically coined term deployed in the Finnish *Futisforum2*. This 'gangsta' English is to be understood as the 'gangsta' kind of talk (or slang), which has its roots in, is influenced by and draws on features of African American (Vernacular) English (AAVE). It is stereotypically associated with people of African American background, in particular, and often mediated through celebrities, such as rap artists. According to Mufwene (2001: 35), "the most common characterizations of 'talking Black' by lay people include: particular terms, 'Black cultural items', specific way of pronunciation, structural and syntactic features as well as talk about the events of the (neighbor)hood amongst family and friends. Related to hip hop culture, in particular, Morgan (2001: 188) argues that its "language ideology is consciously and often defiantly based on urban African American norms, values and popular culture constructed against dominant cultural and linguistic norms". This particular language ideology is inherently intertwined with the "knowledge and use of African American English" (ibid.) Within hip hop culture, "the unequal black-white binary is subverted; blackness emerges as normative and authentic and whiteness—usually the unmarked invisible category—becomes visible and marked" (Cutler 2003: 229). Cutler (2003: 211-12), in fact, argues that white, middle-class hip-hoppers "whose race and class origins

distance them" from African American experiences, nevertheless (try to) "construct themselves linguistically as authentic" via the appropriation of the linguistic features of African American English. However, studies comparing Cross-Racial African American Vernacular English (CRAAVE) (Bucholtz 1999), i.e. the 'non-Black' usage of African American English, with the AAE of African Americans show that "although CRAAVE speakers may express a desire to affiliate with African American culture, their lack of linguistic mastery in using AAE marks them as inauthentic" (Higgins 2009: 97). Thus, despite their wish to be seen as affiliating with the specific culture and as legitimate, 'authentic' users of AAE, 'non-Blacks' are often not seen as such because their resources do not match with the 'native', original ones. Consequently, the CRAAVE usage by many speakers might, in fact, be seen as 'crossing' into a language(s) "not generally thought to belong to you" (Rampton 2005: 280; Higgins 2009: 97). In the case of Mikael Forssell, as we shall soon see, it is the mismatch between his ethnicity, class background and linguistic resources (or crossing) which results in heated discussions - and normative evaluations.

Importantly, then, whether using "other's resources results in 'inauthenticity or not depends on the *interpretation* of the linguistic performance by members of situated linguistic communities" (Higgins 2009: 97, emphasis added; see also Westinen 2014). Here, we can see that the uptake of the performance is crucial to the process of *authentication*, i.e. discursive and social *processes* in which authenticity is 'claimed', 'imposed' or 'perceived' (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 498, emphasis added). Authenticity or authentication is thus no 'inherent essence' of an individual (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 601), but rather 'discursively verified' (ibid.). Consequently, the notion of authenticity is "available for the analysis as the outcome of the linguistic practices of social actors and the metalinguistic practices of sociolinguists" (Bucholtz 2003: 398–399).

Globalization processes have, during the 21st century, made English increasingly important in the Finnish society (Leppänen et al. 2011); for many Finns, youth in particular, often the key English resource is the non-standard spoken vernacular used in their free time, in their hobbies and subcultural groups (see Leppänen et al. 2009). As part of this more general process of change, the so-called hip hop English (or, alternatively, AAVE) is also spreading in various forms across the globe through popular culture (via movies, television, music, etc.), in general, and hip hop culture, in particular. Bucholtz (1999: 445) sees AAVE as "a symbolic marker of African American youth culture" and as "a commodity that [...] youth can easily appropriate, at least partially and imperfectly". According to Androutsopoulos (2009: 60), 'hip hop English' appears as a "'universal' strategy of hip hop identity marking" – creating "a symbolic connection between verbal art, media and fan discourse, on the one hand, as well as between various localized hip hop discourses on the other". Forssell's language use on Twitter, along with his followers' appropriations of it (see below), arguably draw on this kind of 'hip hop English'.

The concept of *authenticity* is often seen in connection with tradition, with 'original' contexts and features – and with 'links' to those, as this "tracing back to an original [...] validates the contemporary" (Moore 2002: 215). Furthermore, authenticity, or 'keepin' it real', is a concept and an expression – a mantra – one often encounters in talk and research about rap music and hip hop culture. In fact, rap music is often seen as *embodying* authenticity (Huq 2006: 113). In rap music and hip hop culture, it is considered important to stay true to oneself and one's roots, and not pretending to be something one is not. The uptake, then, often determines whether this true-to-oneself behavior is discursively verified (or not) in a given community.

As rap music and hip hop culture have 'gone global', the (original) notions of authenticity have become questioned and more versatile, depending on each new local context (e.g. Pennycook 2007a, 2007b; Westinen 2010, 2012, 2014). In fact, as Pennycook (2007b: 103) argues, there is often a tension between, on the one hand, the global dictate and order of hip hop culture (the 'global spread of authenticity'), and, on the other, the local contexts - what matters in each locality.

The fact that a Finnish football celebrity resorts to 'hip hop English', in particular, is intriguing - but it is not a unique phenomenon. In fact, it is not untypical for (Finnish) basketball players, for instance, to align with (Finnish) rap music, appear on music videos, have a 'similar' kind of appearance and make versatile collaboration. With all of these framings and insights in mind, we now turn to analyze Mikael "Miklu" Forssell and his Twitter activity, with a focus on his usages of non-Standard, African American, and possibly 'gangsta' English - but, first, let us introduce the footballer in question.

5. "With an attitude" - the emergence of 'Twiklu'

Not unlike his generation of professional footballers, Mikael Forssell's (b. 1981) life has been characterized by mobility in search of career opportunities (Alaja & Forssell 2007). His career trajectory took him from his native Finland to England in 1998, and between 1998-2012 he played in several clubs in England and Germany, before returning to Helsinki in 2012. He has, therefore, a transcultural professional career and transnational circles of acquaintances. This is reflected in his polylingual (Jørgensen 2008; Jørgensen et al. 2011) digital writing, which has orientations to multiple centers and diverse audiences across Europe: family members, friends, teammates, fans from different stages of his career and the general public. This, along with Miklu's overdriven sense of performance and his explicit (sub)cultural references to (biographies of) American rap artists, musical references as well as several recurring linguistic features associated with African American Vernacular English, becomes the target of critical scrutiny for Finnish football followers, whose major social media platform online is the (above mentioned) discussion forum *Futisforum2.org* (see Kytölä 2013).

Mikael Forssell's life trajectory involves four major languages, and their role in his life can roughly (if incompletely) be classified as follows: *Finnish* - home, native city Helsinki, childhood and adolescence, the club HJK (Helsingin Jalkapalloklubi), Finnish national team, contacts to homeland; *Swedish*[1] - home, native city Helsinki, childhood and adolescence, Finnish national team, maintained contacts to homeland; *English* - his years in Chelsea FC and Birmingham FC; school subject, English as an international language, the *lingua franca* in a highly transnational and transcultural circles of friends and teammates; popular culture, especially his interest in (African American) hip hop culture and *German* - born in Germany, studied German at school age in Helsinki, his years as a pro in Mönchengladbach and Hannover.[2]

Below is a screenshot from Mikael Forssell's Twitter page (Figure 1). The left-hand column has a picture of Forssell; this part is customizable by the owner of the account. While our main

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[1] Finland has two national languages: Finnish and Swedish.
[2] Furthermore, Forssell was transferred to VfL Bochum, the German football club, on 29 Aug 2014, a life event that enables the revigorating and renewing of his circle of German-based contacts; http://www.vfl-bochum.de/site/_home/aktuelles/14709_vflnimmtforsselluntervertragp.htm (accessed 9 Dec 2014)

focus here is on verbal language, a more multisemiotic analysis would pay attention to the affordances and meaning-making potentials of the different elements and their aggregate, as well as their resemiotization and entextualization aspects (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen 2001; Iedema 2003; Leppänen et al. 2014). Forssell's choice of a picture of himself clearly reflects key themes that reoccur also in his writing: sportsmanship (an athlete's body), sex appeal (the undressed torso and the visible muscles), laid-back attitude (relaxing on a patio or balcony), hedonism (enjoying good drinks and company), possibly also the preference for a suntanned skin (Forssell is naturally blonde and pale).

The middle column is the tweet 'feed', with the most recent tweet on the top. This is where the account holder's writings appear, together with tweets directed at him. One can scroll down and click further to earlier tweets, up to several years back in time, although this is relatively clumsy and time-consuming for an average reader (yet often the researcher's job). The top part of the middle column contains another picture chosen by Forssell, as well as a location and a general description (or a motto). The right-hand column contains technical information about Forssell's Twitter account (number of tweets, number of followers, etc.) as well as the participatory options of signing in or signing up.
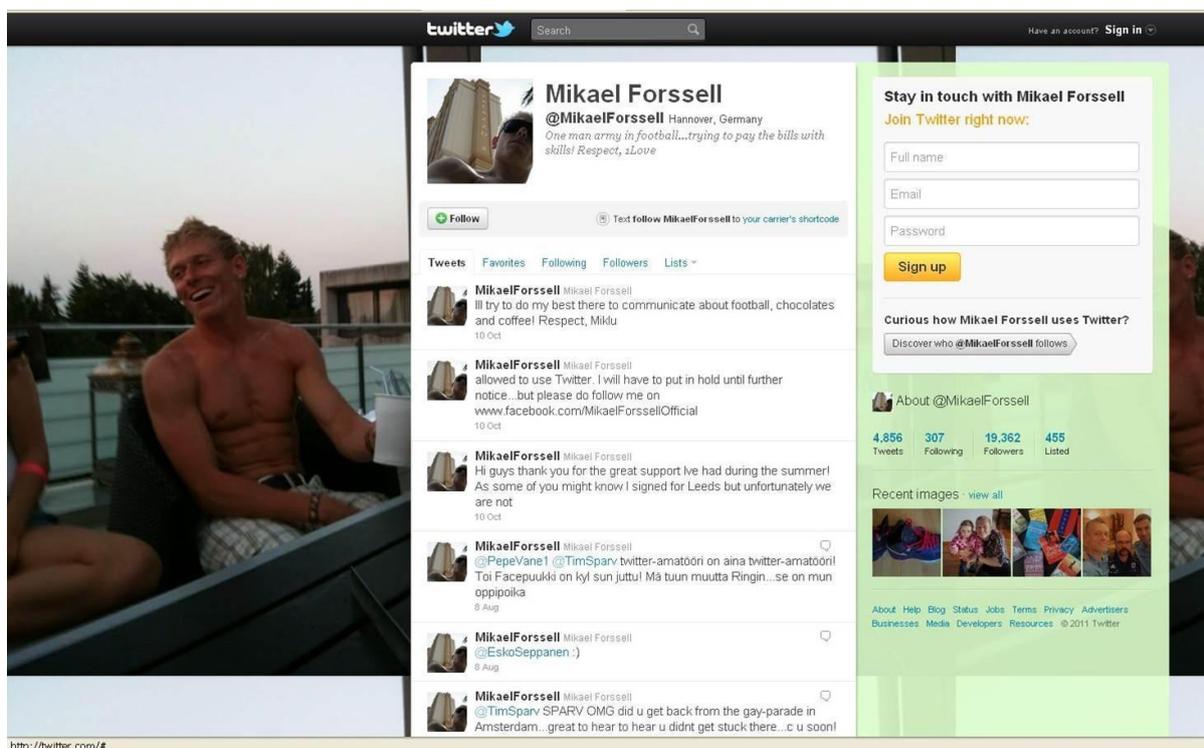

FIGURE 1. A screenshot from Mikael Forssell's Twitter page (October 2013). (https://twitter.com/MikaelForssell)

One of the earliest tweets by Forssell is featured below in Figure 2. In this 'twitpic' we can see an example of how Forssell 'sets the scene' for the recurring hip hop discourse. He portrays himself dressed in a black hoodie and 'cool' sunglasses, with the related caption.

FIGURE 2. "Watching Notorious BIG -film with an attitude…"

In the above image on his Twitter account, Forssell comments on how he is "[w]atching Notorious BIG -film[3] with an attitude…". The first interactive comment on this update is:

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[3] *Notorious B.I.G.* (or, alternatively, Biggie Smalls), i.e. Christopher Wallace, was an American rapper, killed at the age of 25 in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles. He was a central figure in the East Coast hip hop scene and increased New York's visibility in the genre at a time when West Coast hip hop was dominant in the mainstream. He was also himself heavily and notably involved in the growing and highly public East Coast vs West Coast hip

"*Gangsta!! =)*". This immediately confirms Forssell's self-projected identity category, as he is concentrated on this film about the famous US gangsta rapper. A fan ascribes to him a 'gangsta persona' and, later on (see examples below), many more fans and followers deconstruct that identity category based on differing views of appropriateness. We see that Forssell has posted these kinds of cultural references on Twitter for reasons of *affiliation*: to "provide value to [his] fan base and to emphasize commonalities between [himself] and his […] followers" (Marwick & boyd 2011: 147). Another communicative practice Twitter (and other social media) offer for celebrity practitioners such as Forssell is the creation of "strategically managed self-disclosure" and *intimacy*: "a sense of closeness and familiarity between themselves and their followers", by posting personal images and videos, as well as by sharing personal information (Marwick & boyd 2011: 147).

Below is an overview and a brief numerical breakdown of the overall dataset from which the data samples in focus below have been drawn as representative and sociolinguistically interesting cases.[4] (A list of discussion threads used here is found before the Bibliography.) The primary data we have used here come from 2009-2010, but in our experience, both Forssell's Twitter writing and the tone of metapragmatics at *Futisforum2* have remained to a great extent similar since then. This means that the analysis is 'contemporary' even when considering the rapid pace of change in digital communication. Forssell actually had a hiatus from Twitter in his season 2011-12 in Leeds (it was prohibited by his manager!), but reactivated his Twitter when he returned to Finland in autumn 2012.

heading of discussion topic	**subpages** (each page contains 25 postings)	**messages** *(rounded to the nearest 10)*	**time span**
"Mikael Forssell" (Hannover)	114 pages	2840 messages	2008–2009
"Mikael Forssell" (Hannover/unemployed)	164 pages	4080 messages	2009–2011
"Mikael Forssell" (Leeds/unemployed)	121 pages	3000 messages	2011–2012
"Twitter"	23 pages	550 messages	2009–2013

TABLE 1. An overview of the most relevant Futisforum2 discussion threads that deal with Forssell's Twitter activity.

In August 2010, a new discussion topic was opened on *Futisforum2* with the heading "Twitter". The first message framed this new topic as: "put this shit here so that it won't spoil the players' topics". This was an ironic attempt to cleanse the forum's discussion threads devoted to Forssell's and Mika Väyrynen's careers from meta-discussions of their active (non-Standard English, AAVE, 'gangsta') English usages, pointing to a high degree of

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hop feud, which may have lead to his death and also to that of another US rapper, *Tupac Shakur*, six months prior to B.I.G.'s death. In fact, the rap posses of these two 'enemies' are often accused of the deaths of the 'opposing side'. In his music, Notorious B.I.G. told realistic and rough narratives about the life on the streets and was highly appreciated as a skillful 'storyteller'. (Huey n.d.; Price 2006)

4 Figures as of October 24, 2013; rounded to the nearest 10: 5630 tweets, 27,600 followers.

metapragmatic awareness among the followers. The thread was popular for a time in 2010-11 but fell inactive in 2011-12 when the two were playing at Leeds where Twitter was prohibited for players. Twitter writings continued simultaneously to be an 'off-topic' in the player-specific threads.

6. Miklu's *tweets* and normative evaluations of their authenticity

Mikael Forssell launched his Twitter account apparently in November 2009; this was the time of rapid increase in public figures' (rock/pop stars, athletes, celebrities, politicians) Twitter accounts. By then, the communities of practice at *Futisforum* and *Futisforum2* (Kytölä 2013) had a firmly established practice of following Finnish players' careers abroad; Mikael Forssell's career turns had indeed been one of the hot topics for about a decade already at that time. Not surprisingly then, Forssell's contract with Hannover 96 (from July 2008) was also a topic with frequent (and provocative) contributions. In what follows, we analyze Forssell's usages of African American (or 'gangsta') English *vis-à-vis* the reactions and meta-comments on it by *Futisforumists* in five data samples with contextualizing descriptions of the discourses around them.

6.1. "Chocolate munching wanabee rapper" - the clash of indexical fields

As far as our fieldwork and archive searches can reveal,[5] the first time that Forssell's Twitter activity was introduced as a discussion topic on *Futisforum2* was in November 2009.

In a post to *Futisforum2's* topic on Forssell in Hannover, the forum member quotes Forssell's Twitter update for "drinking the best coffee in the world and dreaming about scoring". Then, comments on Forssell's playing and his new Twitter profile follow. A relevant post for our purposes appears a few days later (Figure 3).

Rodolfo
☐ Poissa

Suosikkijoukkue: TPS
| Rapan pelitaktiikka |
Zlatan

◇ **Vs: Mikael Forssell - Hannover 96 - 09/10/11 - Hyvä laukaus kohti yläkulmaa**
« Vastaus #145 : 27. Marraskuuta 2009 klo 10:23:32 »

Suklaata mutustava wanabee-räppäri, ei jatkoon.

FIGURE 3. "Chocolate munching wanabee rapper, you're out."

This short forum post is very representative of the discourses that we focus on here, as it encapsulates the tone of the discussion that follows for years. It contains a reference to Forssell's habit of indulging in delicacies (chocolate, coffee, Nutella, etc.) as well as his fondness of rap, and finally, the critical, disapproving stance that many of the *Futisforumists* take towards these characteristics (and their combination). With respect to authenticity, we should note the premodifier 'wanabee' [sic], which suggests that Forssell cannot but fail to be a 'genuine', 'authentic' representative of hip hop culture, mostly because of his middle-class background. He can merely be a 'wannabe', i.e. fake rapper. This normativity aspect is

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[5] This is the first mention that Kytölä noticed during his online fieldwork (Kytölä 2013) at the time, supported by later retrospective archive searches.

highlighted in the commenter's final phrase "ei jatkoon".[6] As becomes clear from the surrounding communicative context, for the *Futisforum* commenters Forssell neither meets the norms of a pro footballer (= he focuses on PR and joking on Twitter rather than just training) nor those of a rapper/rap fan (= he is not authentic). Here, we can thus already see one example of how the fans (tend to) draw on and make visible their essentialistic notion of authenticity.

Compared to 'traditional' kinds of authority and language policing (curricula, teachers, parents…), this is grassroots, peer-to-peer, organically emerging type of normativity (Kytölä 2012: 228-229; 2013: 124-125). Even such grassroots normativity can have roots in aspects of participants' life histories related to traditional authorities (e.g. 'the grammar' taught at school), but they have the additional layers of community norms, norms of digital writing, and various cultural norms simultaneously at work on different layers (football, 'Finnish-ness', international English, non-Standard or hip hop English, digital communication, etc.)

6.2. "…but Ive been knifed more than 50Cent" – unintentional humor or skilled performance?

After the point described above, Forssell's Twitter language use triggers regular meta-comments within the flow of the main discussion on his career. We now move to our next example from August 2010, the pre-season for the upcoming 2010-11 season in the German Bundesliga. Forssell - who had been ascribed the moniker "Twiklu" by the *Futisforumists* by now - tweets:

> *Off to play Osnabruck in the last pre-season friendly! Gonna be a tough game…*
> *but Ive been knifed more than 50 Cent[7] so Ill pull through!BANG*

This tweet again reflects Miklu's publicly displayed rap fandom. Miklu's first sentence, whilst elliptical, is in rather Standard English, but the second sentence moves toward a more informal register ('Gonna'; 'tough'). It is the third sentence that does the major switch to the 'gangsta' style *(*Coupland 2007; see also "cluster of features" in De Fina 2007: 57-60), emphasized by the closing exclamation 'BANG'. The activity of 'knifing' here can, ironically, refer to two things: surgeries that an often-injured footballer such as Forssell has had to go through, or 'stabbing' in a metaphorical sense (i.e., receiving harsh criticism from media and fans). Moreover, the third meaning is literal, as actual stabbing was part of 50Cent's life experience in the violent world of US gangsta rappers. In this sense, then, Forssell's 'comparison' of having been knifed *more* than 50 cent suggests, in a somewhat humoristic tone, that he is even tougher than the gangsta rapper. In spite of the macabre verbal imagery, the tweet ends in a jocular and highly optimistic, tongue-in-cheek note ("Ill pull

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[6] It is difficult to provide the best possible English translation for the idiomatic expression "ei jatkoon". This expression is currently used in television contests and 'reality' TV shows at a dramaturgical point when the jury decide on whether a competitor is allowed to stay in the contest or if they are eliminated after a certain round. Some English-language contests like that use the phrase "you're eliminated" or "it's a no for me".

[7] 50 cent, i.e. Curtis James Jackson III, is an American rapper, actor and entrepreneur. In a somewhat stereotypical gangsta rap fashion, also he was shot at (and struck by nine bullets) in an incident in 2000. At the time, he was heavily involved in drug business. His themes revolve around his actual, lived ('gangsta') experiences of drugs, crimes, imprisonments, stabbings – and shootings. Later on, 50 cent has been accused of 'selling out' (i.e. losing his 'authenticity') by making crossovers to the genre of 'pop rap'. (Price 2006; Birchmeier (n.d.))

through!BANG"). One overall function of Forssell's tweeting, by now, seems to be entertaining his followers, also by orienting towards multiple centers of normativity.

Next, we turn to look at the uptake and meta-commentary that this particular tweet arouses in the *Futisforum2* discussion thread devoted to Forssell (Figure 4).
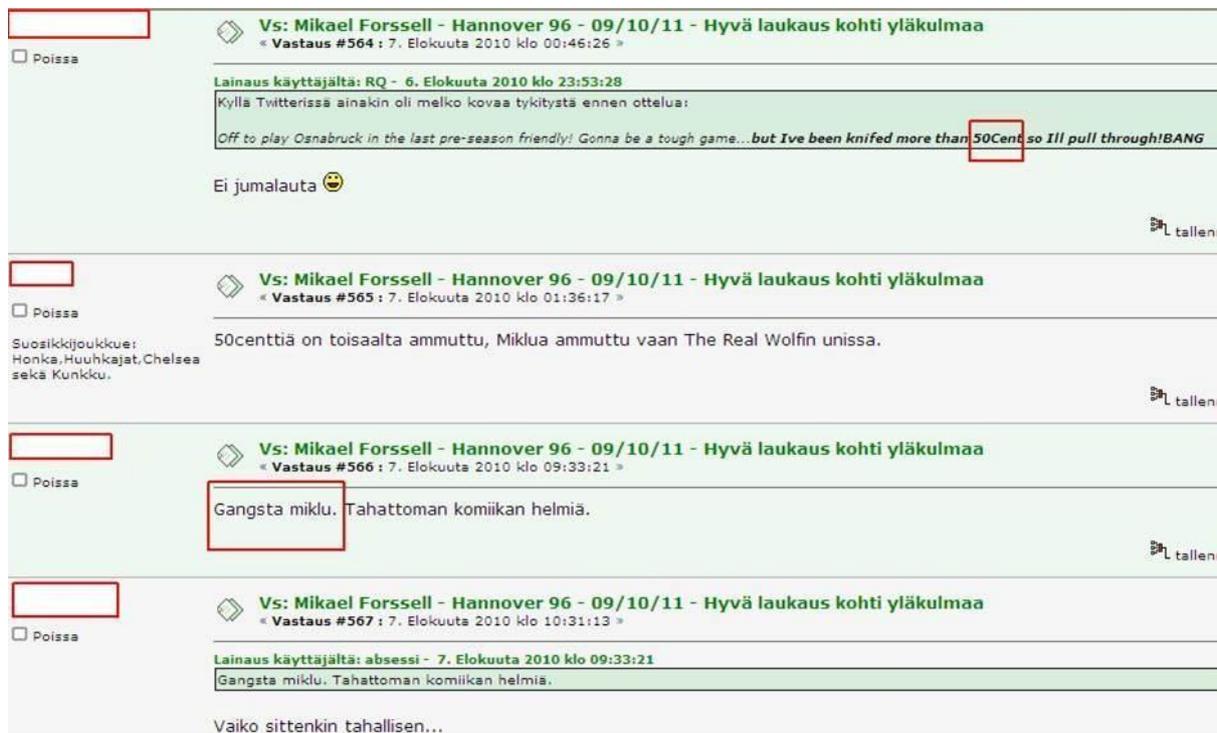

FIGURE 4. "A gem of unintentional humor."

Translations:

Quote from RQ: "*At least in Twitter there was full blast before the match:*"

User 1: ['*jumalauta*' - a swear word referring to God]

User 2: "*50cent has been shot at in reality, but Miklu has been shot at only in The Real Wolf's dreams.*"

User 3: "*Gangsta miklu. A gem of unintentional humor.*"

User 4: [quoting the previous comment] "*Or intentional, after all...*"

Here, user "Honka" (reply #565) displays knowledge of the US hip hop culture ("50cent has been shot at"). By writing "(...)Miklu has been shot at only in The Real Wolf's dreams", he simultaneously refers to "The Real Wolf", a prolific *Futisforum2* writer, whose nickname also contains a reference to authenticity, someone being 'more real' than others (Westinen 2014).[8] The next two short responses - discussing the intentionality of Miklu's humor - reflect the ambivalence of the reception of his tweets: there seems to be no one preferred reading of them (the researchers may share this feeling), there is no contextualization cue in Miklu's tweets at

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[8] The latter member had chosen this name because his original nickname 'The Wolf' was poached by another user in the early days of *Futisforum2*, when many *Futisforum* members emigrated to *Futisforum2*.

this point which would unambiguously lead the followers to one warranted interpretation of his 'gangsta' intertextuality. The language used by Miklu seems exaggerated, and so does his 'tough' attitude and his identification with the gangsta world.

Here, as in other tweets by Miklu, two indexical fields (Eckert 2008) are elicited and two centers of norms are oriented towards: football and 'gangsta'. This is, however, done with rather 'minimal' contributions from the celebrity himself: it is the uptake, the extensive discussion amongst fans on the forum which explicitly and implicitly constructs and adds to these indexical fields and norm centers. "Determining whether readers are watching an 'authentic' individual or a performed 'celebrity' persona is not entirely the point; it is the uncertainty that creates pleasure for the celebrity-watcher on Twitter (Marwick & boyd 2011: 144).

All in all, as illustrated by this short excerpt, the metapragmatic commentaries in *Futisforum2* strongly raise the issues of authenticity, accompanied with reflections on tolerance, to which we turn next. Miklu's authenticity as a speaker of a 'hip hop language' seems to be questioned by most *Futisforum2* responses; however, some contributing forumists appear to share Miklu's ironic sense of humor, while others' tolerance seems lower.

6.3. "I be da reel gansta, from da ghetto!" – appropriation of 'gangsta' by the *Futisforum2* community

Still in August 2010, the beginning of the European club football season 2010-11, we identify the 'next stage' in the chain of the emergence of the Miklu-induced 'gangsta' style among the *Futisforum2* community. Key to this phase is that the *Futisforumists* themselves now begin to make use of a similar, exaggerated, non-Standard style, with notable recurring 'gangsta' features, while also explicitly mentioning the 'gangsta' category.

FIGURE 5. "I be da reel gansta, from the ghetto!"

Translation:

"Well, I think Miklu will shoot himself in the leg soon, so we get rid of the twittering. Literally:"

Miklu's tweet - here in the quote box - expresses his pleasure in the training ("sesh", i.e. session) and plays with the double meaning of 'shooting range'; for a football striker such as Forssell shooting from different ranges is obviously an essential special skill. With the recurring references to the hip hop stars (here: Tupac[9] and 50cent) Forssell crafts another layer of ambiguity: what is 'shooting' here? Moreover, Forssell uses the verb phrase "feel like", suggesting a point of identification with the hip hop world and rap artists.

The part of the response that follows below the Twitter quote (the box) is the first *Futisforum* response to Forssell's Twitter writing that we identify as adoption and appropriation (Hill 2008: 158-174; Bucholtz 2011: 69-80; Kytölä 2012) of the stylistic features used by Miklu. From this point on, the overt (or explicit) metapragmatic evaluation (see Kytölä 2013), stating opinions on Miklu's language, is intertwined with covert (or implicit) metapragmatic commentary, imitating and modifying Miklu's style. This short comment successfully includes several colloquial items, itemized in detail as here:

type of feature	Standard English	'gangsta' English
exclamation	all right, alright	AIGHT ('cool' variant)
verb conjugation	I am	I be
definite article	the	da (twice)
spelling of adjective	real	reel
variant of noun	gangster	gansta*
word choice	[female]	bitches

* This could also be 'gangsta'; we do not know if the omission of the second 'g' was an accidental typing error, a gap in spelling knowledge, or a deliberate stylistic choice.

Moreover, the forum message ends with another exclamation playing with ambiguity: "M-FO". This seems to play with the contemporary colloquial English practice of creating an acronym from the initial letters of one's names. J.Lo (Jennifer Lopez) is the most famous example of this formula (the musical styles she represents are mainly R'n'B, pop and Latin, but this formula arguably fits the hip hop practices too; see Potter 1995; Androutsopoulos & Scholz

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[9] *Tupac* (2pac) refers to Tupac Amaru Shakur, who was an American rap artist and actor. 2pac was a vocal participant in the so-called East Coast – West Coast hip hop rivalry, becoming involved in conflicts with other rappers, most notably with (the previously mentioned) Notorious B.I.G. and his label Bad Boy Records. In 1996, 2pac was shot multiple times in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles and the 'posse' (gang or group) of Notorious B.I.G. was accused of his death. The case remains unsolved. Their deaths showed, in a very cruel and dramatic way, how the contents of (gangsta) rap lyrics became reality. The themes of most of 2pac's songs revolve around the violence and hardship in inner cities, racism and other social problems. Both 2pac and Notorious B.I.G. also served time in prison – their music was thus 'authentically gangsta' in this respect, too. (Price 2006; Erlewine n.d.)

2002). Significantly, "M-FO" also evokes the 'tough' noun 'motherfucker' (or its various spellings) combined with Forssell's initials.

This message, which incorporates several non-Standard, markedly even 'gangsta' features in a short space, is the first example of the emergence of a similar way of writing at *Futisforum2*. When the other forumists response in a more or less equivalent style, with both recurring and one-off 'gangsta' features in their forum messages, we find a parallel to Hill's (2008) 'Mock Spanish' and Rampton's (2006) 'stylized Posh' or 'stylized Asian English. (Author 1, in her/his work on the language practices of Finnish football forums, has found other similar parallels, too; see Author 1: 2012, 2013).

6.4. Evaluations, metapragmatics and indexicalities: 'teenage' style and 'fucking ghetto gangstas'

We cannot here describe all the connections and relationships made publicly conspicuous in Forssell's digital networks, but the most relevant two 'co-tweeters' merit an introduction here. Mika Väyrynen and Tim Sparv, also Finnish football professionals and prolific tweeters, become co-authors of Forssell's 'gangsta' style (thus flagging their groupness) at several points and a salient part of the overall Finnish professional footballers' jocular multi-authored discourse online (see the last example of the analysis). Väyrynen and Sparv engage in a Twitter dialogue with Forssell, deploying the same or similar 'gangsta' (or other markedly non-Standard) English features; these particular instances of language use were interwoven in the *Futisforum2's* metapragmatic discussions in the 'thick' moments described below.

The last empirical point we include in this analysis is the emic addition of age as a factor in the emergence of this 'gangsta' style. When discussing and imitating Forssell's tweets (and those of his colleague footballers Väyrynen and Sparv), the *Futisforumists* frequently raise the issue of age: for many commentators, this 'gangsta' English belongs together with youth or teenage language rather than grown-ups (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. *"he insists on writing like 13-year olds"*

Translation:

[quote from Le Dog]

This mostly makes me laugh ['lol' emoticon]. *As far as I'm concerned, let everyone write as they wish, but at the same time I can laugh with good conscience at riplu's* [sic] *record*

reviews and twitter writings. It gets all the funnier as we know that riplu would know how to write sensibly if he wanted to, but he insists on writing like 13-year olds [thumb down].

Reply: *"Few of us know how to write gangsta English so well. And it's very cool."* [thumb up]

This is a telling example of the negotiation and the co-construction of the ambivalence in Miklu's public writing. Although it is impossible to always pinpoint which writers are being serious and who are being ironic or tongue-in-cheek, with repeated and persistent comments such as these we can identify an emergent meta-discourse, that of the 'enlightened' advocates of diversity. These writers acknowledge that Miklu *actually masters* this 'gangsta' style, and the normativity interpretation turns around 180 degrees: in fact, Miklu, by displaying that he can master this register, *meets the norms* - despite his middle-class Finnish background (and, possibly for some commentators, despite his 'Whiteness'). This is another clearly identifiable thread that emerges in the discussions on Miklu and his public author persona.

In this message, along with several others in these discussion threads, the age factor is introduced to the discussion. This writer (along with others) refer to Forssell's (and Väyrynen's) style as a teenage style ("like 13-year-olds"). Another *Futisforum2* member soon comments:

"*Vittu tätä nykynuorison kieltä*"

("fuck this language of today's youth")

Ironically, Forssell (b. 1981) and Väyrynen (b. 1981) are both in their late 20s, nearly 30, at the time of these tweets (2009-2011), and on the basis of the Finnish football forums' participant frameworks (Kytölä 2013), many of the participants in the metapragmatic commentary are about the same age, some even younger. Ironically, when Tim Sparv's (b. 1987) related tweets are frequently brought into the discussion, they contain much less non-Standard English than those of the other two 'bros' (their term), six years senior to Sparv. With respect to this very small sample, the age factor would tentatively seem less decisive here than personal, aesthetic or stylistic preference. With regard to authenticity, however, age is clearly raised here as one factor which requires appropriate, 'authentic' verbal expression; i.e., 30-year olds are 'inauthentic' or 'fake' if they write in a way associated with 13-year olds.

When Väyrynen and Sparv join Forssell in the social activity of Twittering, the three players' tweets are often explicitly directed at each other (while simultaneously maintaining their personal, specific audiences); one of the tweets directed at Forssell by Väyrynen elicits a negatively framed criticism of 'ghetto gangsta' among the *Futisforumists* (Figure 7).

Slater74
☐ Poissa

⬦ **Vs: Mikael Forssell - Hannover 96 - 09/10/11 - Ainakin rankkari nousi...**
« Vastaus #23 : 30. Elokuuta 2010 klo 12:44:55 »

"MikaVayrynen10@MikaelForssell

wtf bro?harvoin kuullu et jäbä tyytyväinen jos et oo maalannu tai pelannu...still keep ya head up n c ya next week "

Siis mitä vitun ghettogangstoja nää meidän maajengin jätkät luulevat olevansa. Twittaako Littikin jonkun Davidsin ja Kanun kanssa vastaavaa paskaa?

🖳 tallennettu

FIGURE 7. "So, what fucking ghetto gangstas"

Translation:

Väyrynen (alternating between colloquial English and Finnish): *"wtf bro?rarely heard ya happy if not scored or played...still keep ya head up n c ya next week "*

Forumist's response: *"So, what fucking ghetto gangstas do our internationals think they are. Does Litti* [Jari Litmanen] *tweet equivalent shit with, say,* [Edgar] *Davids and* [Nwankwo] *Kanu?"*

In the actual tweet by Väyrynen which is quoted in the forum message above, there is little to suggest a 'gangsta' or a 'ghetto' style. Rather, the non-Standard features 'wtf bro' and '...n c ya...' are in general use across the English-speaking world in various formats and contexts of informal writing. However, 'bro' can also be considered (as originating in) AAVE (see e.g. Cutler 2003) - something to which the forumists apparently relate their comments. Indeed, the comment by Slater74 explicitly associates this sample with 'ghetto gangsta', probably evoked by Forssell's earlier online presence with *real* references to African American hip hop culture; alternatively, it could be a personal, aesthetically motivated negative attitude towards features of 'gangsta', African American and/or non-Standard English. In any case, his verbal expression is strong and he clearly disidentifies with these linguistic features as well as their 'ghetto gangsta' cultural indexicalities.

Similar meta-discussions abound in the *Futisforum2* threads related to Forssell, Väyrynen, Sparv and Twitter in general: the main points of criticism targeted at the writings of these players are the 'gangsta' features, which are deemed incompatible and inauthentic to Finnish well-off sport pros, and the unsuitability of such 'immature', 'teenager' features to grown-ups' language use. At the same time, there are many signs on the Finnish football forum of (a rather carnivalistic) adoption and appropriation of - playing around and fooling with - the cluster (De Fina 2007) of gangsta features. The main message of that tendency seems to be that the use of 'gangsta' by Finnish sports pros (who have lived all their lives far from 'real' authentic gangsta contexts) in digital writing is 'ridiculous but fun' and entertaining at the same time. The overall interpretation of the authenticity and normativity issues related to such language use remains ambivalent.

7. Discussion

In this article, we understood authenticity as *authentication*, as a negotiable, discursively verified process where different social actors make different claims about others' belonging, legitimation or 'passing' in different social formations or groups. Another key concept we deployed was normativity, which entails evaluations, judgments and policing others' semiotic conduct; and we attempted to underline the ways in which normativity in many informal digital contexts is primarily imposed "from below", negotiated and co-constructed in the flow of discourses, and locatable on different layers of language use (or the use of other semiotic resources such as pictures in social media).

We have documented and discussed several axes of metapragmatic debate: the Finnish fans' negotiations of whether Forssell's language is 'good' or 'bad', 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' (gangsta) English, whether it is 'allowed' or 'not allowed' for a professional footballer such as him, and the ways in which this stylized language matches or mismatches with aspects of Forssell's social and cultural background. In addition, we discussed the 'purpose' and

'usefulness' of these ways of writing, as well as his multiple audiences "co-existing in a single social context" (Marwick & boyd 2011: 145), typical of social media. This "context collapse" (boyd 2008) can be discussed together with the "discursive verification" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 601) of authenticity or authentication, which can no longer be seen as 'inherent essence' of an individual. Instead, the diversity of audiences for the same pieces of discourse leads to the discursive verification (or denial) of some authenticities by some (but not all) audiences.

Whatever Forssell (and his colleagues) choose(s) to write on Twitter, his public image is always at stake. We can also observe here that various online activities and communication entail as much social control as any other (offline) human activity. Thus, we can make an ethnographic point on the relation between online and offline worlds: the negative evaluations of Miklu's online linguistic performances presuppose offline knowledge of Miklu's identity as a hard-working, focused footballer. For famous athletes, their fans' and followers' expectations of their public online (e.g. Twitter) performance is often to communicate about the sport. However, the followers may not be indifferent to *how* such communication is done. We have here showcased the very reflexive nature that the audiences' uptake can have with regard to aspects of linguistic styles and specific features associated with those styles.

Forssell's adoption and appropriation of 'gangsta' English features is one conspicuous feature of his overall polylingual performance, characterized by ('unremarkable') hybridity (Pennycook 2010), polycentricity (orientation to multiple centers and audiences) and jocularity. In fact, when gangsta features are adopted (in clusters), we can even talk about 'a style', i.e. a way of speaking/writing in this case (Coupland 2007, Bell 2007, De Fina 2007, Bucholtz 2011). In Rampton's (2005 [1995]) argument, Forssell's language use can here be seen as *crossing*, i.e. switching into a language (or a variety) generally not thought to 'belong' to the speaker. In terms of audience, then, it becomes interesting to observe which specific varieties or features (used by the footballer) evoke strong emotional responses (and, possibly, why). Here, we can see how the audience (re)negotiates the relation between speaker, place and language - who has the right to use which linguistic resources to whom and where. Authenticity and normativity (correctness, appropriateness and expertise) become key issues in these negotiations.

Football fans initiate and maintain metapragmatic, reflexive and at times ironic commentaries on Finnish football forums on the value, acceptability and authenticity of these language usages, with the labels ascribed to that register/style ranging from 'wanabee rapper' and 'unintended comedy' to 'pathetic' or 'retarded'. In these metalinguistic debates, Forssell et al.'s English uses on Twitter are repeatedly characterized as 'ghetto gangsta English' and its evaluation ranges from 'laughing out loud' to 'sense of shared embarrassment'. All in all, the uptake and responses show varying forms of conventionality, purism, and normativity. Emic categories emerging in these metadiscussions are often essentialistic, extreme and black-and-white (bad–good, right–wrong), and 'pure', Standard and monolingual are often articulated ideals. However, to counterpoint that, some of the readers are also skillful languagers showing strong awareness of genre/register differences and readiness to play around with them by appropriating similar 'gangsta' features in their own online forum writing. It is this tension between normativity and appropriation that we have here showcased.

What can also be seen here are the "several different layers of normativity" (Varis & Wang 2011: 72), most notably those of "hip hop normativity and authenticity and polycentricity" versus those of "pro footballer's normativity and authenticity and polycentricity". In this case,

a professional football player and his language use do not sometimes, from the fans' viewpoint, quite 'match' the essentialized norms and authenticity of a rap enthusiast / hip hop head. Questions of authenticity are indeed made relevant by the fans, not so much by Forssell himself. Significantly, however, both hip hop and football cultures are polycentric in nature: people affiliated with these always orient towards multiple centers of norms, instead of only one (see also Westinen 2014; Kytölä 2013, respectively), as we see here.

Moreover, there is a degree of open-endedness and rhizomaticity in these 'Twiklu' discourses. By no means limited to Twitter and the major Finnish football web forums, these metapragmatic discourses about Forssell's twittering also spread and circulate across other online and offline spaces; we have found online examples of the Finnish football fans' critical "Twiklu" discourse, for instance, in Finnish football blogs, the comment sections of more formal institutional (digital) media, and even in articles *in* institutional media (although in such cases, the journalists have felt the need to frame and explain the 'Twiklu' moniker and the associations it can raise).[10] Overall, we can testify to a great deal of ambivalence and ambiguity in this topic. Miklu's stylization of 'gangsta' English is by no means clear-cut, some of the comments in the discussion forum remain vague, as does the precise social function of the appropriation of Miklu's 'style' by the forumists. In general, specific and definite interpretations and conclusions should be drawn with caution. However, there is a clearly observable friction between purist normativities (arguing that an identity of a professional, possibly 'White', middle-class footballer cannot authentically be combined with that of a 'gangsta' English user) and playful appropriation of the same (or similar) digital writing styles in yet another layer of circulation - as when many *Futisforumists* begin to adopt gangsta English features not directly from their 'authentic' US-origin users but via Forssell's example, and with the added twist of parodying Forssell's *already mediated and appropriated* 'gangsta' English rather than the 'authentic' source, say, of a famous gangsta rapper or character in a film.

We could, alternatively, address our questions through the lens of *superdiversity*. While this original coinage by Vertovec (2007) was an attempt to socio-politically capture current diversities in a more complex, late modern world of migration, mobility and globalization (e.g. London and other mega-cities), the adoption of the notion by critical sociolinguists was soon to follow (Creese & Blackledge 2010; Blommaert & Rampton 2011). The key question they pose is how superdiversity influences (and is being influenced by) multilingual and hybrid language uses. This can be seen in increasing mixing/blending of features from various languages/varieties, the organization and movement of linguistic features in *flows*, and complexity of mediation – in sum, a great degree of unpredictability. However, the ever more complex digital mediation chains add a further layer of complexity and unpredictability to these blends and mixes; this is noted by both author tandems (Creese & Blackledge 2010; Blommaert & Rampton 2011) but discussed in more detail by neither (but see Leppänen & Häkkinen 2012 on mediated superdiversity in parodic YouTube videos). Our discussion of Mikael Forssell's Twitter writing in African American and/or 'gangsta' English, along with its adoption and appropriation by Finnish football followers online can, therefore, also be read as

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[10] Examples: blog: http://siististicool.blogspot.fi/2011/09/twiklun-ghettostoorit.html; institutional media news: http://www.iltalehti.fi/jalkapallo/2010111712719497_jp.shtml; meta-news about the fake Forssell Twitter: http://www.iltasanomat.fi/veikkausliiga/art-1288561320785.html Article in English at YLE: http://yle.fi/uutiset/forsell_looks_for_form_and_fitness_in_finland/6576863 (Egan Richardson 12 April 2013)

a contribution to this superdiversity discussion, one in which - somewhat against the spirit of the times - digital communication has played a minor role.

Primary sources

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http://twitter.com/MikaelForssell (Forssell's Twitter account)

Futisforum2

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(Forssell – Hannover 2008-09)

http://futisforum2.org/index.php?topic=83064.0
(Forssell – Hannover 2009-11; unemployed)

http://futisforum2.org/index.php?topic=127020.0
(Forssell – Leeds 2011-12; unemployed)

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("Twitter")

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