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Navigating airport security as a Person of Colour

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Abstract

This linguistic ethnography explores the experience of navigating Amsterdam Schiphol airport as a Dutch Person of Colour. It asks how, and in what ways, language-use can (re)affirm the body of Colour as one that is seen as 'out of place' in a securitised and mobile environment. This is initially done through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis on Schiphol airport's website, as well as security signs in the airport, and this is then complemented by an ethnographic investigation into individual interpersonal encounters at the airport, focusing particularly closely on dilemmas of bilingual language selection.

Drawing on work by Foucault (1982), Amoore and De Goede (2008) Ahmed (2000 and 2006), Fairclough (1995) and Molotch (2011), the airport is examined as a space that coerces everybody into compliance with high levels of (self-)surveillance. However, this paper's findings are that some bodies are more targeted by this coercion than others. It is particularly through certain modes of address implicitly signaling inclusion or exclusion, that People of Colour are made to be compliant with normative dichotomies of 'familiar/stranger', or risk being seen as a troublemaker, a precarious body endangering the safety of the surroundings.

Introduction

In this paper, I will consider how ethnicity, surveillance and securitisation are constructed in and through language, by using a mix of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and auto-ethnography to describe my experiences travelling to the UK from Amsterdam Schiphol airport. I will first provide an overview of relevant literature about securitisation, power and ethnicity, and then explain my choice of CDA and auto-ethnography as methods, along with potential ethical implications. After that, I will describe the general trajectory that airport security takes for me, including an analysis of security procedures as outlined on the Schiphol website, and then analyse this trajectory in terms of misrecognition of identity, which leads to compliance with prevailing security systems. I will do this by making reference to specific encounters during my travels.

Literature Review

Michel Foucault conceptualises institutional power as being exercised through dichotomising everyday interactions, dividing one group against another, and therein objectifying both groups (1982, p. 208). Foucault also argues that a power dynamic can only come into existence when 'the other' is not brought under full physical control, but when there are alternative options for them to act, therefore making a certain level of consent integral to any power dynamic (ibid. p.220). Amoore and De Goede build on this language of power, in differentiating between preemptive disciplinary decisions and *post rem* securitisation decisions. They argue that large parts of preemptive strategising around security are based in the imagination of what emergencies might happen in the future (2008, p. 179).

In addition, in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed talks of the migrant body as one that is seen as ‘out of place’, and therefore uncomfortable. She discusses the uncomfortable body in a very tangible way, exploring it in the language of furniture and habit - being a body in place is like sitting in a comfortable chair: the body seems to sink into its surroundings, any prior difficulty to fit having been smoothed over by continuous use and interaction (p. 156). Being an uncomfortable body means not having the luxury of this smoothness. The body does not sink, but rather it bumps and scratches at the surface, and when this surface is harder or more persistent than the body itself, it is the body that gets hurt. I will consider my own non-white body to be out of place in Dutch airport procedures, bumping up against the fabric of habit, and eventually being smoothed out (as well as smoothing itself out) into a shape that is more palatable to the surroundings of the airport.

Lastly, I will use Harvey Molotch’s idea of the ‘security space’ as the space where “the micro and macro intertwine” (2011, p.2). He argues that the fear of the individual death, but also the fear of the body failing to adhere to social norms, is the most micro level of existential fear. However, the collective or societal implications that these individual fears bring with them can have macro level consequences. I will consider ‘the micro’ here to be individual fear of failure: failure to notice a threat in time, but also failure to ‘keep things running’ at the airport, or the failure to quietly comply with regulations so as to not cause a scene. The ‘macro’ is in turn the mass adoption of new behavioural norms, including (self-)surveillance, that follow from these fears.

I will argue that the power of the language used around airport securitisation lies in the creation of an environment where certain people more than others are imagined to be threateningly out of place, and that it is easier for these people to comply with and accept dichotomising power structures – power structures that divide the person who embodies threat from the person who needs protection – than it is to resist or question these power structures even minimally. I will also argue that this dichotomising power is tied to the airport as itself a static and securitised space, which exists to make sense of the ever-mobile bodies travelling through it.

Methods

I will start out by analysing the written security instructions, advice, and signs available on the Schiphol website, as well as in the airport itself. I will be using CDA to do this, similar to some of Norman Fairclough’s 1995 analysis, in which, for example, he analyses the self-promotion of universities through texts that may not initially seem like promotional materials. While the texts that Fairclough analyses, taken at face value, might seem to merely *inform* the reader from an impartial point of view, Fairclough uses a close reading of grammar and word choice to uncover the hidden workings of power and ideology within these texts. I have chosen to use CDA, as it allows me to “explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes [...] and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony” (Fairclough, 1995). I will then go on to analyse verbal and behavioural encounters through auto-ethnography.

For the auto-ethnography, I will be using encounters from my travels starting in December 2013, up to January 2020. The method of auto-ethnography was chosen as an intentionally subjective and emotive form of data collection. It is important to use this method, as the process of travelling by plane (especially the security aspects of travelling) can often be highly clinical, standardised, and non-personal, masking how non-routine some of the security procedures are for those who are subject to them. This masking to retain the appearance of normality itself actually constitutes a high amount of communicative work, at the same time as it hides this work (Pütz, 2012, p. 155). How we work to attain normalcy (or the appearance thereof), and who is expected to do the work towards this attainment, can tell us a lot about what we expect this normalcy to look like.

Indeed, Rampton and Eley note that the everyday experience of surveillance has been relatively under-studied (2020, p. 200). So too in the sub-category of airport security studies. While airport security has been researched extensively, and has been researched from an embodied linguistic and communicative point of view, this has often happened from a collective or hypothetical point of view. More specifically, it has been discussed from an ethical-philosophical point of view (Amoore and De Goede, 2008), from the perspective of the observation of collective ‘tendencies’ in body language (Pütz, 2012), and from the perspective of spatial, architectural and policy decisions and their effects on collective communication within the airport (Molotch, 2011). While these studies have created a rich landscape within which the discussion of airport security can situate itself, there still seems relatively little debate around the individual affective response to the (linguistic) experience of airport security procedures, and what this affective response may teach us.

Indeed, I argue that the bodily response can be a valuable source for information about security because it is so entangled with the airport as a specifically securitised space. It is *because* of the clinical standardisation of the airport that it is all the more jarring when a ‘break’ in usual security procedures happens, when one’s body or individual presence is made to stand out and brought to the forefront. It is this ‘jolt’ to the individual which fascinates me, not least because it works both ways – if I am alarmed, it is because my presence first alarmed someone else. Similarly, if I am not alarmed, then clearly I have done something (whether I am conscious of this or not) to ‘fall in line’ with what was expected of me in the first place. The jolt, the fear of the jolt, or the relief when a jolt has not hit, are all affective experiences, rather than simply rational or cognitive ones. This is by no small measure compounded by the highly physical experience that airplane travel is: while I am not underestimating the luxury that voluntary travel entails, it should be noted that the carrying of luggage, the standing around for prolonged periods of time, as well as the likely changes to food and sleep schedules, do have an undeniable physical effect on the body that ‘jolts’ it out of its routine. It is therefore important to choose a method of inquiry that is able to incorporate the physicality and the emotion that form part of the data. Ethnography, as a method specifically tailored to examining the everyday experience in a form that allows for me to be both analyst and subject, suits perfectly.

Because I am using my own memory of events rather than recordings, any quotes are by definition approximations of what was said, and are not intended to be taken as verbatim accounts. The contingency of my encounters means that I have not been able to ask for consent of the people that I describe in the ethnography to be included in this project. However, I have

decided to include my description of our encounters anyway, as other participants are at no point identified by either name or physical description, other than broad assumptions of gender and ethnicity. This was done in the knowledge that even if I wanted to, I would not be able to recognise the people I describe if I saw them on the street. The inclusion of their words and actions in this essay, therefore, poses no risk to their employment, social status, or welfare otherwise.

In order to accurately describe the trajectory that security takes for me, it is necessary to outline some biographical details. Firstly, I am a Dutch citizen of part-Indonesian heritage. I have visibly South-East Asian facial features, and it would be very unlikely for any Dutch person to mistake me for being white Dutch.¹ I moved to the UK in 2013, and have lived here since. I go home to the Netherlands at least twice a year to visit my family, most of the time flying from London Gatwick airport to Schiphol Amsterdam and back.²

I will only be discussing encounters at Schiphol on the way to Gatwick Airport. I have chosen to focus on this direction of travel, firstly because Gatwick has a system that is so automated with regards to security checks and checking into flights, that human interaction is kept to a minimum. This is not (yet) the case at Schiphol. Secondly, because I am a Dutch citizen, I might already be seen as an outsider during security checks at Gatwick, simply because of my passport. It would then be difficult to determine whether the feeling of ‘othering’ that is central to my analysis, was based on my ethnicity, my nationality, a combination of the two, or something else altogether.

Lastly, most staff at Schiphol airport are required to speak both English and Dutch in their day-to-day tasks, in addition to any other languages they may speak. This corresponds to Schiphol’s self-promotion as a bilingual English/Dutch space, as evidenced in their website which is fully available in both English and Dutch (schiphol.nl accessed May 2020). In contrast, while Gatwick’s website is available in four languages, Dutch is not one of them (gatwickairport.com accessed May 2020). This means that in Schiphol, I can compare the times where I am addressed in English versus Dutch, whereas I (or any other passenger) am unlikely to be addressed in Dutch at all, in Gatwick.

¹ By which I mean that I have never been explicitly addressed as white. Then again, since whiteness is the dominant ethnicity in the Netherlands, it often goes unnamed anyway, even for people who are ‘actually’ white.

² In terms of lingual background, I would now consider myself to be bilingual in Dutch and English, by which I mean that in any form of communication, I could successfully pretend to have either as my first language and people would believe me. However, this was not always the case. I was not raised bilingually, and I explicitly consider English my second language, because I learned it in secondary school and after moving to the UK at age 16. My first language is Dutch, and this has always been the only language that was spoken in my house as I was growing up.

Grounding the Analysis

*Participants*³

When I talk about the ‘security procedures’ at Schiphol, I am considering firstly the distinct formalised processes of security processing, starting with luggage check-in, and continuing to scanning the passenger and carry-on luggage, passport check, and finally the boarding pass check before boarding the plane. Secondly, I am considering the spaces in-between these separate actions - for instance, walking from the body scan to the passport check booth.

This means that all the Schiphol employees that I encounter while going through this trajectory are participants in the social activity that is ‘airport security’. Furthermore, because of the message that safety is also a collective duty rather than merely an individual one (see the ‘trajectory of security’ section below), the other travelers that I share the space with are also participants. None of us know each other, aside from the information that we are (obliged to) make available to each other or can gather from (fleeting) mutual observation (Eley & Rampton, 2020, p. 202). In the case of passengers interacting with staff, the information that can be gathered is formally the information that is in a passport or on a boarding pass, as well as any information that we volunteer, or that becomes apparent through our encounters. The formal information that can be gathered by passengers from employees might be a name on a nametag.

Competing Objectives

From my perspective, the objective of the security trajectory is to go through security procedures as quickly as possible and board my plane safely. Any delay that happens during the security process is a potential for me to miss my flight, which would come with negative financial and social consequences. In the airport, this is the most pressing concern that is actively on my mind.

The employee’s perspective is twofold: they are supposed to ensure (the appearance of) safety in the airport, while also maintaining a continuous flow of movement that means that delays and crowds are kept to a minimum, and their work space stays clear and easily surveillable. In a study of several major European airports, it was found that the majority of security threats that, according to protocol, should be addressed by staff actually go ignored under the assumption that they are false alarms (Kirschenbaum et al, 2011, p. 72). Similarly, Molotch concludes that many airport staff make individual decisions regarding security, sometimes going explicitly against protocol (2011, p.107). We can therefore conclude that security staff do not always strictly have ‘pure’ security as their objective. This is important, because this makes the decision to focus on the enforcement of security at certain times exactly that: a decision.

It is here, in these objectives, that we already see a distinction between the traveler and the security employee, one which may be seemingly obvious, but needs to be considered nonetheless: the traveler is a mobile body. Firstly they are mobile in absolute terms – the body is moving from one space to another. This means that the spaces that are being traveled through, like the airport, are meant to be temporary, abnormal, or non-routine spaces, spaces that are

³ It has happened that I have traveled with friends or family, but I am choosing not to include observations from these journeys to simplify the analysis.

meant to be left behind rather than lingered in. Secondly, when it comes to international travel, traveling bodies are legally mobile: the body moves from one jurisdiction to the other.

The security employee, on the other hand, can consider themselves relatively fixed or stationary in absolute terms: under ideal circumstances, the employee's day-to-day existence in the airport *is* one of routine, as this is just the normal workspace. Furthermore, in legal and security terms, the security employee *facilitates* the transition from one space to another. It is the security employee's task to make the body legally and safely intelligible between the country of departure, and the country of arrival. This differing attachment to the airport as a temporary or a fixed space, will be relevant to my analysis.

Analysis - The trajectory of security

Written language

I will firstly focus on the analysis of written texts before and during the security process. I do this because these written texts are available to *all* passengers, and therefore set a more general tone of what airport security is like in Schiphol, in anticipation of the analysis of my more personal verbal encounters later. In order to do this, I will take guidance from Fairclough's 1995 CDA investigation into promotional material. In this article, Fairclough argues that texts can be discursively presented in one format, while having the effect of another (p. 151). I will argue that the written language used in security processes at Schiphol is initially presented as a discourse of 'travel information' while developing slowly to have the effects of a discourse of 'security demands'.

Passengers who might want to be prepared for the security check can turn to the Schiphol website for more information. The Schiphol airport website has a specific section dedicated to explaining security procedures (schiphol.nl, [A fast and smooth security check](#), accessed May 2020). This part of the website uses the language of the passengers' objective, and seems tuned in to the knowledge that airport security is not likely to be an everyday occurrence to the person who is traveling: "Everyone wants to clear security quickly – so we've made our process as comfortable as possible", reads the introductory paragraph at the top of the web page. As this is congruent with the passengers' interests in getting through airport security quickly, the wording on the website suggests that this writing fits within the discourse of 'travel information' rather than 'security demands'.

Another example suggesting that the website text belongs to an advisory discourse, is the language used around checking online what items are and are not allowed in hand luggage. The website reminds us that "Smart packing starts at home". Given that the home is not a space where airport security has any official jurisdiction, this again situates the text within the discourse of advice and helpful information.

However, as we scroll further down on the page, another tip that the website gives us is to "Always follow the security member's instructions." It does not specify what these instructions could be, but instead simply poses the security employee's instructions as final, whatever these

may be. Here, we see ‘the security employee’ as a fixed and static figure: there is no entertainment of the possibility that an individual employee might give out false, biased, or unhelpful instructions. If we consider Sara Ahmed’s ‘body out of place’ as one that is scratching at the hard surfaces of institutions, then non-specific but imperatively definitive sentences of this kind start to harden the surface of the institution. There is no mention of passengers’ rights to refuse certain procedures, and this shifts the discourse into ‘security demands’.

Furthermore, Schiphol airport website says of full-body searches:

“A security officer will search you manually after the scan if the computer connected to the scanner detects an object on your skin. A full body search doesn’t always happen, but it is possible. It may not be the nicest part of your holiday, but it allows to [*sic*] keep our airport safe for you and all other travellers.”

This is the only mention of the word ‘safe’ (or any of its derivatives) on the whole security web page, and it is only invoked for the most intimate of security infringements – direct touch from the institutional body to the passenger’s body. Suddenly, it is unclear what discourse we, as readers and passengers, are participating in – are we being advised on how to smoothly travel through security and have an enjoyable travel experience, or are we being told how to keep ourselves and others safe? In conflating the two discourses (travel information and security demands), we learn that the acknowledged discomfort arising from invasion of privacy and the imposition on our ability to travel through security quickly are the price we all must pay for collective security. This corresponds to Molotch’s investigation into US airport security post-2001, where security scans were reimagined by many passengers as a sort of patriotic duty, necessary and even enjoyable as part of a collective duty of safety (2011, p.99).

Altogether, on the Schiphol website, the reader is at first discursively constructed as a passenger seeking information about their travels. However, as we read on, the change from travel information to security demands constructs the passenger as a potential security threat, and requires cooperation in order not to be seen as such. In moving from one country to another, the mobile and aberrant passenger is positioned as needing the security employee, who will make the passenger intelligible as a body to be protected, rather than a body that is threatening. This insertion of one discourse into another continues in the use of warning signs at Schiphol airport itself.

Throughout the airport, but particularly at the luggage check-in and body scan, there are the usual warnings around what is legal and illegal to take out of the country, and what items should or should not be packed into suitcases. These signs contain the message that people who illegally carry any such items will face a fine, or possibly a custodial sentence. However, rather than being straightforwardly informative, the presence of the signs at the airport, seems to serve more of a reassuring message to other passengers that action against potential terrorists is being taken. After all, while certain items like army knives or spray cans might genuinely be accidentally carried for utilitarian purposes on a holiday, it seems very unlikely that someone has knowingly packed dry-ice, radioactive material, or automatic firearms (which are all on the list of prohibited items), without knowing that this is illegal. So in this case, it seems that the people who have packed these items are *grammatically* the addressees of the warning signs, but not necessarily in

practice the intended audience. The main function of the signs is less to do with the message *on* the signs when read straightforwardly, and more about conveying a message of assurance. This is an example of, what Fairclough calls, “meaning being subordinated to effect” (p. 151), which creates an ambiguous situation in which the reader can be discursively constructed equally as the danger, or the one being protected.

However, whether you are seen as an ally or an ‘other’ can be highly dependent on who is doing the seeing. This creates an unbalanced and coercive power relation between the observer (security personnel) and the observed (the passenger), as will be addressed in the following section.

Speech and behaviour

In checking in my luggage, my passport and boarding pass are checked first. I am then asked whether I want to be addressed in English or Dutch, despite my passport showing me to be a Dutch citizen, born in the Netherlands. For a while I assumed that this was standard procedure to welcome those who do not speak Dutch, as in an international setting people are much more likely to speak English than Dutch. However, over time I have observed that this does not always happen to people who are white Dutch or are perceived as such: they are simply addressed in Dutch.

At the security scans, where one does not have to show their passport, I am always addressed in English. Presumably this is because in the absence of documentation, there is nothing that marks me as Dutch anymore. Sometimes, if the attendant has a particularly strong Dutch accent, or if they seem to struggle with English, I respond in Dutch to make things easier for them. It is about an equal amount of times that the conversation is then continued in English, versus Dutch.

Similarly, while showing my passport at the checkpoint, or showing my boarding pass at the gate, I am always initially addressed in English. About half of the time, when staff realise that I am a Dutch citizen, they switch to Dutch. At no point has any member of staff commented on the switch, or done anything else to acknowledge that their initial assumption of me as a non-Dutch speaker was false. Again, while I initially assumed that it was standard procedure to address everyone in English, I have heard the same members of staff who addressed me in English, address the white people in line in Dutch - sometimes even when those white people were actually British citizens who did not speak Dutch at all.

Analysis - Encounters in the airport

In *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed mentions her interaction with white police officers in Adelaide when she was 14 (2000, p.128). In this encounter, she was stopped by a police officer, who asked her if she was Aboriginal. The officer’s colleague then winked at her, and said that it was “just a sun-tan, isn’t it?”, to which Ahmed merely smiled. It is her own smiling response which she analyses as a combination of collusion and fear: on one hand a desire to be seen as a body that deserves protection in the eye of the surveilling authority, and on the other hand a fear

of what happens when the body is no longer seen as worthy of protection, but instead as being itself the threat.

Following this example of interactions with surveillance, involving mistaken attribution of identity, I will analyse my encounters at Schiphol through broadly two avenues: times where I was mistakenly but explicitly recognised as a ‘body out of place’, and the resulting feeling of compliance that this has evoked in me.

Misrecognition

Misrecognition tells us a lot about existing power relations: not only do we find out who is supposed to hold the power, and who is not supposed to, we also see the malleability and contingency of bodily identity, and who is in the power position to determine what a body ‘really’ is, or what it ‘really’ connotes. One body can, within the same encounter, be halted and prohibited from continuing along its intended passage, and then (based solely on the prohibitor’s reassessment of the situation) have this prohibition lifted in one smooth motion. The body itself has not changed, just the perception thereof. It is not accidental that I use the language of ‘intended passage’ at this point - here too, we see the power that the (presumed) stationary body has over the body that is presumed to be mobile, in transition, and out-of-place.

My first encounter concerns one journey where we were asked to stand in different queues for our passport check. The queues are divided into EU and non-EU passports. When I made my way to the EU queue, a member of security staff told me in English to “go to that queue”, while pointing at the non-EU queue. When I tried to reply and say that I do in fact have an EU passport, he pointed towards the non-EU queue, without letting me finish my sentence. This member of staff then turned to his colleague, and said in Dutch “*ze willen ook altijd met je in discussie gaan,*” presumably under the assumption that I could not understand him. The sentence roughly translates to “they always want to argue with you”, where ‘arguing with’ implicitly carries a tone of ‘arguing while already convinced that the speaker is right’.

After standing in line for the non-EU passport check for a while and realising that this queue was going significantly slower, I returned to the same member of staff and asked (in Dutch) whether I could join the EU queue, showing my passport in the process. He simply nodded, and pointed towards the EU queue. There was no acknowledgement that he had mistakenly placed me in the wrong queue, or talked about me to his colleague. Because he did not respond verbally, there was no reciprocated interaction between us in Dutch, despite both of us knowing that the other person spoke Dutch.

The staff member’s choice of words in both English and Dutch left me feeling that I was in the wrong and the member of staff was right. That I had overstepped my boundaries⁴ as a ‘good’ customer in trying to prove that I held an EU passport. Furthermore, the use of the plural ‘they’ and the use of ‘always’ instilled in me the sense that I was being characterised *either* as part of a broader group of unhelpful ‘other’ customers, who are defined by being willful, oppositional,

⁴ Interestingly, the phrase ‘overstepping boundaries’ tells us much about the suspicion placed upon those who are deemed ‘too mobile’. For a brief discussion on the problematisation of mobility and flow in airports, see Pütz 2012, p. 157.

and arrogant in their presumption of knowing the rules of the airport better than the people who work there, *or* as part of a presumably stubborn or troublemaking ethnic minority (or both). Regardless, the words worked to instill in me a fear of being a nuisance, one of the failures of social convention that Molotch describes. Furthermore, I was worried that other passengers might have seen my interaction, and might be nervous about boarding a plane with someone that they had seen as being a troublemaker.

Here we see Foucault's conceptualisation of consent in power relations – it was very much possible for me to resist (to an extent) the power enacted upon me, as evidenced by the fact that I did eventually join the EU queue: I was not *forced* to join the non-EU queue through physical violence or the threat thereof. However, knowing that my insistence on being seen as an EU citizen only antagonised the employee into characterising me as a willful customer, and knowing that even after proving myself to be an EU citizen, the employee refused to acknowledge my ability to speak Dutch, I am certain that if this happens another time, I will not even argue with the security staff, and I will just join the non-EU queue, even if this takes longer. Here, we also once again see the micro and macro convergence that Molotch speaks about: because of my embarrassment at being a ‘bad’ passenger, who rocks the boat rather than eases the passage from one space to another, I will now choose to comply with the outlined security principles. Especially as someone who might, at some point, need the assistance of airport employees, I am reluctant to antagonise people who I might need to ask for help.

Molotch argues (2011, p.115) that for security personnel, it is often the lack of seeing passengers in their linguistic totality, that enables workers to miss vital information - he cites several cases where inattention to common uses of language (humour, sarcasm) have led to the escalation of a simple misunderstanding into a mistaken security concern (p.94). Presumably, in my own case, my being a Person of Colour is such an overriding attribute in ‘determining’ my language abilities, that even undeniable evidence to the contrary is glossed over. The ability of airport staff to construct me as someone who does not speak Dutch, points not only to the malleability and contingent nature of identity, but also towards the linguistic power relations at play in *creating* me as ‘the other’ – even in the face of evidence to the contrary, people are able to create a situation in which my ability to speak Dutch effectively *does not exist*, as it is not acknowledged in subsequent turns.

Compliance

Another encounter happened when I was trying to order takeaway food in Schiphol. As I was standing in line, I was not really paying attention to the people standing behind the counter. When it was my turn to order, the employee (a man of Colour) addressed me in English. Because I was not entirely sure (though fairly certain) that I had heard the man speak in Dutch, and because the items on the menu were all in English anyway, I decided to order in English, and I was replied to in English. Then, when my order arrived, I was again not paying attention too much, so I replied with the Dutch *dankjewel*, ‘thank you’. The employee then said ‘*Oh, dus je kunt gewoon Nederlands?*’ - ‘Oh, so you can speak Dutch?’ I said (in Dutch) that I did, but explained that I thought it would have been easier for everyone involved if I spoke in English, because I knew for certain that we both spoke English, and I was not sure if we both spoke

Dutch, in addition to the fact that it is awkward to have to switch from Dutch to English when saying the name of the product you want to order.

In this instance, it was my own reluctance to break the flow of the English spoken around me, which meant that I had misrecognised or ignored the worker's ability to speak Dutch. As he was a person of Colour (which was not an active consideration in my decision to speak English, but may well have been a subconscious push), this may well have resulted in him presuming I was applying the same ethnic stereotypes to him, that I have had applied to me.

Here we see the Foucauldian nature of compliance with linguistic normativity, as well as Molotch's named awkwardness: I chose to speak in English, because I did not want to upset the flow of the routine interaction. After being first addressed in English, I did not want to address the employee in Dutch, only to find out that he did not in fact speak Dutch. I did not want to start the encounter in Dutch, only to have to switch to English to pronounce the names of the food. And eventually, my slipping up and replying in Dutch did in fact disrupt the ease of the interaction, as we then got onto a conversational tangent which would not have happened in 'normal' service encounters.

Presumably, these were also motives as to why the employee addressed me in English initially, rather than Dutch - it was not my ability to speak Dutch which caused the 'break' in the flow of conversation, it was my inability to stick to English as the language we had both chosen to conduct this conversation in. Because of this, rather than take this as an opportunity to decide to address all Schiphol employees in Dutch from now on, I know that in the future I will pay more attention to ensure that my encounters are fully in English. Even if this reinforces and contributes to normative language ideas, I also know that when I am in the airport, it is my priority to save time. This makes me compliant with the securitisation system, at the same time as I am one of its subject.

It is important to acknowledge that neither of the two encounters mentioned above can be strictly relegated to the realm of 'security' as it is understood in the everyday usage of the word, but rather show that security pervasively seeps into everyday interaction, even in spaces that don't seem to deal with security explicitly – at no point was I considered a threat, or was I taken aside to be questioned. However, these self-surveilling encounters are closely connected with the form that security takes in the airport. Molotch mentions that post-2001, security questions at airports have become routine, and that the successful navigation of these questions often relies on people giving the 'right' answers, regardless of whether they are truthful (2011, p.89). For instance, the questions 'have you packed this bag yourself' should always be answered with 'yes' regardless of whether a friend, family member, or other trusted acquaintance has had a hand in helping with the packing. Any other answer, no matter how innocent, no matter how truthful, might lead to delays and questioning at the very least. It is the familiarity with the routine and the 'fixed', that marks us as safe. If we give the wrong answer (even if this is the truthful answer) and show our newness to the environment of the airport, we are seen as trouble.

Similarly, as shown in the second encounter, my own adaptation of my behaviour is not necessarily even a response to actual suspicion by employees, but occurs in response to the knowledge that I might create a social or conversational 'break', which will create a delay. This

in itself already goes against my own objective of navigating the airport as swiftly as possible, but an *observed* delay, a delay which also impacts other travelers' objectives, might result in being seen as an 'other' by staff as well as fellow passengers. While in many cases this may be considered overly (or unnecessarily) cautious, being treated as a presumed non-Dutch speaker has contributed to this sense of caution, where I would rather take extra efforts to voluntarily comply with the security system, than let my lack of preparation lead to a situation where I am seen as suspicious.

For instance, I have now started to ask whether it is necessary to take my shoes off at the body scan, as there are inconsistent rules about this at Schiphol airport. This is just to save myself the trouble and embarrassment of walking back and forth, in case I leave my shoes on when I am supposed to take them off or vice versa. Initially, I left my shoes on unless specifically asked otherwise, but the resulting holdup was too much of a hassle, not to mention a hassle which affected other passengers: *going back to put your shoes in with your other belongings in the tray, but the tray has already gone through the scanner, and now somebody else is standing in your spot, so it is not clear whether you can just grab a tray, or whether you have to join the queue for the trays again...* - et cetera. The failure involved in not anticipating security norms upsets the whole queuing system, as it requires me to move aberrantly *within* the security space. I become a body, not only 'out of place', but also specifically 'in the way'.

I have also found myself excessively smiling - but not to the point of suspicion - at security personnel and other passengers, even when they rarely return the favour. I want the other participants in the security process to think of me as a willing participant, to avoid being seen as the suspicious body out of place - even if this means affirming and thereby consenting to a system where, for instance, looking unfriendly evokes suspicion.

This also means that I now often address staff in English, even if I have seen them speak to others in Dutch. The switch in languages can be too distracting for me to be useful, and the knowledge that I might be addressed in English anyway, regardless of any ability to speak Dutch that I show, means that it is easier to just start by speaking English from the get-go. Again, here I fail to challenge a system that sees brown bodies as 'foreign', because it allows me to meet my objective, and because it stops me from being seen as a 'body out of place'. I am still not a 'body in place', in the sense that my body is not recognised as being properly Dutch, but at least I am a sanctioned and linguistically *recognisable* kind of foreign, rather than a suspicious or troubling kind. Here too, I am not only (mistakenly) identified as a non-Dutch speaker, I have in effect *become* this other that I am presumed to be - since I have now stopped addressing staff in Dutch, I *am* effectively a non-Dutch speaker at the airport. In all these self-surveilled changes too, we see how the writings of Foucault, Ahmed, and Molotch all converge: out of a 'micro' fear of the failure to comply with the socially organised rules, the 'body out of place' will consent to behaving in a way that affirms or eases 'macro' processes.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have used CDA and auto-ethnography to analyse my experiences at Schiphol airport, as a visibly non-white Dutch citizen. I have shown how the combination of the address of

the passenger as a willing participant in security processes, and the address of the non-white body as being 'out of place' and excessively mobile, creates a situation where I have felt forced to adapt my behaviour, in order to appear less obstructive. This 'consent' to surveillance is a consequence of the fatigue of failure that comes with being seen as a potentially problematic body.

The workings of the ethnically and lingually biased security system at Schiphol airport are such that certain bodies are coerced into self-surveilling based on perceived national and ethnic background. However, because this working of power is not directly evident, it cannot be easily addressed. Brown bodies may not be explicitly targeted in airport policy, but the material effects of the (self-)perception of our bodies as being 'out of place' create us as signs of trouble.

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