

Haagse Harry, a Dutch chav from The Hague? The enregisterment of similar social personas in different speech communities

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Abstract

This paper presents two remarkably similar characterological figures who are stereotyped embodiments of working-class personas: *Haagse Harry* in The Hague and chavs in England. The two figures have similar attires, class positions, attitudes, and associated attributes. We compare and contextualize the indexical links between their linguistic features and their social characteristics. Firstly, while chavs can be both men and women, the fictional persona *Haagse Harry* represents an all-male lower-working-class subculture. Secondly, while *Haagse Harry* consistently speaks Broad *Haags*, the language of chavs is not rooted in any single regional dialect but invariably indexes working-class features. Thirdly, *Haagse Harry*, and his sociolect, has a higher social status compared to the language and persona of chavs, who embody British class prejudice. We demonstrate that the repertoire of linguistic features deployed in the stylisation of characterological figures is strongly dependent on patterns of variation and ideas that are prevalent in the local speech community.

Keywords: chavs, The Hague, enregisterment, social class, characterological figures, indexicality

1. Introduction

This paper presents two highly similar ‘characterological figures’ (Agha 2003: 243) who are stereotyped embodiments of working-class personas in two different locations: *Haagse Harry* in The Hague, The Netherlands, and chavs, a social persona found across England. There are remarkable

similarities in the stereotyped, social characteristics of these personas, such as attire, attitude and lifestyle, but also language. Nevertheless, there are also fairly subtle but important differences between the two, which we will argue may be accounted for by significant societal differences that characterise their respective speech communities.

Haagse Harry, “Harry from The Hague”, is a fictional character, who is displayed in the form of a statue in a popular square in the city centre of The Hague. The statue represents a male figure decked out in full stereotyped working-class regalia, with a raised middle finger behind his back and a turd at his feet, to symbolize his complete disregard of polite society (for an image of the statue, see https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haagse_Harry). The statue attracts considerable attention from locals and tourists alike, who are frequently found taking selfies with Harry in the background. Upon seeing the statue, English tourists would most likely identify Harry as a chav, a likewise stereotyped but deeply controversial portrayal of certain groups of the English lower working classes. As the journalist and social commentator Owen Jones writes, the ‘chav’ persona is a form of demonizing the working class which “encompasses [...] negative traits associated with working-class people-- violence, laziness, teenage pregnancies, racism, drunkenness, and the rest” (2012: 8). All these characteristics fit *Haagse Harry* like a glove, teenage pregnancies excepted.

In spite of these similarities, the repertoire of linguistic forms (i.e., ‘register’) enregistered with the two social personas must necessarily differ, not least because they speak different languages, English and Dutch, but primarily because of the differences in the linguistic and social contexts in their respective communities. How this works with respect to the two selected types of social persona and why this should be the case are questions that will be addressed in this paper. We begin by introducing chavs and *Haagse Harry* as characterological figures and by discussing their social characteristics and stereotyped representations. We then turn our attention to their registers, detailing the linguistic features associated with them and how these are propagated through various channels (television and other popular-culture representations, meta-discourse publications and

social media). We then compare the different stylisation of the speech of chavs and *Haagse Harry* which we seek to explain in relation to patterns of variation and linguistic ideologies in their respective communities. But first we will briefly consider the central notion to this paper, enregisterment.

1.1. Enregisterment

Agha defines enregisterment as “processes through which a linguistic repertoire become differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha 2003: 231). He applies the concept to Received Pronunciation (RP) to show how what was once a regional variety came to be seen as the language of the upper classes in Britain and became established as the perceived standard variety. In essence, enregisterment refers to the indexical links that are formed between linguistic features and stereotyped social personas. Linguistic forms, Agha argues, are embodied as ‘characterological figures’ who are the stereotyped users of a register (2003: 243).

Similarly, Johnstone et al. (2006) adopt the notion of enregisterment to demonstrate for Pittsburghese that socially meaningful linguistic features are linked to ideas of localness. The authors view enregisterment as a process of increasing social salience, or ‘orders of indexicality’ according to Silverstein’s framework (2003). As a linguistic feature receives increased awareness and when value is attributed to it, it can move through the orders of indexicality and ultimately become enregistered. This concept is expanded from Labov’s earlier notion of the distinction between indicators, markers and stereotypes which differ in their respective social salience (1972: 178–180). Johnstone (2009) highlights the central role of metalinguistic activities to the enregisterment of linguistic features with a social identity, and argues that stereotyped linguistic features are shared and propagated through channels such as meta-discourse, popular-cultural references, and public-sphere discourses (Johnstone 2009; see also Beal 2018 on Geordie and Ch’ti alongside Pittsburghese; and Ilbury (2019) on the role of social media in the enregisterment of the ‘roadman’ figure in

London). Through the process of enregisterment, linguistic features coalesce with other factors such as social characteristics (e.g., attire, behavior, attitudes) which jointly index a social persona.

As we will see, chavs and *Haagse Harry* are examples of characterological figures who are associated with extremely similar (but not identical) social characteristics but that are indexed by sociolinguistically distinct repertoires of linguistic features. We will compare and contextualise the repertoires of the linguistic features--in terms of their distribution and social meaning--associated with each of these figures.

2. The characterological figures: Chavs and *Haagse Harry*

2.1. Chavs

The word *chav*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, designates young people originally from the South of England that are “characterized by brash and loutish behavior and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status” (*OED*, *chav*, n). As we will see though, chavs are no longer exclusively associated with the South of England, as is reflected by their portrayal in popular media. In addition, the *OED* labels *chav* as “derogatory” and as “British slang”. *Chav* emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s--the *OED*’s first quotation of the word dates from 1998, though its context suggests earlier usage--and was soon included in a number of dictionaries (Jones 2012: 7–8). In 2004, it was selected as “Word of the Year” by Oxford University Press (<https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/>; Bennet 2012: 5). As a social group chavs are indeed generally viewed with derision and are subjected to considerable spiteful social-class commentary (see Jones, 2012).

Being applied to certain groups of British society, *chav* has connotations of low economic position or inactivity as well as a range of cultural and social expectations in relation to clothing, hair styles, leisure activities, and language (Lockyer 2010). In addition to the connotations of chavs as “groups of young people, clad predominantly in sports apparel, who engage in minor forms of unruly

behavior in and around town centres, entertainment zones and certain fast-food outlets” (Hayward and Yar 2006: 15), chavs are also associated with council housing and council estates (areas of social houses rented out to tenants from lower social income groups by a local council). In the public imagination, the etymology of *chav* is frequently, if erroneously, interpreted as the acronym “Council housed and violent” (Hayward and Yar 2006: 16; Nayak 2006: 24). Instead, the word most likely derives from Romani *čhavo*, meaning “unmarried Romani male, male Romani child” (*OED, chav, n*). Another important aspect of ‘chav’ centres on race and class (but not gender): chavs, male and female, are most frequently white and working-class (Tyler 2008; Lockyer 2010; Jones 2012).

Portrayals of chavs are not associated exclusively with any specific area in England--note that in this paper we refer to England rather than Britain or the UK as the vast majority of references to chavs are situated there. However, it is worth noting that whilst ‘chav’ is a term used in England, other parts of Britain use different terms: in Scotland, the term ‘ned’ carries almost identical expectations and associations (see *OED, ned, n.2*). Representations of chavs on TV have been most prominent, but are not limited to situational comedies. Though the characters may not be explicitly referred to as such, examples of chavs in situational comedies, many of which were also broadcast in The Netherlands, include *Shameless*, featuring the Gallagher family (Channel 4, 2004–2013), *People Just Do Nothing* (BBC, 2014–2018) and *The Royle Family* (Granada, 1998–2000, 2006–2012). In addition, chavs have appeared in sketch comedies such as *Harry Enfield and Chums* with Wayne and Waynetta Slob (BBC, 1994–1997), *Little Britain* with Vicky Pollard (BBC, 2003–2007), and *The Catherine Tate Show* with schoolgirl Lauren Cooper (BBC, 2004–2009). Lauren Cooper, despite having publicly died in a canoeing accident in 2007, was even revived in 2020 for a sketch on BBC One’s *The Big Night In* which sought to raise money to support those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the sketch, Lauren’s long-suffering teacher attempted in vain to teach her remotely, which suggests that chavs continue to be a source of humor in British society.

In addition, a range of books have propagated and drawn comic value from portrayals of chavs, such as the young-adult novel series *Diary of a Chav* (Dent 2007–2009) and various chav so-called humor books: *The Little Book of Chav Speak* (Bok 2004), *The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok 2006), *A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner 2004) and *Baby Names for Chavs* (Wileman and McGreechan 2018). Furthermore, chav merchandise can be purchased online, such as mugs, T-shirts, bumper stickers, keyrings, and birthday cards. In these portrayals, chavs are depicted in recurrently similar ways as lazy, unintelligent, ignorant, lacking in common sense, abrasive, and argumentative. Additionally, they are stereotypically depicted as having links with criminality and are associated with drug and alcohol use (and abuse). Female chavs are additionally associated with sexual promiscuity in a way the male chavs are not (or at least are not derided for it). The most prominent example is Vicky Pollard in *Little Britain*, whose representation--it is perhaps worth noting that Vicky is impersonated by a male actor, Matt Lucas--was made available to a large audience with 9.5 million viewers (almost 40% of the television audience) watching the first episode of the third series (Locker 2010). Vicky epitomises common conceptions of 'chav': she is a teenage girl who is obstructive and obnoxious with authority figures, claims benefits, wears her blonde hair tightly scraped back in a scrunchie, wears tracksuits and gold bling (ostentatious jewellery), lives in council housing, has over twelve children by several different fathers, and often talks about her real or imagined sexual exploits (see Lockyer 2010).

As for other forms of popular culture, chavs are great targets for fancy dress parties, for which costumes, including those of *Little Britain's* Vicky Pollard, can be bought online. For instance, in 2014, the actress Michelle Keegan threw a chav-themed party for the entire cast as well as friends and family after filming her final-ever episode for the soap opera *Coronation Street*. Guests dressed as famous fictional chavs--Sacha Parkinson, for instance, dressed as Frank Gallagher from *Shameless*--or wore tracksuits, caps, bling, and football T-shirts, and were photographed holding up two fingers to the camera with cans of cheap beer in the other hand.

Although chavs are typically associated with the lower socio-economic classes, a range of socio-cultural expectations take precedence in defining a potential chav. Being wealthy does not exclude a person from being identified as a chav. Indeed, several wealthy celebrities have been considered to be chavs (Tyler and Bennet 2010). For instance, in 2011, the singer and TV-personality, then named Cheryl Cole (b. 1983), was labelled 'Queen of the Chavs'. After growing up on a council estate in Newcastle upon Tyne, Cheryl had been branded a chav when wearing big hoop earrings caps and tracksuits (Cusack 2012). She lived up to the cultural expectations of chavs who are associated with similar dress styles (see Hayward and Yar 2006). In fact, previous research has comprehensively demonstrated that Cheryl uses the 'Geordie Chav' persona to construct her public identity (Di Martino 2019). It seems then that although the association is there, chavs do not necessarily have low economic status, but instead are defined by their adherence to a set of stereotyped, cultural expectations about the working class.

The chav persona had its heyday in the noughties, but the term itself fell out of fashion during the last decade. In part, its decline resulted from heightened criticism of its use, which was increasingly seen as an offensive and unacceptable belittling of the lower socio-economic classes, possibly due to the broadening of the lowest socio-economic class following Britain's 2008 economic crisis. Nonetheless, the term has recently resurged again in popularity: as Coulter (2020) and Shadijanova (2020) note, in 2020, 'chav' and its renewed derisive exploitation for comic effect became particularly widespread on TikTok. This video-sharing platform, which is most popular with young people, allows users to post 15-second mobile videos. TikTok has surged in popularity since 2019 and was the most downloaded app of 2020 (BBC New Online 2020). In 2020, thousands of videos from across England have trended under the #chav or #chavs hashtags. During the past two years, such videos have been shared over 150 million times, with videos captioned with #BritishChavs, #UKChavs and #SchoolChavs having an additional 12 million views. These videos include so-called comedy sketches, chav make-overs or makeup tutorials, and chav transformation of famous cartoon characters, from, for instance, *Peppa Pig* or *The Simpsons* (see Coulter 2020;

Shadijanova 2020). Resurgence of the chav figure thus seems to be led by teenagers, who are not likely to be aware of or understand the significance of the chav debates and controversies of the late 2000s and early 2010s. The chav then is as relevant a characterological figure in England as ever.

2.2. Haagse Harry

Haagse Harry, by contrast, is an entirely fictional character, though clearly representing a social-class category comparable to that of chavs in England. As mentioned, his attire is remarkably similar, consisting of a tracksuit, trainers and a single gold hoop earring and a conspicuous gold ring. The linguistic variety typically associated with this character, which we will describe below, is that found--until fairly recently at least--in Schilderswijk, one of the poorest districts of The Hague (Stal 2005: 53). Today, however, after extensive renovation, the district largely comprises council houses (*sociale huurwoningen*) which are predominantly inhabited by migrants, currently amounting to over 90 per cent of its population (*Den Haag in Cijfers*).

Haagse Harry was created by the late Marnix Rueb (1955–2014), as part of a cartoon series featuring a stereotyped working-class lout from The Hague in tracksuit and sneakers, wearing bling, and continually swearing and uttering profanities (Elias and Goeman 2002: 83). Rueb, who originated from an upper-middle-class family living in a more affluent part of The Hague (Elias and Goeman 2002: 83) but who himself lived in Schilderswijk until his untimely death a few years ago, produced four comic strip books featuring *Haagse Harry*, with one more appearing posthumously. The books are written in Broad *Haags*, and they depict Harry vociferously fighting the establishment, motivated by the insecurities supposedly threatening working-class values resulting from high lower-class unemployment, feminism, and increasing multiculturalism (Elias and Goeman 2002: 45).

Rueb's comic books reached nationwide popularity, with *Haagse Harry* becoming a well-known figure (Elias and Goeman 2002: 84). His statue is available in miniature form (ca. 10 inches high) as well as in the shape of gadgets like keyrings and on T-shirts, similar to what, for instance, Johnstone (2009) found for Pittsburghese and Beal (2018) for Geordie and what they describe as

important factors in the enregisterment of a linguistic variety. *Haagse Harry's* popularity may be due to the deliberate breaking of social taboos (Goeman 1999: 128). Apart from taking a stand against the authorities, political or otherwise, Harry customarily inveighs against Turkish migrant workers, "German tourists on the beach," and women, who are invariably portrayed as sex objects (Elias and Goeman 2002: 84). His habit of invoking terminal diseases, using explicitly sexual and anti-feminist terms when swearing and making sick jokes has given Harry a somewhat controversial status, since the character is often unduly taken to represent the average working-class professional from The Hague (Ad van Gaalen, as cited in Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 2019: 25–27). The *Haagse Harry* statue was erected in the autumn of 2016 in posthumous recognition of Marnix Rueb's status in The Hague, and it is currently a major landmark in the city centre.

3. The linguistic registers of chavs and *Haagse Harry*

Chavs and *Haagse Harry* are thus remarkably comparable characterological figures who share many features, such as their apparel, their anti-authoritarian stance and unruly behavior, their conservative and sometimes ignorant societal values, and their associations with areas of social housing and low economic status. Nonetheless, as we will show in this section, apart from the fact that that they speak different languages, English and Dutch respectively, the linguistic registers associated with them differ in a number of significant ways.

3.1. Chavspeak

The word *chavspeak* (or *chav speak*) is not recorded in the *OED*, even though it has been around since the early 2000s (see Bok 2004). Based primarily on the two popular-culture chav publications *The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok 2006), and *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner 2004), Bennet (2012) discusses stylisations of chavspeak. Language is central to descriptions of chavs in these books, which describe how, in terms of phonological characteristics, Cockney features heavily in the orthographic representation of their language. Chavs are moreover

portrayed as using features that are recognized across Britain as existing working-class stereotypes: TH-fronting, glottal stops for /t/, H-dropping, the alveolar variant of (ING) and Cockney MOUTH monophthongisation (Bennet 2012: 10). In terms of lexis, Bennet mentions alleged borrowings from stereotypes of 'Black Englishes' which are metalinguistically commented on as inauthentic. In addition, the language of chavs supposedly demonstrates communicative incompetence in, for instance, an inability to form full sentences. In terms of topics, chavs often speak about petty crime and violence, and frequently cause public nuisance.

In these popular books about chavs and chav culture, as analysed by Bennet (2012), the authors depict a stereotypical, supra-regional chav who is not described as coming from any specific geographic area. In this section we complement Bennet's analysis by observing the most salient linguistic features used by so-called chavs featuring in the above-mentioned TV productions, in books and social-media representations, in which chavs allegedly come from a specific geographic area. As shown by Trudgill's classical model of the relationship between social class and geographic linguistic variation in Britain (Trudgill 1974: 41), there is increasing regional variation at the lower end of the social scale. In contrast, higher-class speakers speak more similarly to each other, regardless of where they are from, which converges on the standard accent, RP. We found that popular representations of chavs frequently draw upon regional, and often broad, linguistic features from the geographic area the characters are supposedly from. In this, particular linguistic features are used that serve to index working-class in the fictionalized characters' regional dialects, with usually a single character using a strong regional accent being made to represent their social class.

In terms of phonetic features, the major dialect boundary in England observed by linguists and identified by non-linguists in perceptual dialectology tasks is between the North and the South (Trudgill 1990). For northern chavs, chavspeak is stylized as including broad non-standard regional and supra-local northern features as well as local, regional features. For instance, *The Royle Family*, as a parody of the British royal family, depicts a working-class family from Manchester who use

linguistic features from this area (e.g., [ɪ] rather than [i] in the *happy* lexical set, and post-velar nasal stop). In *Baby Names for Chavs* (Wileman and McGeechan, 2018), the speech of chavs is orthographically represented with linguistic features associated generally with northern Englishes, such as the absence of the TRAP-BATH and STRUT-FOOT contrast. The authors assert that they conducted their research into chavs by visiting allegedly working-class towns such as Pontefract, Barnsley, and Cleethorpes in West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and North-East Lincolnshire, respectively. We found a similar representation on TikTok, in a video uploaded in 2019 by a teenage influencer, which has currently received 527.5 thousand likes.¹ In this video, the teenager herself and a female friend, dressed as what they term ‘chavs’ and wearing thick make-up, have an aggressive confrontation after one tells the other that she is pregnant and that one of many potential fathers may be the other girl’s boyfriend. In the clip, the girls use broad regional phonetic features from Yorkshire (to a greater degree than the influencer’s own accent in other videos). As for scholarly studies, Montgomery (2018) found that Scouse, the accent of Liverpool--a traditionally working-class city whose economy historically centred on port and manufacturing work--was perceived as “Chavvy” by informants from schools and colleges in the North of England and the Midlands (2018: 153).

Coming to the South, the major sub-division of accents is between the South-West and the South-East (Altendorf and Watt 2008: 194–195). Vicky Pollard, the fictional character from *Little Britain*, was born and raised on a council estate in Bristol, in South-West England (https://littlebritain.fandom.com/wiki/Vicky_Pollard#Personal_history). As a result, her speech includes features from this region (e.g., rhoticity). Vicky’s linguistic characterization, however, is somewhat exceptional, since southern chavs are most frequently localized as coming from South-East England and largely use traditional, working-class London features.

Often, accents spoken in South-East England are considered as occurring on a continuum between England’s standard variety, RP, and Cockney (broad, working-class East-London speech);

this parallels the class continuum, with the higher classes speaking the former variety and the lower classes the latter (see Altendorf and Watt 2008; Cole 2021a). The generalized pattern of speech in South-East England, which shares features with both Cockney and RP, is a sociolect known as Estuary English (Rosewarne 1994; Wells 1997; Agha 2003: 265). Thus, the use of Cockney-like features by south-eastern chavs, regardless of where in the South-East they are from, marks them out as lower-socio-economic class. As for their fictional representation, traditional Cockney linguistic features (e.g., the monophthongal MOUTH vowel, τ -glotalling, TH -fronting, L-vocalisation) are used by London-based Wayne and Waynetta Slob in *Harry Enfield and Chums*, by many West-London characters in *People Just Do Nothing*, and by the protagonist of *Diary of a Chav*, which is set in East-London's peripheries in southern Essex. Similarly, although we are not told where she is supposed to be from, the fictional character Lauren Cooper in *The Catherine Tate Show* uses south-eastern working-class features such as τ -glotalling and TH -fronting. As a socially salient linguistic feature (a stereotype in Labovian terms) which is perceived by young people as being "chavvy," "uneducated," and "confident" (Alderton, 2020), it is little surprise that τ -glotalling features heavily in the speech of fictional chavs. In addition, TH -fronting is forefronted in Lauren Cooper's catchphrase "Am I bovered?." The phonetic features spoken by these representations of chavs are not necessarily enregistered as 'chav', as much as they are broad regional features, by token of which they are adopted to index working-classness.

Consistently, representations of chavs use working-class features of the geographic area they are associated with, ranging from Manchester to London to the South-West. Nonetheless, there are some similarities in the ways the speech of chavs is represented, particularly in terms of lexis. Chavs are often portrayed as using profanities and vulgar language, with many being portrayed as threatening violence and being abrasive and confrontational or at least being incoherent and inarticulate. In addition, their portrayal often includes stereotyped linguistic features from so-called 'Black Englishes' (as found by Bennet 2012--see above). Examples are the protagonists in *People Just Do Nothing*, *The Catherine Tate Show*, and *Diary of a Chav*, who frequently use lexical items such as

the invariant tag question *init* and adjectives such as *sick* (“cool, good”) or *safe* (“good”, or simply signifying agreement). Bok, including *dat* and *dis* as typical examples of the use of TH-stopping in his *Little Book of Chav Speak* (2004: 28–29), associates *dis* with hip-hop, a genre of music which first became popular in the Bronx, New York City, in the 1970s and was popularized by inner-city African- and Latino-Americans. Chavs’ supposed use of linguistic hip-hop features represents the attempt-- Bok’s in this case--to index chavs with ‘street’ culture and ‘Black Englishes’, though this is, in reality, inauthentic. In linguistic studies, TH-stopping has been found to not only be associated with ‘Black Englishes’ but to be related to involvement with grime (rap) and dancehall music (see Drummond 2018; Ilbury 2019).

3.2. Haags

In contrast to chavspeak, *Haags* does have a strictly local basis, as a Dutch vernacular variety that is typically found in The Hague. Uniquely from a sociolinguistic perspective, the term ‘Haags’ covers two distinct sociolects, a broad variety found among the lower classes, and a more elite form (Elias 1977: 7–8; van Gaalen and van den Mosselaar 1985; van Gaalen 1989: 99; Goeman 1999: 121).

There is some overlap between the two in the realisation of particular diphthongs and the use of non-standard verb forms (Elias 1977: 48), but for this paper, we will focus on Broad *Haags* only, the variety that has been epitomized in the fictional persona of *Haagse Harry*.

Haags has been traced back to the seventeenth century (Elias 1977: 14; Elias and Goeman 2002: 67), though its development into an actual sociolect took place during the late-nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution, occurring later in The Netherlands than in other European countries, gave rise to significant urban growth there (Elias and Goeman 2002: 75–76). There is some disagreement among scholars about the question whether *Haags* is an actual dialect or merely an accent; in any case, its phonological features are most pronounced and have been well documented in academic studies (Elias 1977, van Gaalen 1989, Timmerman 2018). These features, along with some grammatical characteristics that index *Haags* as being different from Standard Dutch, are

drawn upon in the characterization of its speakers, fictional or otherwise. We will proceed to discuss the most salient of these features, which primarily serve the purpose of sociolinguistically stereotyping working-class speakers from The Hague.

In his description of *Haags*, van Gaalen (1989) lists twelve phonological features that differ from Standard Dutch, the most salient ones being the diphthongs [ɛi], [œy] and [ɫu], as in Standard Dutch *ijs* “icecream”, *ui* “onion”, and *gebouw* “building”, for which *Haags* has [ɛ:], [œ:], and [ɑ:] (Timmerman 2018: 19; see also van Gaalen and van den Mosselaar 1985). A typical consonantal characteristic of *Haags* is the realisation of /r/ as [χ] (van Gaalen, 1989: 102; Timmerman 2018: 22). Consequently, *groot* “large” and *goot* “gutter” are homophones in *Haags*. The feature has turned into a shibboleth (Elias and Goeman 2002: 37), as has that of words with Standard Dutch *ij/ei* (*Haags* [ɛ:]) in street names like *Rijswijkseplein*, which is locally rendered (and spelled) as *Rèswèkseplèn*. When newly appointed as mayor of The Hague, Jan van Zanen, formerly mayor of Utrecht, was challenged in the national press as to his ability to pronounce the phrase *Ès op ut Rèswèkseplèn* “icecream/black ice on Rijswijkseplein” (NRC, 30 May 2020).

Broad *Haags* is greatly stigmatized (Elias 1977: 8). For all that, Elias (1977: 10) notes that the sociolect enjoys considerable covert prestige, carrying strong notions of masculinity. Women were indeed criticized for participating in a Broad-*Haags* speaking contest in 1991 (Elias and Goeman 2002: 44). Being a recognized--male--speaker of *Haags*, however, doesn’t necessarily stand in the way of the kind of upward mobility resulting in being elected an alderman of the city:² van Gaalen interprets this as a sign of the emancipation process *Haags* underwent despite its widespread stigmatisation (1989: 104). Even the Dutch king, Willem Alexander (b. 1967), who was born and partly bred in The Hague, has been known for his ability to mimick the accent as a boy (van Gaalen 1989: 104). It would be hard to imagine a member of the British Royal Family using--in jest or otherwise--a working-class variety of British.

Though during the 1970s it was believed that *Haags* was disappearing, Elias undertook a socio-stratificational study, published in 1977, which proved the opposite. The study was conducted among different generations living in Schilderswijk, and it unequivocally demonstrated the accent's viability, especially among younger and older male speakers, with the intermediate group showing greater sensitivity to Standard Dutch. The subsequent nationwide popularity of The Hague-born-and-bred standup comedians van Kooten and de Bie, with their weekly shows on national television, contributed to both wider familiarity and general stereotyping of the accent. Continuing the popularisation process of *Haags*, as particularly relevant from the point of view of this paper, have been Marnix Rueb's *Haagse Harry* strip books, published since 1994. The strip books are entirely in Broad *Haags*, which was eventually codified in *Ut Groen-geile Boekie* (1998), in a parody of language learning coursebooks, produced jointly by Marnix and Robert Jan Rueb, and Sjaak Bral. *Ut Groen-geile Boekie*, whose third so-called Corona edition (*kerauna eidisie*) appeared in October 2020, was succeeded by a proper if once again facetiously intended coursebook called *Haags, De Kugsus* (*cursus* "course") (Bral and Rueb 2002). While these publications are in the first place written for comic effect, playing on the type of (black) humor that characterizes working-class *Haags* speakers, there is nevertheless a significance to the codification of its spelling. The existence of a form of standardized spelling (see Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004) reflects the status and prestige of broad *Haags* and its speakers which, as explored in the following section, is one of the major differences compared to chavs and their language.

4. Differences in the stylisations of chavs and *Haagse Harry*

Evidently, there are distinct repertoires of linguistic features which form components in the stylisation of the two characterological types we have analysed, chavs and *Haagse Harry*. There are several important differences between how chavs and *Haagse Harry*--as well as their speech--are stylized. Firstly, while chavs as a social category include both men and women, *Haagse Harry* represents an all-male lower-working-class subculture. Secondly, there are differences in coherence

of the linguistic repertoires: while *Haagse Harry* consistently speaks in one way (Broad *Haags*), the speech of chavs is variable and not fixed. Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly, there are substantial differences in the levels of status and prestige held by chavs and *Haagse Harry*, and, correspondingly, their respective linguistic registers. In this section we address each of these three points in turn, contextualizing the differences in terms of patterns of variation, ideas about language use and variation, and the structural, socio-cultural circumstances in the registers' respective communities.

4.1. Gender differences

While chavs as a social category include both men and women, there is no female equivalent of *Haagse Harry* in The Hague. Unlike 'chav', which is a term used contemptuously to describe a section of society, *Haagse Harry* is a single fictional character who embodies conceptions of working-class, male culture in The Hague. As noted above, Broad *Haags* enjoys a considerable amount of (covert) prestige, carrying strong notions of masculinity. Indeed, it is most prevalent in the speech of males, young and old (Elias 1977). According to Silverstein's (2003) orders of indexicality and Labov's distinctions between indicators, markers and stereotypes (1972: 178–180), linguistic features with a clear sociolinguistic distribution may progress to become socially salient and take on social meaning—this is indeed what happened to Broad *Haags*. Being particularly predominant in the speech of males, it is therefore to be expected that the social meaning Broad *Haags* has acquired is related to masculinity, and that working-class men from The Hague will identify with and use Broad *Haags* in their speech as a result of its connotations with masculinity. This became evident once more when, almost immediately after the COVID-19 restrictions were imposed in The Netherlands in 2020, local football supporters produced banners in Broad *Haags* in recognition of the groups most affected: pubs and restaurants, hospital staff, and sex workers. Some of these banners were sexually explicit,³ which thus effectively and deliberately indexed the sociolect as male only, and functions as an additional way of keeping the women out (see the Broad-*Haags* speaking contest discussed above).

There is currently no comparable female, working-class characterological figure embodying The Hague's working-class culture and speech from a women's perspective. It may well be that the development of such a figure is inhibited by the general and widespread popularity of the figure of *Haagse Harry*.

In contrast, the chav persona represents a scornful commentary on supposedly working-class culture across England. Whilst the working class exists across England, so too, chavs are portrayed to exist across England. Whilst the working class can be both male or female, so too, chavs are portrayed as either male or female. Nonetheless, the social characteristics attributed to portrayals of female and male chavs are not identical. As such, to consider chavs as single characterological figures would be a simplification. In fact, two distinct characterological figures can be distinguished who substantially overlap in associated characteristics but are nevertheless differentiable: the male chav and the female chav. As we have seen, chav women (but not men) are derided for an apparent sexual promiscuity and are often depicted as single mothers who do not adequately care for their children. Chavs, men and women alike, are typically portrayed as wearing tracksuits, caps, and bling, and additionally in the case of the women (but not men), with heavy make-up and their hair scraped back into a scrunchie.

In very recent portrayals of chavs, however, the caricature has become increasingly associated with women. Whilst the chavs of the 2000s and early 2010s could be either male or female, the resurgence of the term 'chav' in 2019 has most frequently been applied to females. We have already mentioned TikTok videos that are trending under the hashtags #chav or #BritishChav and which strongly favor women/girls (whether acted by a female or by a male). Indeed, #chavgirl is trending on TikTok, while #chavboy is not. Nonetheless, despite being a recent phenomenon, these new portrayals of chavs are strikingly similar to those of the early 2000s: chav women wear scrunchie hairstyles, thick, dark make-up, tracksuits, and bling; they are aggressive, confrontational, and sexually promiscuous. It seems that 'chav' is increasingly becoming a characterological figure

exclusively associated with females. This change does not indicate that young working-class men are no longer a target of adverse commentary, humor or scorn. Instead, young men who exhibit traits previously associated with chavs, are now considered to be 'roadmen'--a new phenomenon associated with 'grime' culture and indexed by features of Multicultural London English (MLE) (Ilbury 2019). Like chavs, roadmen are associated with petty criminality, drug use, violence, hanging around fast-food outlets, and branded clothing. However, it is worth pointing out that 'roadman' operates as a self-selected identity marker to a greater extent than 'chav' and carries somewhat greater prestige. 'Chav' then has increasingly become a label which chastises working-class young women in England.

4.2. Coherence of linguistic repertoire

A key difference between chavs and *Haagse Harry* is the coherence of linguistic features used by the two characterological figures. *Haagse Harry*, as his name indicates, is exclusive to The Hague while chavs are part of English society overall. Harry's speech is localized and he invariably uses Broad *Haags*. In contrast, the language spoken by chavs includes working-class features, particularly stereotyped class-marked features, that are local to where the chav is supposed to come from.

In this way, chavs, though certainly constituting a characterological figure, challenge our understanding of enregisterment. Typically, enregisterment is understood as the process pertaining to a repertoire of linguistic forms becoming differentiable and linked to social personas or practices (see Agha 2003). However, there is not just one set of linguistic features which is enregistered as 'chav', but there are many and varied ways of speaking associated with chavs. Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification to state that any of these varieties--or even individual linguistic features--overtly index the chav persona. We have already referred to the structure of linguistic variation in Britain according to which single persons using strong regional accents are often taken as representing working-class membership. Therefore, more accurately, different varieties spoken by 'chavs' form part of working-class speech and many of their linguistic features are stereotyped,

socially salient features which index working-classness. In turn, being working class, at least culturally but not necessarily economically (see Lawler 2005; Biressi and Nunn 2013 for perspectives on class-as-culture in Britain), is a prerequisite for someone being considered a chav.

In sum, the language of chavs identifies them as working class but not necessarily as originating from any specific geographic area. The chav phenomenon is therefore not a commentary on any area of Britain or any specific regional dialect; instead, it is a class commentary. By contrast, whilst *Haagse Harry* is working class, the character is not created intrinsically or foremost as a critique of The Hague's working classes. Harry's use of Broad *Haags*, in conjunction with his other social characteristics, is deployed to set him out as a man from The Hague which additionally but not primarily encompasses being working class.

4.3. Status and prestige

There is a major difference in the level of status and prestige attributed to chavs and *Haagse Harry* as well as their respective linguistic registers. *Haagse Harry* is definitely a humorous figure but is by no means such a clear target for derision, mockery and disdain as chavs. *Haagse Harry* is largely an identity marker representing male, working-class culture in The Hague, and his statue in The Hague is a point of local interest and pride. In contrast, it is very difficult to imagine a statue celebrating "chaviness" being unapologetically erected in any part of England. Whilst individuals may identify with *Haagse Harry* and what he represents as a working-class man from The Hague, people extremely rarely self-identify as chavs (Lawler 2005; McCulloch et al. 2006; Nayak 2006; Bennet 2012). For instance, in 2004 a prominent UK tabloid newspaper with a largely working-class readership, *The Sun*, hoped to reclaim the term with their "Proud to be a Chav" campaign. Nonetheless, the campaign was unsuccessful and lasted only a week (Bennet 2012): people do not self-identify as chavs.

Chavs are often scapegoated as responsible for or indicative of society's wrongs. It has been argued that 'chav' is an evolution and popular reconfiguration of the underclass discourse which

proliferated in Britain in the 1980s (Hayward and Yar 2006), which as a concept had largely been introduced to Britain by the American political commentator Charles Murray (Murray 1990; 1996a; 1996b). Murray postulated that there was apparent heritability in the British underclass as a result of single-parent families (particularly with absentee fathers). The term 'underclass' was used to refer to a group of people who did not participate in the labor market, and it acquired connotations of single-parenthood, welfare dependence and criminality.

Chav caricatures emerged from the underclass ideologies, and were most prominent in the 2000s and early 2010s. At this time many Britons were concerned that some groups in society (often referred to as "scroungers") were unfairly and unduly benefitting from the hard work of other citizens. In 2014, the British Social Attitudes survey revealed that 35 per cent of its respondents believed that dole (social welfare) claimants are "fiddling" and 32 per cent that most social security claimants don't deserve help (NatCen 2017). The growing adherence to neoliberal and capitalist ideals in Britain increasingly caused social problems and economic hardships to be regarded as the responsibility of individuals. By token of this ideology, the group of people that are now designated as chavs were depicted as responsible--and culpable--for their limited social status, and came to be described in terms that are remarkably similar to those used for the "Great Unwashed" of Victorian England (Hayward and Yar 2006: 17).

Chavs personified an unevidenced culture which apparently rewarded those who evade work and social responsibility at the expense of others. Putting an end to such a "something-for-nothing" culture was a key message in David Cameron's coalition government between 2010 and 2015,⁴ proposing a radical overhaul of the benefits system in 2012, particularly housing benefits, which were believed to encourage work-apathy and to disadvantage hard-working citizens (Humphrys 2012). Several years earlier, in 2005, well before becoming Prime Minister, fellow Conservative Member of Parliament Boris Johnson wrote an opinion piece for *The Telegraph*. In this piece, Johnson, who is comfortably situated in Britain's socio-economic and political elite, vilified

Britain's poorest and designated them as 'chavs', stating that the bottom 20 per cent of British society are "the group that supplies us with the *chavs*, the losers, the burglars, the drug addicts and the 70,000 people who are lost in our prisons and learning nothing except how to become more effective criminals" (Johnson 2005, emphasis added). The links Johnson drew between the bottom 20 per cent of British society and chavs (as well as criminals) confirms that the disdain felt towards chavs is a veil for the disdain for Britain's poorest--essentially, the working class.

The concerns about this "something-for-nothing" culture were propagated by the media through documentaries such as *Benefits Street* (Channel 4, 2014–2015), *Ann Widdecombe Versus The Benefits Culture* (ITV, 2007), *On Benefits and Proud* (Channel 5, 2013), and articles in British newspapers such as "Our benefits culture is a joke, parents should send their kids out to work at 13--says Lord Sugar" (*The Sun*, 17 March 2016); "'She makes my blood boil': Twitter slams a mother-of-four who claims her £25,000 in benefits is not enough--despite owning a flat screen TV and a smartphone" (*Daily Mail*, 31 September 2016); "What happens when you give three benefits families £26,000 in return for signing off? They splurge on an engagement ring, new clothes, a £14,000 burger van and a PARTY BUS" (*Daily Mail*, 7 March 2017); "Madness of Britain's handout culture: Scroungers rake in £85,000 a year from benefits" (*Express*, 14 May 2017). At this time, the media attempted to highlight the supposedly prevailing and inheritable culture of shirking and scrounging facilitated by the social benefits and council housing systems, despite research demonstrating this is largely a myth (MacDonald et al. 2014).

The widespread acceptance of deriding and ridiculing chavs--who, let us not forget, are inextricably linked with working-class culture--was exploited by politicians to demonstrate that they are aware of and sympathetic to many Britons' concerns over the supposed proliferation of chav culture. For instance, in 2007, the then Prime Minister and Labour MP Tony Blair took part in a comedy sketch for *Comic Relief: Red Nose Day* (BBC, 16 March 2007) with Lauren Cooper, the fictional schoolgirl from *The Catherine Tate Show* already mentioned. In this sketch, Lauren is

undertaking work-experience at Blair's offices in Downing Street. She is abrasive and ignorant, and disrupts the Prime Minister in his work. The sketch ends with Lauren being dumbfounded as Blair imitates her accent, including TH-fronting, and repeats her catchphrase "Am I bovvered?" to her. Blair's imitation of Lauren's accent demonstrates the central role of language in stylizing chavs, including stereotyped, working-class features such as TH-fronting. The mockery of chavs--which apparently allows a mockery of their working-class accents--has thus been adopted by Britain's most prominent political figures and lawmakers, the same people who represent and adjudicate these very social groups.

The denigration of chavs by Britain's wealthiest and highest classes is perhaps best evidenced by the video *Class Wars*, which was produced and shared publicly in 2007 by pupils from one of Scotland's leading private schools, Glenalmond College. In the spoof video, pupils, dressed in clothing associated with the upper classes including full hunting gear and waxed jackets, "hunt" other pupils dressed as chavs, wearing tracksuits and caps. The spoof chavs are fished out of rivers and chased by hunting dogs before being shot in the chest with double-barrelled shotguns. The video caused both sympathy and outrage: the Scottish National Party condemned it, and the Scottish MP Roseanna Cunningham, whose constituency included the school, stated: "Doubtless, it is intended as humour and irony but it comes across as brash, crass and arrogant."⁵ Cunningham was not the only public figure to condemn the vilification of supposed chavs. The derision of chavs, particularly by Britain's highest social classes, led to increased debate and controversy around the term in the late 2000s and early 2010s. This movement was spearheaded by Owen Jones (2012) who, as already discussed, suggested that the *chav* iconographies caricature and demonize the working class.

It is no coincidence that British society, politicians included, consider working-class accents a viable target for ridicule. Class is central to linguistic ideologies in Britain where there is an institutionally supported class-marked standard accent, Received Pronunciation (RP) (Agha 2003).

Through standard language ideology, RP is held in esteem whilst other accents carry relative stigma-- an ideology that goes wildly unchallenged. Working-class speech typically scores poorly on competency ratings (e.g., Coupland & Bishop 2007; Cole 2021b) and in the extreme, the language of chavs is denigrated as incoherent, influent, inarticulate, improper English, and even as impeding communication (see Bennet 2012).

No such assertions are made about Broad *Haags*, *Haagse Harry's* accent. The Hague's working class, and indeed *Haagse Harry*, are not targets of such spiteful, deliberate ridicule as chavs. Quite the opposite in fact, as the existence of the *Haagse Harry* statue alone indicates. In addition, as mentioned, *Haagse Harry* is available for purchase as ornaments, on keyrings, T-shirts and, most recently, facemasks. Whilst chav merchandise is also available, there are important differences. Chav merchandise, in being ostensibly 'humorous', serves as an indicator of the purchasers' adherence to chav-mockery (such as fancy-dress costumes or tongue-in-cheek presents for friends). *Haagse Harry* merchandise on the other hand reflects a more genuine appreciation and pride in the figure and what he represents, particular among The Hague's working class.

In terms of the linguistic status of the language used by speakers of *Haags* and chavs, there are also clear differences. Broad *Haags* enjoys substantial (covert) prestige. A major player in the current *Haags* linguistic scene is Sjaak Bral, whose real name is Marcel van der Heijden (b. 1963) and whose alias parodies the well-known late Belgian *chansonnier* Jaques Brel. Not only does he publish on and in *Haags*, he also organizes local spelling bees and stages annual end-of-the-year stand-up comedy shows in The Hague. Such shows are a typically Dutch phenomenon, with well-known comedians vying for a place on national television on New Year's Eve. Sjaak Bral's show is one of the few theatrical performances in The Hague that is attended by members from all social classes. It invariably ends with the audience getting to their feet and chanting the local anthem *Oh Oh Den Haag*, a song created in 1991 by another well-known local stand-up comedian, Harry Jekkers (b. 1951). Another form of musical enregisterment of *Haags* may be found in the extremely popular

flamenco band called *De Règeâhs*, broad *Haags* for “the herons” (*reigers*) (a parody on the stork as the traditional symbol of The Hague). Again, their shows are frequented by people from all walks of *Haags* life. There is therefore a celebration and appreciation of Broad *Haags* in The Hague, including by those who are unlikely to speak it and are not working class.

Haags may be a strictly local phenomenon, but the popularity of the *Haagse Harry* comic strip books, preceded by that of the stand-up comedians “Koot en Bie” (see above), has paved the way for the nationwide appreciation of the stylized sociolect. Its popular standardisation process at the hands of the Rueb brothers and Sjaak Bral is unique to The Netherlands, and reflects not only on the viability of this urban variety but also on ways in which local forms of Dutch function within popular culture. *Haags* has recently been gaining functional domains rather than losing them: it is increasingly drawn upon in advertising as well as in city marketing (for examples, see <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/haagsetalen/>). Broad *Haags* is used in several domains, in both spoken and written forms, including, of course, the comic series featuring *Haagse Harry*. The variety has even been codified, resulting in a shared awareness among users of the variety’s written form.

This is, of course, not to say that Broad *Haags* is accepted in all domains. There was a controversy in the Dutch press after a road sign was erected by a builder in Broad *Haags*, which was originally the cause of considerable hilarity (Gioia 2017). A week later, the sign was removed after complaints to the municipality that the message was unclear (*Omroep West* 2017). Rather than a disdain for broad *Haags*, what sparked off this linguistic incident may be explained in the light of what Jan Blommaert describes as “expectations [...] about relationships between signs and particular spaces” (2013: 32). Putting up a sign informing the public about a temporary detour for cyclists in broad *Haags*, these expectations had been broken. This misunderstanding was very likely deliberate: road signs are never in the local dialect, nor even in any of the languages spoken in districts of The Hague where large numbers of non-native Dutch inhabitants might arguably most profit from them.

Nonetheless, Broad *Haags* was evidently sufficiently codified and salient to be used in a publicly displayed text by the builder responsible for it. Whilst considered inappropriate for a road sign, the sociolect is not victim to overt denigration to anywhere near the same extent as working-class accents in Britain; correspondingly, *Haagse Harry*--his accent included--enjoys considerably greater status and prestige than chavs, who merely embody British class prejudice.

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented two remarkably similar characterological figures who are both stereotyped embodiments of working-class personas in different locations: *Haagse Harry* in The Hague and chavs in England. We compared and contrasted the linguistic features deployed in the stylisation of the speech of these figures, finding that whilst *Haagse Harry* is a controversial and certainly humorous figure, he is primarily an identity marker who embodies facets of working-class, male culture in The Hague. As a result, he speaks exclusively in Broad *Haags*, an accent predominant in male, working-class speech with strong connotations of masculinity. In contrast, 'chav' is not an identity marker for any group, and instead, represents a contemptuous commentary on the English working class, including their accent. The language of chavs is not geographically rooted, nor does it discriminate between men and women (though increasingly 'chav' is a term applied to young females for comic effect on social media). As a result, the accent of chavs has shape-shifted, but invariably continues to index working-class speech. Disdain for chavs runs in parallel with the devaluing of working-class accents, which has long been embedded in linguistic ideologies in Britain.

In sum, though *Haagse Harry* and chavs are, at first sight, almost identical figures with similar attire, class position, attitudes and stances, their speech is stylized in very different ways. This paper has demonstrated that the repertoire of linguistic features deployed in the stylisation of characterological figures is strongly dependent on patterns of variation and ideas held about this variation in local speech communities. Particularly in the case of chavs, we have highlighted how diverse repertoires of linguistic features can be enregistered in terms of a single characterological

figure, though we also found that our current understanding of enregisterment works only partly when attempting to explain their representation, their culture and their language in England.

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¹ Due to privacy restrictions, we are unable to provide the details of this video.

² Two examples are the former, widely respected and even nationally successful, alderman Adri Duivesteijn and, currently in office, Bert van Alphen, both born and bred in Schilderswijk. A third example is Richard de Mos, though accusations in 2019 of being involved in a bribery case forced him to step down (*NL Times*, <https://nltimes.nl/tags/richard-de-mos>). During the 2021 general elections he made an unsuccessful attempt at gaining a seat in the Dutch parliament.

³ See <https://www.facebook.com/haagsetalen/posts/975174616213632>.

⁴ Curiously, in 2016, six days before Britain's EU referendum, Cameron also insisted he was going to bring an end to the "something-for-nothing culture", but this time for EU migrants. See: <https://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2016/s4410479.htm>.

⁵ For a newspaper article on the video and its criticisms, see for instance <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-475052/Pupils-act-chav-hunt--hunting-pinks-horseback-prey-Burberry-caps.html>.