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**ANTILANGUAGE**

**EMOJI**

**CRITICAL YOUTH**

**LANGUAGE STUDIES –**

**RETHINKING CONCEPTS**

**METROLINGUALISM**



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# 01

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## Disinventing and demystifying youth language: Critical perspectives

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### **1. From the margins**

All texts have margins; the white strip of paper that engulfs a book's chapters, an essay, or the manuscript of a talk. It has several purposes, such as providing the few centimeters that readers need for their fingers and thumbs to hold the pages. Next to grasping and holding, the margins are for working with what is offered on the sheet of paper: a text. Reading, as an interaction with the text, can open communication with the author, other readers and often with ourselves. We can then come to depend

on these marginal spaces in order to write on them ourselves. We can cover them with short remarks, notes, reminders, corrections, angry responses, happy responses or doubt. These notes on the margins can even become more important to us than the text itself. They might turn our reading into a metasemiotic discourse, a complex discussion of what we have just seen or the draft of a paper that we might now want to write ourselves. The writing on the margins is almost always precious, because it generally contains fresh and spontaneous ideas (if we are lucky) and

creates an interaction with others, breaking the writer's monologue. Yet, it is often critical and sometimes these written things remain in the margins because of this.

This volume, in some sense, has emerged from resorting to our own marginal comments and thoughts on those whom we, as linguists, often place in the marginal spaces of their or our society. These brief notes were the traces of our reading and spontaneous thinking and often seemed to highlight certain ideas; suggesting that they should be brought out of the insignificant borderlines. Numerous contributions to the description and sociolinguistics of youth languages offer explanations for the seemingly strange marginalization and subjugation of the subject. Youth languages are different because they are not part of mainstream linguistic practices; they are placed in the margins of communication. Yet youth is neither a marginal condition nor a rare phenomenon as such; the experience of coming of age is one that we all share. Our marginal notes often hinted that the essentializing and exoticizing representations of young people's language practices are a problem. We could easily relate to youth and therefore asked in our handwritten comments for a critical reflection on the marginality of a group to which we once all belonged.

## **2. Why critical?**

Developing a more critical perspective appears to be a timely task. Is the object of our discussion – youth language – really marginal, remarkable and different? After all, what once appeared to be special knowledge about youths and in-group expertise of linguists, now appears to be common knowledge.

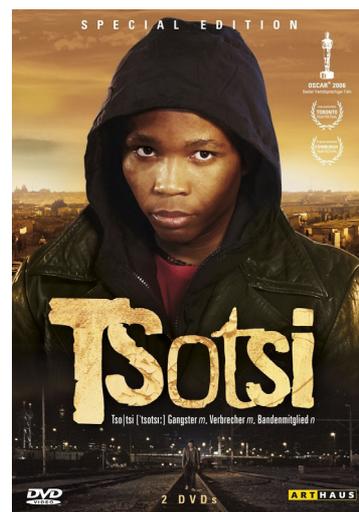
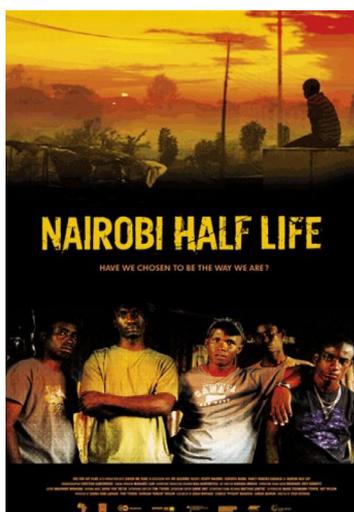
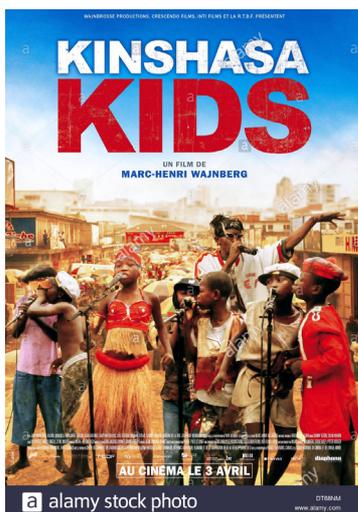
Just as youth is not a marginal condition, neither is youth language. Therefore, another overdue critical reassessment is needed to address the observation that youth languages have often been constructed as 'special' in terms of their linguistic creativity by linguists. By highlighting their strategies of manipulating 'standard' language, it seemed as though this kind of creativity was a special feature of youth language practices. In particular; rapid and highly skilled multilingual juggling, now often termed translanguaging (see below); semantic manipulations such as metaphor, metonymy and dysphemism; and phonological processes such as truncation, abbreviation or playful phonotactic changes have been illustrated with examples from many youth languages (see Kießling & Mous 2004, Nassenstein & Hollington 2015, among many others). However, the very same strategies are also employed by other speakers in a wide range of contexts. For example, translanguaging can be observed in numerous multilingual societies around the globe. Furthermore, semantic manipulations are a vital phenomenon in linguistic change and language evolution. In fact, scholars in cognitive linguistics such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have illustrated that metaphor is a crucial cognitive process through which our human mind processes experiences; hence metaphor is pervasive in everyday language. Likewise, phonological manipulations are found in many different contexts from colloquial speech to advertisements and politics. In this regard, it needs to be acknowledged that linguistic creativity is a widespread, common and everyday phenomenon in language use and not special to youth languages (see Carter 2004).

The current construction of youth language as exceptional and specially creative is an undertaking not only by linguists, but also by the wider society. This becomes evident when looking at the appropriation of youth language practices in popular discourses. In many instances, the exoticization of youth languages can be observed when youth language is commoditized and commercially exploited in popular media such as advertisements or movies. This often incorporates a static presentation of extracts of the fluid practices of youth. With regard to African contexts, the movies *Tsotsi* (2006), *Nairobi Half Life* (2012) and *Kinshasa Kids* (2012) (see Fig. 1–3) are examples of urban youth representations. In these movies, semi-criminalized adolescents portray the daily struggle for survival in the three African megacities Johannesburg, Nairobi and Kinshasa, while several young protagonists' rely on creative bricolages in order to make a living.<sup>1</sup>

However, all three movies, despite their good reviews, shared an inherent linguistic problem. The African youth language practices that they all, to some extent, exhibit; Tsotsitaal (South Africa); Sheng (Kenya) and Yanké (DR Congo), were reproduced, stylized and mostly decontextualized in order to create authentic settings for the three storylines of the respective productions. This was mostly actualized by non-speakers of these languages; targeting assumed non-speaker consumers of the movies and their stylized language. This consequently turns fluid linguistic practices into artefacts and thus into popular commodities of the movie industry. Interestingly, the viewers seem to have understood the languages used in these movies, which were successes among diverse audiences.

Yet, the commodification of youth language is not limited to the production (and consumption) of movies, but can also be seen in the academic artefactualization of youth language presented at conferences, workshops and published in papers and monographs.

Fig. 1–3. *Tsotsi* (2005), *Nairobi Half Life* (2012) and *Kinshasa Kids* (2012)



<sup>1</sup> For a commercial appropriation of German youth language practices see for instance *Fack Ju Göhte* (2013).

This has been gaining increased attention not only as recent field of study but also as a way of generating funding and boosting careers.

The study of African youth language practices, for example, is an academic field of study which took a more concrete shape in the years after the millenium, and has hitherto produced a large body of scholarly work (following Kießling & Mous' 2004 paper; for an overview see Nassenstein & Hollington 2015, Mensah 2016). Most of the studies, corpora and analyses have been treated as innovative studies and were largely focused on practices described as urban phenomena. Despite the variability of labels, 'slang', 'slanguage', 'youth slang', 'teen talk', 'anti-language', 'UAYL', etc. employed for the practices that stand in the center of attention of linguists, there is a recurrent list of features that most youth languages (and their speakers) allegedly share, which will be critically reanalyzed in the present volume.<sup>2</sup> Instead of providing precise new directions, we would like to raise certain general questions:

- How can we 'unlearn' the consideration of language as a totalitarian concept and rather think of youth language as part of fluid, messy, multifaceted practice; building upon holistic, embodied work instead of wordlists, corpora and grammatical analyses?
- What does a non-disciplinary approach to youth language look like?

- How can we reflect upon established academic practices, such as looking at youth language as a form of non-conformity in language instead of focusing on youths who use language in more conventional ways (or remain silent)?
- How can we create a holistic account of language ideologies and concepts that investigates the ideologies of speakers as well as those of scholars?
- How can we successfully consider youth language practices as a process rather than fixed varieties?
- Which other views on youth language, for example grassroots practices, are possible?
- How can we incorporate writing practices and youth agency in digital media?
- Which forms of contributions, apart from written academic essays, can shed light on the phenomena from other angles?

### 3. Rethinking language, reassessing data

Collected data on youth language, such as wordlists, short conversations, ethnographic notes and metalinguistic comments, are often more reminiscent of a performed stage play than of natural speech and everyday interaction. The data presented in scholarly

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<sup>2</sup> It may be important to note that the critical view on youth language studies does not aim to emphasize shortcomings in our colleagues' work but has an intrinsic self-reflexive motivation. By firstly looking at our own research results and published works, we came to the conclusion that a more critical stance is needed. We are indebted to our colleagues whose comments and ideas have largely contributed to this volume: Janine Traber, Janosch Leugner, Ana Deumert, Nkululeko Mabandla. Kieran Taylor is warmly thanked for carefully correcting our style and English.

papers and (the few) monographs available often draws a static picture of an exoticized or humorized form of language, which is deviant and abnormal. This is precisely one of the points we aim to raise in this issue: in order to be demystified, youth language first needs to be seen as a type of ordinary everyday language; neither bound to a specific age group, nor to resistance identities or necessarily serving the means of an “anti-language” (Halliday 1976). This broader dichotomy can be seen in the labeling of such speech styles as “contemporary urban vernaculars”, suggested by Rampton (2011), which no longer necessarily bounds a linguistic style to age or specific social groups. This concept was then later picked up by Aarsæther et al. (2015) for groups of (young) people in Belgium and Norway.

Our own work has shown that in African city contexts, but also towns and villages alike, youth language can be employed by middle-aged or elderly people in all kinds of situations. Elsewhere, we (Hollington & Nassenstein forthcoming) state that youth language practices like Yanké (sometimes called Lingala ya Bayankée) from Kinshasa have undergone an increasing social spread. In the case of Kinshasa, Yanké has spread all across the capital city; employed in music; advertising; and in young and old people’s interaction. It is used mockingly, playfully, or simply as one of many linguistic options in the urban linguascape of Kinshasa. Figure (4) illustrates an example of the language taken from an advert of a Congolese phone company; in which the network (and offer) is described as *tokoss*, derived from Lingala *kitóko* (‘beautiful’). Often having been associated with youth language, *tokoss*

nowadays represents an exclamation found all across Kinshasa, no longer restricted to adolescents (if it had ever been restricted to youths at all, of which we are not certain).

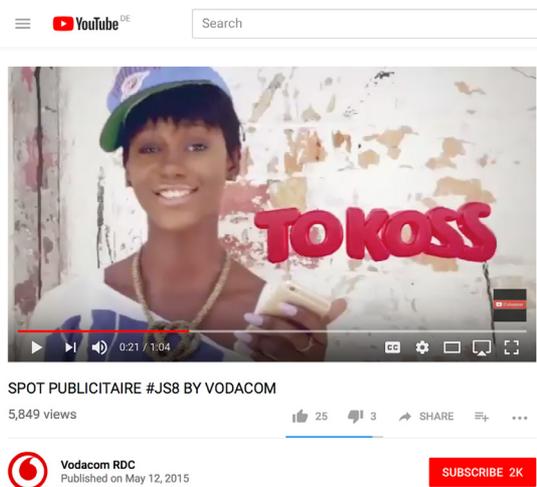


Fig. 4. A video advert, praising a phone network as *tokoss* (‘beautiful’)<sup>3</sup>

‘Youth language’, in this case, turns into a strange contradictory term that denotes the deviant in language, or rather what language professionals – linguists, language planners, teachers, writers – consider deviant. From a particular point of view, a word such as *tokoss* is ‘not normal’. Yet it is widely used and very visible, for example in advertisements placed on built landscape and in the digital space. Due to both linguistic landscapes and digital forms of communication tending to be conceptualized as ‘urban’, such linguistic practices become quickly categorized as ‘urban vernaculars’ and enregistered as ‘youth languages’. However, we must question whether this is the only enregisterment that takes place. Isn’t the ideo-

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qva2CJHfr3w&app=desktop] (accessed 29 June 2017).

logical construction and conceptualization of language practices more complex and multiple rather than simplistic? We suggest a more reflected analysis here: hegemonic language concepts need to be seen as coexistent with others; for example, just as *tokoss*, as a linguistic entity, might in a certain context be part of practice enregistered as ‘youth language’, in other contexts, within Kinshasa’s large and complex linguistic market, this practice might be enregistered as ‘local’. This concerns language as a concept; language practices and language ideologies are decidedly dynamic and multiple, things that can never be told as single stories but emerge as a kind of idea of reality through diverse and often messy stories.

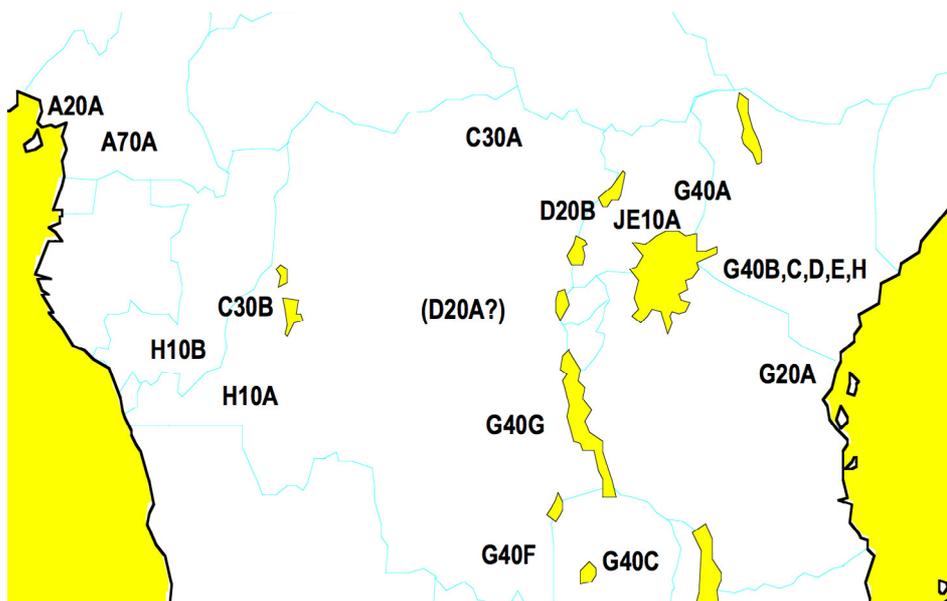
#### 4. Reconsidering methodology in complex settings

Critical thought on the commonly applied methodology of youth language studies is, however, not entirely new. The concepts raised in this volume form the basis for further critical approaches, mostly with a focus on African language practices and linguistic presences (with the exception of Busch’s contribution). In two recent publications, Beyer (2014, 2015) raises the point that very few studies are based on immersion fieldwork of linguists who spent a longer period of time in the respective communities. Moreover, he states that very little ethnographic data is available, as most studies are,

in general, based on short (and often typological) overview descriptions which reveal little of the actual reality of speakers and their social interactions. Only a handful of more extensive ethnographic studies have, so far, provided more profound insights (for Sheng, see for instance Wairungu 2014).

Another general problem is the tendency towards bird’s eye views of languages; evident in the discussion of Sheng and Co. Map 1 shows the classification of Sheng in Maho’s (2009) updated list of the Bantu languages, based on a classification by the Bantuist Malcolm Guthrie. In accordance with other Kiswahili dialects (an overview can be found in Möhlig 1995), Sheng has received a letter-number combination G40E. In this particular case it can be seen that fluid urban practices seem to be turned into “‘new’ languages in the Bantu area” (Maho 2009: 96).

Map 1. Sheng (G40E) and Engsh (G40D) according to Maho (2009: 96)



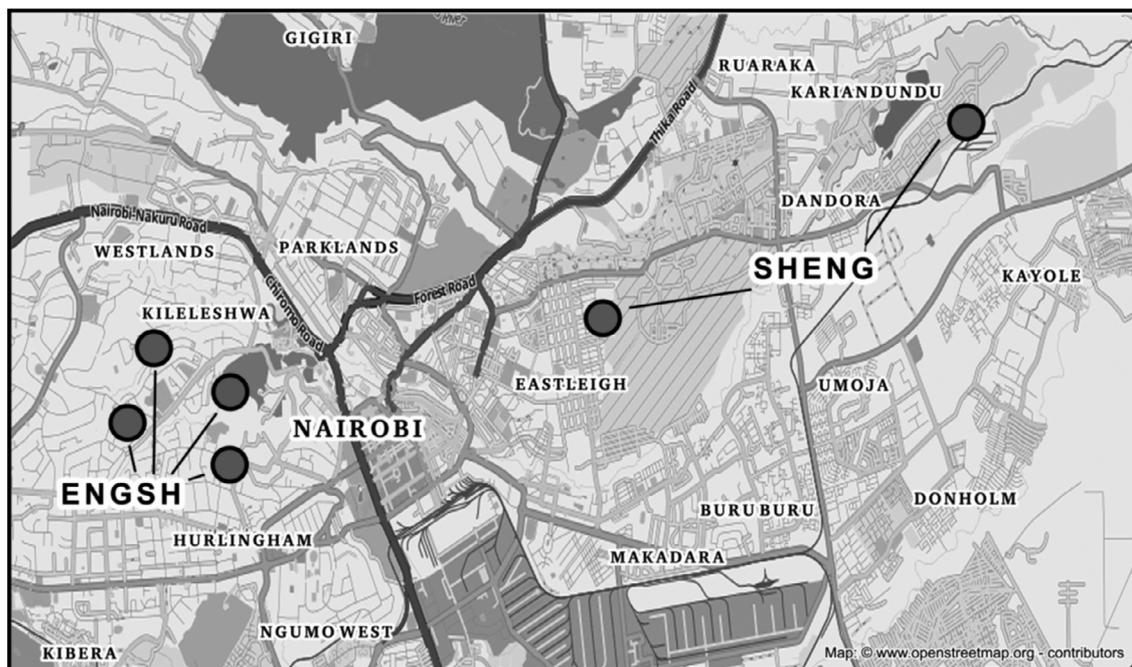
Counting languages and considering youth language practices as new languages or varieties of existing languages, seems to be a common Africanist take on youth language, grounded in the discipline itself. Hurst, who provided important insights especially in Tsotsitaal speakers' (linguistic and non-linguistic) stylistic aspects (in her monograph from 2008), also mentions specific varieties:

[A]ll of the official languages in South Africa (11 in total) have their own accompanying tsotsitaal. Other non-official languages, including mixed forms of language in highly multilingual townships such as Soweto, also have their variety of tsotsitaal. (Hurst 2015: 169)

A second map, provided by Kioko (2015: 131) shows no dialectal differences ascribed to

specific Kiswahili-based linguistic practices but differentiates between varieties of Sheng as spoken in different neighborhoods of Nairobi. There are certainly different ways that predominant ethnic groups speak Sheng in certain neighborhoods, however mapping them geographically does not seem to be the most suitable method to illustrate the broad variability of Sheng. This is due to the fact that Map 2 resembles maps based on isoglosses (Möhlig 1995) rather relating to sociolinguistic factors of migration and urban settlement. Yet it is evident that Kioko's studies enrich the discussion on Sheng with important new insights. For instance, based on his observations, he shows that Sheng, along with other youth language practices, does not necessarily have to be an "interethnic bridge" (Kießling & Mous 2004: 315) for speakers but can rather be subject to ethnic negotiations, or "competing identities" (Kioko 2015: 128).

Map 2. Different varieties of Sheng (Kioko 2015: 131)



While the model of European ‘multie-thnolects’ in cities of the Global North (such as Rotterdam, Stockholm, Brussels and Berlin) points in a similar direction to the idea of interethnic language practices in the Global South, Sheng, Yanké etc. often still reflect colonial language policies focusing on so-called “tribalism”. In reality they are by no means homogenous entities that can be easily labeled, documented and then considered as “new languages” (cf. Maho 2009).<sup>4</sup>

In his extensive study on Sheng, Wairungu (2014) describes the impact of his own Kikuyu identity on the research situation and his interethnic relationship with the Sheng speakers he interviewed. Not only the delicate role of the researcher’s and his/her interlocutors’ ethnic affiliations become obvious in this example, but also the observer’s paradox (see Nassenstein, this volume).

My regional and **ethnic identity also affected the way I interacted** and perceived my informants. Some of their narratives about the 2007 post-election violence projected Kikuyu as a threat to other ethnic communities in Kenya, hence potential targets during ethnic clashes. This identity threat was true in Nakuru as was in Mombasa, where people from upcountry, especially Kikuyu, were targeted for elimination by the communities that perceive themselves as coastal. Some of these

narratives were very frightening because they were about how informants experienced the 2007 post-election violence as perpetrators or as victims. Such narratives hurt my emotions and affected the way I perceived the narrator. (Wairungu 2014: 43–44, our emphasis)

Yanké was initially described as “inter-ethnic” by speakers, however the inherent ethnic tendencies of the language became clear once speakers got acquainted with Kioko’s recent findings on Sheng:

*On se moque vraiment de l’ethnicité de l’autre. Quand un autre... vous êtes dans la rue, un autre est en train de parler, les natifs de Kinshasa ont leur accents, par rapport à comment ils discutent dans le langage de jeunes. Exemple, si tu te trouves avec des enfants dans le rue qui viennent de Kananga [Kasai province, speaking Cilubà]: Ils vont parler dans un accent la, d’autres vont commencer à rigoler, et qui vont leur [sic] nommer, leur coller des noms, exemple “tatu, eh, tatu!” Tatu, ça signifie comme ‘papa’, maintenant on va leur coller par rapport à leur tribus [sic], par rapport à leur ethnicité. Même s’il est jeune, on commence directement à l’appeler tatu. Okay, pour les Baswahili [eastern DR Congo, speaking Swahili], on les appelle minasema. “Minasema, eh, ah, bínó, ba-faux-jeunes, ba-minasema.” On tire de leur ethnicité, des “kadogo, kadogo, yáká!”*

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<sup>4</sup> Linguists often streamline and/or ignore divergent labels for youth language practices, as also expressed by Wairungu (2014: 78), saying “that speakers use different labels to refer to practices that are hard to distinguish linguistically”. He gives the example of Sheng speakers who decide to name their language *Heng*, and also refers to the difficult task of linguistically differentiating between Nairobi Swahili and Sheng. Another example is the (still very prominent and popular) label *Indoubil/Hindoubill* for youth language(s) from DR Congo, despite the fact that Yanké and Langila speakers reject this language name, treating it as an antiquated relict. The practices of *Kindubile* in Lubumbashi (Mulumbwa 2009) and *Kindoubil* in Kisangani (Wilson 2012), however, have retained modifications of this label. The act of linguists giving youth language practices fixed labels (see for instance also Nassenstein, this volume) forms part of an artefactualization of linguistic practice (see also Lüpke & Storch 2013).

[We really mock each other in terms of one's ethnicity. When one... you are in the streets, another one speaks, Kinshasa natives have their accents, according to how they discuss in youth language. For example, if you are with children in the streets, the ones who come from Kananga [Kasai province, speaking Cilubà]: They will speak with an accent, others will laugh, they will call them names, attach names to them, for example *tatu*, "oh, *tatu!*" *Tatu*, that means 'daddy' [in Cilubà], now they attach a label to them according to their tribe, their ethnicity. Even if he is young, one starts directly to call him *tatu*. Okay, for the Swahili people [eastern DR Congo, speaking Swahili], one calls them *minasema* [I say]. "*Minasema*, ah, you guys, fake youths, the *minasemas*." You pull them by their ethnicity, the ones of "child soldier, child soldier, come!" (Carter Omende, 2016, our emphasis)

We can consequently question whether the original statement may have been due to the linguist's insinuating questions, or methodology. Not only the role of ethnicized speaking practices has to be reconsidered, but also concepts of urbanity (vs. rurality?), resistance identity, youth language as anti-language, and many more.

## 5. Sociolinguistic trends and academic hierarchies

In current sociolinguistic theory, the concepts of translanguaging (García & Wei 2014), polylinguaging (Jørgensen et al. 2011) and metro-lingualism (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015) (to name those most cited) grasp fluid approaches to

multilingualism. These are also summarized by Pennycook (2016) under the label of a "trans-super-poly-metro movement". However, these concepts have, so far, rarely been applied to African youth language practices<sup>5</sup> and in most cases more conventional approaches, such as code-switching, still range among the most commonly employed theoretical frameworks (see Ogechi 2002, among others). This reflects a divide in the debates surrounding theories from different (socio)linguistic academic environments and among different intellectual movements. Theoretical models, like those mentioned above, tend to gain momentum purely *because* they are developed and discussed with reference to several colonial and globalized languages. This is of interest and relevance to the majority of influential scholars in the field who are based at northern universities or included in metropolitan and exclusive networks. Those whose institutions, competences and interests are elsewhere, at less visible institutions, in languages shared by lesser numbers of people, or on topics well outside mainstream linguistics, do not get invited to contribute to high-profile theory making (unless as validators of something already established), and they are not taken seriously as independent thinkers of different ideas and theories. We probably use the label of 'youth language' for deviant practices because we lack any adequate theoretical approach that could lead us to more high-profile models instead of banal conclusions.

This is arguably best exemplified by citing yet another theoretical framework that has moved increasingly into the academic focus:

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<sup>5</sup> For some exceptions, see Nassenstein & Hollington 2016 on fluid "global repertoires" and Tacke-Köster 2016 on a metro-lingual understanding of Kirundi Slang.

namely the discussion of superdiversity (based on Vertovec 2007) as a popular concept to explain complex diversified urban spaces. The diverse linguistic landscapes and soundscapes of European cities, among others, have become focal to sociolinguists seeing diversity not so much as static linguistic variations, but as dynamic processes (e.g., Matras 2009). But how helpful is this concept in the study of (very diverse/diversified) youth languages really? The concept of superdiversity (Blommaert 2013, Rampton et al. 2015) is often associated with “late modernity” or “liquid modernity”, which, according to Bauman (1999), is characterized by nomadic trajectories; ever-changing workplaces; values; and the loss of traditional networks, supposedly representing a novelty in contemporary societies in the Global North. In African societies, for example, the dynamics that constantly unfold through the cultural practices of building relationships, being immersed in social environments of different kinds, and being *in motion* (symbolically, physically, philosophically, linguistically) is often a crucial, yet banal, aspect of life (e.g., Mietzner & Storch 2015). This questions how remarkable superdiversity is from an African, or for instance, Oceanian perspective.

Another view on youth language practices, and the deviant in language is possible. Refocusing with a postcolonial perspective and historicizing such language practices within their context, we see that they often emerged in or toward the end of colonialism.<sup>6</sup> We therefore suggest that youth language can often be seen as a kind of mimetic play in postcolonies. This can be explained by taking



Fig. 5. Jungle Man-Eaters (Columbia 1954)

a closer look at the hip hop artist “Jungle de Man-Eater” from Jinja in eastern Uganda. Having created a new hip hop style (*Lusoflo*) held in the local Bantu language Lusoga,

<sup>6</sup> See the supposed emergence of Tsotsitaal in the 1930/40s in Sophiatown, Soweto (Glaser 1990), Sheng in the 1930/40s in Nairobi, and Yanké in the late 1950s in the struggle for independence in Léopoldville/Kinshasa (Gondola 2009).

“Jungle” plays with names (see Figures 5-6), concepts, and different styles of language. He mixes conventional Lusoga language, proverbs and songs which he picked up from conversations with elders, with Lusoga youth language, that he calls Luyáyé in analogy with the Luganda-based youth language Luyaaye from Kampala (see Namyalo 2015, 2017).



Fig. 6. The Ugandan artist Jungle de Man-Eater<sup>7</sup>

However, instead of seeing himself as a non-conformist or ‘youth language speaker’, research subject, “Jungle de Man-Eater” explained to us that he was a researcher. He positioned himself as an embodied marginal protagonist, who would walk around at night and actually collect youth language (Jungle de Man-Eater, pers. comm. 2015):

I collect words that create stories for me, with my notebook, I write them down or ask for their meaning. I go to local bars at night, where the guys stand outside and sell weed, or waiting for somebody. They are never sober, they know

stories. They see the sluts. I go around smoking cigarettes, I am everywhere. I talk to girls, buy her a drink, and I chat in Lusoga, to show that now not only Luganda is a language of money. People then start getting free! I record words with my phone, I am an urban researcher. But I also go to villages, collect proverbs from elders, idioms, and I ask them ... how to write them.

This can be seen as not only considerably interesting for an understanding of linguistic innovation, but especially in terms of the binary social relations and clear hierarchy that youth language research often produces (experts vs. speakers, researchers vs. observed object). The Ugandan hip-hop artist seemed to turn these relations around; providing a slightly different, playful copy of northern researchers’ practices (see Taussig 1999 on the concept of mimesis), as a stylistic bricolage of conformative and non-conformative language. An afternoon spent with Jungle in Jinja developed into notated lists of Luyáyé words, which he had scribbled earlier in his notebook, collected during one of his nocturnal strolls. It is very interesting to observe that these notes did not differ from the neatly arranged, translated and semantically grouped wordlists in our fellow academics’ short overviews of Yabacrâne, Lughya ya Mitaani or Kirundi Slang.

Our aim is thus to understand youths’ creative and manipulative means of language no longer as sociolectal deviations but as agency. Youth language can, when seen from a post-colonial angle and drawing upon what now is increasingly referred to as Southern Theory, be understood as power, magic and damnation

<sup>7</sup> Based on a form of postcolonial mimesis, Jungle’s name with a clear reference to Lee Sholem’s movie from 1954 summarizes the critical voice of his hip hop lyrics, in which the European fear of a ferocious Africa is a recurrent trope.

(see also Storch 2011 for a discussion of youth language in analogy with other forms of agentive and powerful language). Street children in Kinshasa, often expelled from their homes and considered to be bewitched (see also De Boeck 2004), employ youth language in practices of cursing others and in doing so turn their marginalized roles into powerful agency through threats related to cannibalism, brutality and murder. Street children become the ultimate

Other, the vampire and cannibal, and bragging about this constitutes a way of constructing the Other's Other. A former street child from Kinshasa narrated an incident in which he threatened an adult thief, by 'using power', referring to powerful language which would intimidate and threaten his interlocutor:

J'ai appliqué la force: *Eh, zóngisá lar wâná, na'obá-kisela yó. Sókí oyébi nga té, nakodamé yó, na'â vraí yanké, yakuza!*

[I used force/power: Oh, give back that money, I will add you something [else] to that. If you don't know me, I will devour you, I am a real Yanké, a Yakuza!](Carter Omende, Kinshasa, 2016)

In this case, language is not only a fashionable item, or humoristic and creative expression for the street youth, but can affect and alter power relations between speakers and listeners; between the marginalized and the societal excluders. Yanké reveals a considerable number of specific lexemes related to witch-

Luyáyé word	Gloss
<i>ebinyoka</i>	'cigarette'; lit. 'what is puffed'
<i>dem/kadem/kachick/mazale</i>	'girl'
<i>badé/bladi/chali/wefile</i>	'guy, buddy'
<i>cheda/mula/majja</i>	'money'
<i>muyayu</i>	'street kid'; lit. 'small wildcat'
<i>mpolyà, popi</i>	'policeman'
<i>matware/hood/crib</i>	'house, home'
<i>karwiliwili, chikàdó</i>	'liquor, sugarcane spirit'

Table 1. Jungle's collected Luyáyé words

craft, exorcism and a *deuxième monde*; it could be justifiably categorized as a language of sorcery, spirits and witchcraft. A range of scholars already stress that young people's "agency often arises out of the way in which they are capable of crossing and recontextualizing the boundaries between seemingly contradictory elements" (De Boeck & Honwana 2005: 10). Playing with pain and pleasure, they can be seen as stuck between the worlds of the living and the dead, representing vulnerable beings and at the same time violent actors (cf. *ibid.*). This ambivalent role of African youths could be used as an example to help broaden the view of youth language, reconsidering speakers' linguistic choices in their postcolonial context.

Youth language practices are surely diverse and can be taken as examples of a broad diversification of languages, but they also reveal a high degree of critical reflexivity. 'Speaking back' and 'speaking youth language' can be understood as critical performances in the postcolony and beyond: resistance, as

represented by youths' stylized linguistic practice, rooted in imperial formations and contradictory globalized or local arenas where multiple and divergent language ideologies co-exist. Mimetic interpretations of adolescent speakers target a colonially-based epistemic hegemony, functioning beyond mere creativity and run to challenge authoritative systems of knowledge productions and global inequalities. Power, agency and ownership are expressed through powerful language, taboo-breaking, linguistic secrecy and also chaos. There is a creative play with non-standard language and anti-normative enregisterment, however this is only one of the central aspects of youth language practices.

## **6. About this volume**

The discussion in this introduction outlined a few ideas of alternative approaches to youth language. The papers collected in this special issue each shed light on various aspects of youth language and thus enrich the study of such phenomena through critical methodology, perspectives or theoretical implications. Breaking away from classical linguistic approaches and offering alternative perspectives also means including various formats and ways of writing. This broadens the view on language as it not only includes the typical papers in academic writing style and thus makes other voices possible.

Critical self-reflection and a reanalysis of his own research practices on youth language from Burundi, Kenya, DR Congo and Uganda marks the focus of Nico Nassenstein's paper. By discussing several crucial aspects of his own work; such as the observer's paradox; the danger of artefactualizing youth language

practices; or the common dichotomist view of language as being either urban or rural, he suggests critical and more actor-centered perspectives on youth and youth language.

A new access to the topic, portraying and discussing youth and embodiment is presented by Anne Storch. She uses her creative critique to engage the reader in new perspectives on youth language by deconstructing stereotyped images of "youth". Suggesting a more holistic approach to youth language, the author discusses African practices in postcolonial contexts and illustrates that youth are not (only) what linguistic scholars believe them to be. This is achieved through the example of the Atikulate movement in Nigeria and a discussion of young peoples' self-portrayal and self-expression.

A different take on language ideologies and digital communication is offered by Florian Busch, who discusses the digital writing practices of young adolescents in Germany. By investigating digital registers of writing, the author introduces the concept of media ideologies and presents a new model for the study of writing registers in digital spaces. By analyzing examples from WhatsApp, he also examines young peoples' metadiscourse practices as part of their communicative practices.

Another critical perspective on previous studies of youth languages is offered by Andrea Hollington. She aims to deconstruct the notion of youth languages as 'exceptional', in terms of their creativity. By discussing young Zimbabweans' linguistic practices in Zim-dancehall, she shows that the same linguistic strategies are also found in other contexts and employed by other speakers. Moreover, she sheds light on transatlantic dimensions of

youth language practices in music to supplement the empirical work.

The paper contributed by Helma Pasch and Germain Landi constitutes yet another approach to youth language: In the form of a dialogue between the two researchers, the article discusses how research on Sango Godobé (CAR) was undertaken. Scrutinizing the fieldwork practices (with results published in Pasch & Landi 2015), the paper, in interview-style, addresses a number of issues related to the practical implementation of research methods. Revealing personal experiences during research on Sango Godobé, the authors present an intimate discussion on how linguistic data was obtained.

In their work on language and tuk-tuks in coastal Kenya, Bonciana Lisanza and Angelika Mietzner analyze painted words and images as personal stories of mostly young drivers. Grouping the slogans on tuk-tuks according to different identity-related categories, they show that the perception of creative words on vehicles as a “youth register” is mainly an external ascription, while owners and drivers may seek to express something very different.

Solomon Waliaula explores language practices of young people in Eldoret, Kenya, by focusing on a special domain of communication. He investigates the language of European football fandom in Kenya and analyzes conversations of fans. His study hints at the problematic nature of the category “youth” and, following a discourse-oriented approach, shows how fans use language to gain social prestige and to create and deconstruct football myths. Further, it becomes evident that Sheng, as a Kenyan youth language, does not always play a predominant role in young speakers’ interactions.

Emmanuella Bih’s paper introduces youth language practices in Cameroon from a different angle. By incorporating dialogues of conversations involving youths and family members of the older generation, she demystifies some of the common assumptions of African youth languages with regard to secrecy. As she focuses on language practices in Anglophone Cameroon (as opposed to the much studied Camfranglais of the French speaking part of the country), she also sheds light on aspects of identity and generational change by illustrating how language is connected to music, clothing and hairstyle.

Youth language practices in northern Uganda are the subject of Steffen Lorenz’ contribution. The author introduces the language practice from Gulu and describes its origins, its spread and its linguistic innovations. His analysis is embedded in a discussion of the speakers and their social contexts, as well as including the consideration of power notions in language developments.

In his critical analysis of the Yabacrâne phenomenon in Goma, eastern DR Congo, Paulin Baraka Bose shows that a label initially given to a youth language practice can actually have multiple social meanings and is not necessarily restricted to a specific way of speaking, nor to stylized language. By offering an overview of the different meanings of Yabacrâne in Goma, he questions the academic study of African youth languages, the processes of knowledge production and encourages alternative approaches.

Nicolai Klotz, as sort of an afterword to the present issue, presents another alternative view on youth language practices: His photo series illustrating graffiti art on a wall in Swakopmund, Namibia, mainly speaks for itself.

The pictures reveal communicative practices which involve language, art, slogans, imagery and metaphor and which often serve as comments on social issues, as motivators or advice for social and political behavior.

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# 02

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„I swear they said this ...“:  
Kritische Gedanken zu  
afrikanischen Jugendsprachen  
und ihren Beschreibungspraktiken

# 02

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## „I swear they said this ...“: Kritische Gedanken zu afrikanischen Jugendsprachen und ihren Beschreibungspraktiken

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### **1. Von Jugendsprache und dem Felddagebuch des Forschers\***

Ähnlich wie andere Modeerscheinungen generieren wissenschaftliche Trends schnell eine Art kanonische Herangehensweise und ein Drehbuch für all diejenigen, die sich dem neuen Trend widmen möchten. Als innovativ präsentierte Forschungsfelder (wie die Jugendsprachforschung seit frühen Arbeiten in den 1980er

Jahren, ungefähr seit Dumestre 1985, Spyropolous 1987, Sesepe 1990) werden nicht selten ungeachtet ihrer Historizität untersucht, wobei Ergebnisse aufgrund einer relativ einheitlichen methodischen Herangehensweise sodann schnell hervorsehbar und allzu ähnlich wirken. Dies tritt häufig ein, lange bevor Methoden und Begrenztheit der Ausrichtung des neuen Felds erstmals kritisch hinterfragt werden. Brennende Forschungsthemen werden nicht selten

zu vermarktbar und attraktiven Zugpferden (für Nachwuchswissenschaftler, Themen für Sammelbände, Tagungszuschüsse, etc.); so auch die Beschäftigung mit jugendsprachlichem Sprechen in Afrika.

Die Beschreibung und Dokumentation vor allem urbaner jugendsprachlicher Praktiken in Subsahara-Afrika ist seit Beginn der Jahrtausendwende in großem Stil auf akademisches Interesse gestoßen. Die meisten der verfügbaren Studien konzentrieren sich jedoch auf größtenteils linguistische Ergebnisse, mit einem Fokus auf elizitierten Wörterlisten und Sätzen, der vergleichenden Analyse linguistischer Manipulationen, teils begleitet von ethnographischen Notizen oder einer kompakten Darstellung der jeweiligen Sprechergemeinschaften (*communities of practice*). Oftmals wird hierbei selten ein kritischer Blick auf die Rolle des Forschers in seiner Interaktion mit den Sprechern oder das ihn umgebende Feld geworfen, und kaum die Frage nach der grundsätzlichen Schwierigkeit gestellt, im steten Wandel befindliche Jugendsprache festzuhalten (oder festzuschreiben?). Hierbei, so wirkt es, dokumentiert der Linguist stets, was bereits nicht mehr sprachliche Mode ist, oder spätestens während des langwierigen Publikationsprozesses endgültig zum sozio-linguistischen Relikt verkommt. Die aktuelle Jugendsprachforschung muss sich daher not-

wendigerweise mit der Frage beschäftigen, wie aussagekräftige und repräsentative Ergebnisse erzielt und in Text umgewandelt werden können.

In Michael Taussigs (2011) *I Swear I Saw This* geht es um Zeichnungen in seinem ethnologischen Feldtagebuch und um die Frage der Dokumentierbarkeit von Beobachtungen, komprimiert zu schriftlichen Notizen. Komplexe Zusammenhänge, so Taussigs Ansatz, verlangen demnach eine andere, nicht lediglich auf das geschriebene Wort fixierte Repräsentation, da Beweisbarkeit schwer zu erreichen und kausale Zusammenhänge flüchtig scheinen:

They say science has two phases: the imaginative logic of discovery, followed by the harsh discipline of proof. Yet proof is elusive when it comes to human affairs; a social nexus is not a laboratory, laws of cause and effect are trivial when it comes to the soul, and the meaning of events and actions is to be found elsewhere, as in the mix of emotion and reasoning that took the anthropologist on her or his travels in the first place. (Taussig 2011: xi)

Der *social nexus*, von dem Taussig spricht und der laut ihm kein Labor sei, schließt immer auch das Feld mit ihm, das vom beobachtenden Forscher mitgeprägt und verfremdet werde, und daher nie als objektive Konstante gelten

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\* Die vorliegende Arbeit basiert auf einer kritischen Reflexion eigener gesammelter Sprachdaten zu verschiedenen jugendsprachlichen Praktiken im Gebiet der Afrikanischen Großen Seen in den Jahren 2009–2014. Eine frühere Version dieses Aufsatzes wurde an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz im Oktober 2016 präsentiert. Ich danke den anwesenden KollegInnen für ihre Ideen und viele hilfreiche Kommentare. Vor allem danke ich Anne Storch für ihre Inspiration und viele gewinnbringende Diskussionen zu kritischen Zugängen zu Jugendsprache, sowie Chris Bongartz für hilfreiche Tipps. Gerrit J. Dimmendaal danke ich aufrichtig für die Ermutigung (vor vielen Jahren) eine erste Feldforschung zu lingalabasierter Jugendsprache in Kinshasa durchzuführen. Meinen Freunden und Gesprächspartnern in den verschiedenen genannten afrikanischen Ländern bin ich für ihre Unterstützung verbunden. Ich danke beiden Reviewern für alle hilfreichen Verbesserungsvorschläge. In meinem Aufsatz werden für einen besseren Lesefluss gelegentlich *Forscher*, *Sprecher* oder *Wissenschaftler* etc. generisch sowohl im Falle von männlichen als auch weiblichen Kollegen angewandt und sollen keinesfalls geschlechtsspezifisch gedeutet werden.

könne. Die Beobachtung von und die Teilnahme an sozialen Praktiken, in diesem Falle an der Interaktion afrikanischer Jugendlicher, führt gängigerweise zu publizierten Ergebnissen, an deren Gestalt der Wissenschaftler gehörigen Anteil hat, und deren Beweisbarkeit immer zu einem großen Teil subjektiv (und somit auch potenziell alternativ auslegbar) bleibt: Es kann kritisch sogar behauptet werden, dass sich Soziolinguisten ihre eigenen Jugendsprachen erschaffen, vielmehr als dass sie objektiv Jugendsprachen lediglich beschreiben würden (siehe auch Abschnitt 3). Sheng, Yanké, Tsotsitaal und Camfranglais sind demnach nicht nur gefragte Themen für studentische Abschlussarbeiten, sondern je nach Schwerpunktsetzung der Beschreibenden und Sichtbarkeit der Publikationen immer auch Teilprodukte von Linguisten.

In meinem Aufsatz möchte ich ferner Taussigs Beobachtung, dass das Notizbuch als eine Form von Literatur gesehen werden soll, in das Zeichnungen, Farben, Emotionen und kurze Momentaufnahmen eingehen können, bevor sie in der Produktion von fertigen Texten oft ausgeblendet werden, auf Aufsätze und Monographien anwenden, die jugendsprachliches Sprechen im urbanen Afrika beschreiben, festschreiben, und deren methodologische Basis sich bei kritischer Analyse oft als präskriptiv, subjektiv und als linguistische Artefakte schaffend entpuppt.

Dabei nehme ich vor allem meine eigenen Ergebnisse von Feldforschungsaufenthalten (und somit mein „Feldtagebuch“ in Taussigs Sinn) sowie wegweisende Forschungsarbeiten der afrikanistischen Jugendsprachforschung (siehe beispielsweise Kießling & Mous 2004, Hurst 2008, Nassenstein 2014, Hollington & Nassenstein 2015, Mensah 2016) kritisch unter die Lupe.

Überdies stellt Taussig fest, dass in Notizbüchern häufig „*raw material of observation with reverie*“ gemischt werde, und somit die Träumerei des Beobachters notwendigerweise oft Eingang finde in die Produktion von Feldforschungsnotizen. Nachdem er aus einem kolumbianischen Taxi heraus eine komplexe Szene von obdachlosen Menschen

Abb. 1. Taussigs (2011: 2) Notizbuchzeichnung seiner Beobachtung in Medellín, Kolumbien



in einem Tunnel in Medellín beobachtet, und eine Frau, die einen Mann scheinbar in einen Nylonsack einnäht, schreibt er mit rotem Stift ein beschwörendes „*I swear I saw this*“ unter die Notiz. Daraufhin fertigt er eine Zeichnung in seinem Notizbuch an, die die Szene einfangen soll (siehe Abb. 1). Er sagt, er könne die beschwörenden Worte mehrfach in allen Farben schreiben, es würde nie ausreichen um zu bezeugen, was beobachtet wurde, wo hingegen die Zeichnung in ihrem bezeugenden Charakter mehr als nur „sehe“, oder „betrachte“, sondern Selbstzweifel beinhalte, und in ihrem Bezeugen mysteriös werde, komplex, machtvoll, und *notwendig* (vgl. ebd., S. 2).

Taussig vertritt die Meinung, dass Sprache allein für die Beschreibung seiner getätigten Beobachtungen nicht ausreiche, da das umgebende Feld die Fragen „*Who am I?*“ und „*What is that?*“ des Forschers durcheinanderwerfe, und das Feld, das Beobachter und Beobachtetes impliziert (d.h. einwickelt und logisch verknüpft), zu einem Grabenkampf werde und enormen Druck auf Sprache ausübe, nicht hingegen auf eine Zeichnung (vgl. ebd., S. 71). Wenn wir Taussigs Vorschlag auf aktuelle Zugänge zu jugendsprachlichem Sprechen in Afrika anwenden, stellen wir fest, dass zahlreiche Beobachtungen und Beschreibungen in Form von Wörterlisten, aufgelisteten sprachlichen Manipulationen, und sprachlichen Abweichungen dargestellt werden, die eine Form von Sprachdokumentation darstellen, die für kreative und fluide Praktiken von Sprache denkbar ungeeignet scheinen.

Dennoch scheinen sie als ein verzweifelt „*I swear they said this...*“ (als Abwandlung von Taussigs „*I swear I saw this*“) zu stehen, das beschwörend schwer greifbares jugendliches Sprechen in Aufsätze umwandelt und auch

hier einen enormen Druck auf Sprache ausübt, um den Beobachtungen und soziolinguistischen Realitäten überhaupt gerecht zu werden. Der Anspruch auf linguistische Erforschbarkeit und Dokumentierbarkeit manifestiert sich in Arbeiten zu Jugendsprache oft in griffigen extrinsischen Benennungen von kreativen Praktiken und Registern (Termini wie *Sheng*, *Yanké*, *Luyaaye*, nicht selten von Linguisten selber geprägt), in der Beschreibung von (oft wenig relevanten) grammatischen Divergenzen, in geschaffenen Korpora und im „Deutlichmachen von Undeutlichem“, somit auch im Sprechen und Beschreiben von eigentlich Unaussprechlichem, von Opazität und von geheimen Praktiken, die durch Beschreibung teils einfach dekontextualisiert werden, teils auch exotisiert (Jugendsprache als andere, abweichende Art von Sprache) oder humorisiert (Jugendsprache als vermeintlich urkomische Art von Sprache).

Und obgleich viele Linguisten neuerdings Jugendsprache in Afrika offener, mit neuen Ansätzen und Methoden zu fassen suchen, bleiben einige grundlegende Probleme bestehen, die im Folgenden skizziert werden sollen. Anhand eines methodenkritischen Überblicks werde ich ausgewählte (teils eigene) Studien jugendsprachlichen Sprechens in Uganda, Burundi, der DR Kongo und Kenia neu beleuchten, in denen Jugendsprache dekontextualisiert, zu einem Artefakt gemacht, ihrer Fluidität beraubt und in urban-ruralen Dichotomien verortet wird.

Meine Argumentation, grundlegende Ansätze der bisherigen Forschungspraxis diskutierend, spricht sich für interdisziplinäre Zugänge aus, sowie für eine verstärkte Anerkennung der Agentivität und idiolektalen Kreativität jugendsprachlicher Sprecher,

beispielsweise durch eine akteurszentriertere Perspektive der afrikanistischen (Sozio)linguistik. In diesem Kontext kann sprachliche Variation von Sprechern unter anderem als eine Art künstlerisches Projekt verstanden werden, wenn das, was als Sheng, Yanké oder Tsotsitaal bekannt ist, von Künstlern verschiedenen Alters (beispielsweise von Modeschöpfern in Interviews, Bloggern, Hip Hop Musikern etc., siehe Abschnitt 4.), bewusst als Stilmittel gewählt wird, und einen indexikalischen Verweis auf Jugendkultur darstellt (als Teil ihrer Performanz), jedoch nicht zwingend identitätsstiftend oder *antilanguage* ist.

## **2. Making the image: Schwerpunkte und Trends der bisherigen Forschung**

Im Laufe der wissenschaftlichen Beschäftigung mit afrikanischen Jugendsprachpraktiken seit den späten 1980er-Jahren haben sich immer wieder unterschiedliche Schwerpunkte herausgebildet, die in Aufsätzen, Monographien oder Dissertationen einen zentralen Fokus eingenommen haben. Selbstverständlich sind nicht alle Studien eindeutig einer theoretischen bzw. konzeptuellen Richtung zuzuweisen, jedoch weisen einige herausgegriffene Arbeiten gemeinsame Zugänge zu Jugendsprache auf.

Vor allem in frühen Arbeiten wurde jugendsprachliches Sprechen immer wieder als pidginisierte oder ‚hybride‘ Form von Sprache gesehen (Goyvaerts 1988 zum Indoubill in Bukavu, DR Kongo; Ferrari 2004 und Bosire 2006 zum Sheng von Nairobi, Kenia). Die Pidginisierung bzw. Hybridität bezieht sich in den genannten Studien auf den Abbau von Konkordanzsystemen, eine Vereinfachung von Tempus-Aspektsystemen und auf die Viel-

zahl an sprachlichen Manipulationen, wobei dieser Zugang zu Jugendsprache vor allem ein typologischer ist, der Jugendsprache entweder als schlechtere Form von Standardrealisierung oder als neu entstandene (hybride) Varietät betrachtet, im Vergleich zu ähnlichen Prozessen in anderen jugendsprachlichen Praktiken. Weitere Studien haben Jugendsprache vor allem aus einer Kontaktperspektive beleuchtet, mit Fokus auf Sprachkontakt, *Mixing* oder Codeswitching als richtungsweisenden Konzepten (siehe unter anderem Mazrui 1995, Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997, Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997, Ogechi 2002).

Darüber hinaus reihten sich weitere Arbeiten, wie auch Kießling & Mous' (2004) viel beachtetes Grundlagenpaper zu afrikanischen Jugendsprachen sowie andere zu Lugha ya Mitaani (Tansania; Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006), Luyaaye (Uganda; Namyalo 2015), und Invugo y'Umuhanda (Ruanda; Nassenstein 2015), in eine Fokussierung von *resistance identities* und Jugendsprache als *antilanguage* (Halliday 1978) ein, in vorliegenden Fällen oft begleitet von Wörterlisten mit phonologischen oder semantischen Manipulationen.

Bisher sind vergleichsweise wenige ethnographische Studien entstanden, in denen das Augenmerk auf Beobachtung und Partizipation des Forschers innerhalb zu beforschenden Gruppe von Jugendlichen gelegt wurde, sowie auf soziale Praktiken und weniger auf linguistische Prägung. Samper (2002) und Wairungu (2014) bauen auf ethnographischen Studien zum Sheng auf, und Wilson (2012) auf ihrer Interaktion mit Kindoubil-Sprechern aus Kisangani (DR Kongo).

Weitaus größerer Beliebtheit als linguistische Ethnographien, die meist eine längere Forschungsdauer in den betreffenden Grup-

pierungen von Jugendlichen voraussetzen, haben sich grammatische Studien erfreut, in denen die grundlegenden morphologischen Abweichungen der Jugendsprache von der jeweiligen Standardsprache (oder dem, was unter formalisiertem Standard verstanden wird) deskriptiv dargestellt werden. Studien dieser Art sind beispielsweise Kouega (2003) zum Camfranglais, Shinagawa (2007) zum Sheng, meine eigene Arbeit zum Yanké (Nassenstein 2014) zumindest teilweise, und Gunnink (2014) zu Tsotsitaal. In den genannten Studien werden außer phonologischen Grundlagen und morphologischer Divergenz im Nominal- und Verbalsystem jedoch kaum syntaktische Merkmale behandelt.

Basierend auf Hursts (2008) Dissertation zu *style* in Tsotsitaal, konzeptuell an Bakhtins (1981) Konzept der Polyphonie und Mehrstimmigkeit des Individuums angelehnt, sind weitere Arbeiten entstanden, die sich auf stilisierte Praktiken, Ästhetik und poetische Ausdrucksformen konzentrieren, außer für Tsotsitaal (Hurst & Mesthrie 2013) u.a. für Sheng (z.B. Vierke 2015). Ein Sonderband der Zeitschrift *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* (Hurst 2014) greift die Idee, jugendsprachliches Sprechen als stilisierendes Accessoire zu werten auf, unter anderem in Bezug auf Gender-Konstruktionen (Maribe & Brookes 2014)<sup>1</sup> und in Bezug auf die Semiotik von Gestik junger Sprecher (Hurst & Buthelezi 2014).

Als ein weiterer Fokus ist in jüngeren Studien das Verständnis von Jugendsprache als zwar einerseits urbaner Sprache, aber anderer-

seits auch fluider und „translokaler“ Sprachpraxis zu nennen, u.a. analysiert am Beispiel des Kirundi Slang aus Burundi mit einem Fokus auf Metrolingualismus (Tacke-Köster 2016) und in Bezug auf eine zunehmende Mobilität von Tsotsitaal und dessen *floating lexicon* (Hurst 2015). Andere Studien mit breiterer Ausrichtung (Nassenstein & Hollington 2016) beschreiben afrikanische Jugendsprachpraktiken als *global repertoires* und schließen zum Teil die populäre Mediatisierung von Jugendsprache mit ein (Hollington & Nassenstein 2018a zu sozialen Medien, Hurst-Harosh & Erastus 2018 in Bezug auf mediale Repräsentationen von Jugendsprache allgemein). In diesen Studien wird Jugendsprache somit als etwas gewertet, das nicht notwendigerweise an eine geographische Verortung gebunden sein muss, sondern auch als delokalisierte Sprachpraxis in digitalen Räumen wie WhatsApp, Facebook und Co. Verwendung finden kann. Digitale Ethnographien von afrikanischen Jugendsprachen sind bisher nicht erschienen, wären jedoch vor allem für digitale Sprachpraktiken wie Langila (ursprünglich als Jugendsprache der DR Kongo beschrieben, vgl. Nassenstein 2015c) sinnvoll.

Nicht nur aus Ermangelung einer fixen soziolinguistischen Theorie zu Jugendsprache (vgl. Beyers kritischer Überblick 2014, 2015), sondern auch aufgrund von diversen Forschungskontexten und Kategorisierungen von Jugendsprache haben wir es mit einer großen Bandbreite an Studien zu tun. Trotz ihrer Diversität weisen einige der genannten Arbeiten jedoch grundlegende methodische

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<sup>1</sup> Dies wurde unter anderem auch von Rudwick (2011 u.v.m.) in mehreren Publikationen für homosexuelle zulusprachige Gruppen herausgearbeitet, in denen die Wahl des geheimen Registers *isiNgqumo* zum ausgeprägten Stil einer bestimmten Subkultur geworden ist.

Probleme auf, die anhand eines kritischen Blicks auf bestimmte Studien exemplarisch erläutert werden sollen. Außer dem vorliegenden Band sind auffallend wenige kritische Studien mit Fokus auf Dekolonialität oder generell mit postkolonialer Ausrichtung verfasst worden. Ellen Hurst fasst die vorsichtigen Bewegungen einiger KollegInnen in diese Richtung wie folgt zusammen.

Similarly, theories of 'disinvention' and 'destandardisation' (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005), and the rejection of the 'monolingual orientation' (Canagarajah, 2013) are useful moves in reconceptualizing the dynamics of youth language, particularly in light of the role of colonialism in standardization and the pervasiveness of the notion of 'one nation, one language' in spite of the inherent multilingual nature of African countries. (Hurst 2017)<sup>2</sup>

Obgleich die genannte Liste an verschiedenartigen Zugängen zu Jugendsprache nicht komplett ist (vgl. auch Hollington & Nassenstein 2015a für eine geographische/sprachbezogene Auflistung), fällt auf, dass beispielsweise sprachanthropologische Herangehensweisen höchstens peripher berücksichtigt wurden, vor allem mit Fokus auf Sprachideologien (z.B. Hollington 2016, Mensah & Inyabri 2016, Rüsç & Nassenstein 2016) und Agentivität in/durch Hip Hop (Alim 2009). Auch pragmatische Studien fehlen gänzlich bis auf wenige soziopragmatische Einblicke<sup>3</sup>, und könnten vor allem unter Einbeziehung von Kontext im Sinne einer Analyse von Sprechakten,

Höflichkeitsstrategien, Indexikalität etc. neue Forschungsfelder eröffnen (siehe auch die Diskussion in Hollington & Nassenstein 2015b). Einige wenige Studien beschäftigen sich mit metapragmatischen Fragestellungen (so z.B. Williams 2016).

Die methodologischen Herausforderungen, die die Beschreibung von Jugendsprache mit sich bringt, sind dennoch nicht neu. Beyer (2015) resümiert, dass mehr ethnographische teilnehmende Beobachtungen angestrebt werden müssen, in deren Kontext sich Linguisten tatsächlich längere Zeit in entsprechenden *communities of practice* aufhalten. Ein theoretisches Gerüst zur Beschreibung von afrikanischen Jugendsprachpraktiken fehle bisher, so Beyer (vgl. S.24), und häufig würde weiterhin beispielsweise verkannt, dass jeder Sprecher verschiedene *linguistic styles* und Register habe, die er einsetzen könne (vgl. S.28), in der Soziolinguistik häufig auch als *repertoire approach* beschrieben (vgl. vor allem Lüpke & Storch 2013, aber auch Blommaert & Backus 2011). Weiterhin bestehende Herausforderungen sind nach Beyer, neben intensiverer ethnographischer Arbeit, beispielsweise auch eine genauere Untersuchung sprachlicher Innovatoren und sozialer Netzwerke, um den Kontext kommunikativer Praktiken einzuschließen.

Die kurze Dauer vieler den Studien zugrundeliegender Feldforschungsaufenthalte scheint ein weiteres Problem zu sein, das häufig nicht erwähnt wird. Meine eigenen Aufenthalte in Ruanda und Burundi im Rahmen zweier Kurzbeschreibungen der Jugendsprachen Imvugo y'Umuhanda und Kirundi

<sup>2</sup> Siehe [<http://linguistics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-157#acrefore-9780199384655-e-157-bibitem-0048>] (aufgerufen am 20.02.2017).

<sup>3</sup> In der europäischen Jugendsprachforschung sind einige Studien verfügbar, die sich mit Identitätskonstruktionen und Diskursanalyse beschäftigen, so z.B. Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou (2003).

Slang kritisch betrachtend muss ich feststellen, dass ich eindeutig zu wenig Zeit mit Sprechern der jeweiligen Gemeinschaften verbracht habe um grundlegende Einblicke (Nassenstein 2015a, 2017a) zu veröffentlichen. Meine kurze Reise nach Bujumbura, Burundi, umfasste im Februar 2014 gerade einmal eine Dauer von nur vier Tagen, die ich meistens mit Sprechern des Kirundi Slang am Strand und in belebten Bars des Viertels Bwiza zubrachte. Meine Aufenthalte in Kigali, Ruanda, waren nie wirkliche Feldforschungsaufenthalte, sondern meist mehrtägige Durchreisen, entweder von Uganda in den Kongo, oder von Uganda nach Burundi, oft in Cafés oder an Busterminals sitzend, unterbrochen von kurzen Gesprächen mit Jugendlichen.<sup>4</sup> In einem anderen Fall, als ich Sprachdaten (ein im Fall von Jugendsprache meist wenig griffiger, teils problematischer Terminus) zum Swahili-basierten Yabacrâne aus Goma (Ostkongo) zu sammeln versuchte, aber die Grenze zum besagten Zeitpunkt nicht überqueren konnte, ließ ich die Forschung meist auf Busfahrten durch Ruanda stattfinden. Das Ergebnis war ein Kurzüberblick des Yabacrâne (Nassenstein 2016), der als erster Artikel möglicherweise hilfreich, als grundlegende Studie aber völlig unzureichend scheint.

All dies muss nicht implizieren, dass eine längere Forschungsdauer notwendigerweise zu ergiebigeren oder adäquateren Ergebnissen führt, mag jedoch für die Tendenz sprechen, Jugendsprache teils *en passant* und in Form einer attraktiven akademischen Nebenbeschäftigung zu dokumentieren; entsprechende Resultate sind sodann von oft nur begrenztem Nutzen. Dieses gesteigerte Interesse an der

Dokumentation von afrikanischen Jugendsprachen, unter anderem auch in Form von studentischen Abschlussarbeiten, scheint nicht von ungefähr zu kommen; der rasche, beinahe verstohlene Blick in innovative, und teils (vermeintlich) geheime Sprache von Jugendlichen (als nicht-jugendlicher Wissenschaftler) wirkt nicht nur aufregend, sondern scheint teilweise leider auch ein sehr kurzes Verweilen vor Ort zu rechtfertigen, basierend auf der Annahme einer lexikalischen „Begrenztheit“ von Jugendsprache. Spezifische Studien versuchen ihre Legitimation durch Angaben gesammelter jugendsprachlicher Lexeme zu beanspruchen, wie Nassenstein (2014, basierend auf einer früheren Studie von 2011) zum Yanké mit 636 Lexemen, Reuster-Jahn & Kießling (2006) zum Lughya ya Mitaani mit 1111 und Namyalo (2015) zum Luyaaye mit 1300 Wörtern. All diese Zahlen sind jedoch keineswegs aussagekräftige quantifizierende Indikatoren einer gelungenen Beforschung jugendsprachlicher Sprecher, in deren Mittelpunkt komplexe Praktiken und Gruppendynamiken (und deren Dokumentation) stehen. Die Transformation von Beobachtungen von Jugendsprache in Zahlen (von Lexemen, realisierten Nominalklassen, etc.) wirkt häufig einengend. Taussig (2011), um noch einmal auf ihn zurückzukommen, sieht den Übergang von beobachteter Realität in gezeichnete Bilder, und möglicherweise geschriebene Wörter, als Prozess an, dem etwas Seltsames anhaftet:

My picture of the people by the freeway is drawn from the flow of life. What I see is real, not a picture. Later on I draw it so it becomes an image, but

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<sup>4</sup> Zwischen 2010 und 2016 habe ich vermutlich acht oder neun Wochenenden in Ruanda verbracht, von denen ich aber keineswegs alle zur Jugendsprachenforschung nutzte.

something strange occurs in this transition. This is surely an old story, the travail of translation as we oscillate from one realm to the other. (S. 7)

Der merkwürdige „*act of making the image*“ (ebd., Emphase im Original hier ausgelassen) scheint in der Beschreibung von afrikanischen Jugendsprachen erstaunlich leblos, verzerrt, mit Wörtern beschrieben, die wenig von der Magie der beobachteten Bilder wiedergeben: Ich erinnere mich an ein Ereignis in Kinshasa von 2009, als ich im Hof unseres gemieteten Hauses im Stadtteil Limete Aufnahmen zur lingalabasierten Jugendsprache mit einigen kongolesischen Jugendlichen machte. Im Innenhof, der der hintere Teil eines Priesterseminars war, stand ein Tisch (meist mit Kaffee oder Bier, Notizzetteln und einem Computer und Aufnahmegerät bestückt) und daneben

Abb. 2. Der Innenhof in Limete mit Papa Joseph, Bobo Kitenge, Fidele Omende (von links)



befand sich ein leeres Schwimmbecken der Missionare, durch das nur noch Eidechsen und Kröten liefen. Neben dem Becken um den Tisch herum konzentrierte sich meist in den Morgen- und Abendstunden meine Arbeit und sodann auch die Feierabend-Gesellschaft (siehe Abb. 2).

Papa Joseph Zoleya, mein betagter ehemaliger Lingala-Lehrer, befand sich zeitgleich auf dem Grundstück, weil er zuvor einen deutschen Bekannten in Lingala unterrichtet hatte, und nutzte die Gelegenheit um von seiner Schulzeit in den späten 1950er-Jahren zu berichten, wie er, als Junge aus einem Dorf in der Bas-Congo-Provinz (heute Kongo Central) stammend, kikongosprachig, das Lingala der *Bills* (brutaler Jungen im Cowboy-Look, siehe Nassenstein 2014: 12–14) in der Hauptstadt nicht beherrschte, und deswegen auf dem Schulweg in der neuen Umgebung mehrfach bedrängt wurde, nachdem er nach Kinshasa gezogen war. Papa Josephs Jugendsprache, die

er dann eines Tages letztendlich lernte um seinen Schulweg zu meistern, hieß *Indoubil* (vgl. Sesep 1990), war eng an anti-koloniale Tendenzen der Kongowirren geknüpft, und war 2009, wieder reaktiviert, stark nostalgiegeladen. Er erzählte von der Brutalität der *Bills*, und den Versuchen der belgischen Priester die Delinquenz zu mindern, indem sich einige Priester den jungen Leuten anschlossen und gemeinsam Musik machten, zudem von der

Umbenennung der Straßen und Stadtviertel Kinshasa (die bis heute besteht) durch Jugendsprachensprecher, und von vielem anderen. Die anderen Anwesenden lauschten. Im Innenhof desselben Hauses stießen sehr bald einige Freunde dazu, Quelqu'un Tshivulukilu, und Bobo Kitenge, beide damals in ihren Zwanzigern. Beide sprachen, während ich ins Haus gerufen wurde und anderen Tätigkeiten nachging, ihre Versionen und Interpretationen von Jugendsprache auf Band, während sie auf dem Hof auf- und abwanderten. (Ich hatte beide mehrfach zuvor gefragt, ob sie mir helfen konnten bei meinem Versuch zu verstehen, was jugendsprachliches Sprechen in Kinshasa eigentlich bedeutete.)

Quelqu'un war ehemaliges Straßenkind und hatte als Sohn des Predigers einer Pfingstkirche in den 90er-Jahren einige harte Jahre auf der Straße verbracht, und war demnach selber Yanké(e), wie ich die Jugendlichen in ihrem Einvernehmen nannte, und kannte daher auch die meisten der Ausdrucksformen, die mich interessierten. Zu Hause wurde vor allem Cilubà gesprochen, die Sprache seines Vaters aus dem Kasai, während seiner Jahre als Straßenkind sprach er jedoch vornehmlich Lingala. Seine vier von ihm selbst aufgenommenen Ausführungen sprachen jedoch eine andere Sprache als die von Papa Joseph: Er nahm die Sache sehr ernst, erklärte Lingala-Jugendsprache als etwas sehr Technisches der Straße, von Geheimnis und intensivem lexikalischen Entleihen geprägt (damit man auf den Straßen Kinshasas nicht verstanden würde) und führte einige Beispiele an. Die Beispiele wurden von den anderen, die im Kreis um ihn herumsaßen, mit Interesse aufgenommen, wenngleich sie von Jugendlichen wie Omende nicht mehr aktiv

verwendet wurden (z.B. das Wort *bret* ‚Brot‘, vom englischen *bread*).

Notre désir est de parler de l'importance et de l'histoire d'une langue que nous pouvons aujourd'hui appeler une langue de la rue ... non, pas tellement de la rue, mais une langue qui est utilisée dans une société. Entre eux, les enfants de la rue se communiquent dans une langue qui est parfois le mélange des mots de l'anglais, français, et aussi du lingala. Par exemple, si une personne voulait demander du pain à son frère, il va demander *tya nga bret* [bret], ça veut dire ‚donne-moi le pain‘.

[Unser Wunsch ist es von der Wichtigkeit und der Geschichte einer Sprache zu sprechen, die wir heute Straßensprache nennen können, nicht wirklich Straßensprache, sondern Sprache, die in einer ‚Gesellschaft‘ verwendet wird. Unter sich kommunizieren Straßenkinder in einer Sprache, die manchmal die Mischung von englischen, französischen und Lingala-Wörtern ist. Zum Beispiel, wenn eine Person nach Brot fragt, wird er [sie] fragen *tyangabret*, das heißt ‚gib mir das Brot‘.] (Quelqu'uns Notiz auf meinem Aufnahmegerät, August 2009)

Quelqu'uns Audio-Sequenzen zu Jugendsprache waren vor allem Erinnerungen an seine Jahre rund um die belebten Marktplätze, auf der Suche nach Geld und geprägt von Elend (lachend erzählte er jedoch oft, dass er bereits mit sechs angefangen habe zu rauchen, und sodann mit neun Jahren aus Gesundheitsgründen wieder aufgehört habe).

Als ich kurz darauf wieder aus dem Haus in den Hof trat, sah ich, dass nach Quelqu'un Bobo, Student der Medizin an der UNIKIN, der größten Universität der Stadt, das Aufnahme-

gerät übernommen hatte. Alle anderen hörten interessiert zu (die kongolesischen Jugendlichen, Papa Joseph, Quelqu'un, sowie einige meiner deutschen Bekannten, die ebenfalls zu Forschungszwecken im selben Haus wohnten). Bobo, der nie auf der Straße gelebt hatte und kein Yanké(e) im eigentlichen Sinn war, kam aus wohlbehütetem Hause, mit Eltern aus dem Südostkongo (wie der Präsident), mit guten Kontakten in verschiedene einflussreiche Zirkel. Zu Hause sprach Bobo mit seinem Vater Kiswahili, Lingala und Französisch. Er erklärte in den verschiedenen Aufnahmen, die ich am Ende des Tages nacheinander abhörte, Jugendsprache als etwas, das Studenten verwendeten, wenn sie beschlossen einen Abstecher in eine dem Campus nahe gelegene Kneipe zu machen, z.B. in das damals äußerst beliebte Tshe-Tshe. Er gab die Termini an, die für das Tshe-Tshe und andere Bars verwendet wurden und wie man – ohne dass die Eltern oder andere Kommilitonen es verstünden – die gemeinsame Eskapade absprache (mir ist im Gedächtnis, dass er *todyé cathédrale* sagte, ‚lass uns beten/in die Kathedrale gehen‘).

Die Gruppenaufnahme zu lingalabasierter Jugendsprache umfasste nicht nur verschiedene Generationen (von den 1950ern bis 2009), sondern gleich mehrere soziale Variablen, wenn man in Labovs Kategorien denken will (Alter, soziale Gruppe, Ethnizität; die im vorliegenden Beispiel jedoch nur bedingt die gleiche Bedeutung haben wie bei Labov). Das Gruppenereignis der Dokumentation von Jugendsprache durch Eigenaufnahmen (während ich andere Dinge erledigte, wobei es vielleicht ein glücklicher Umstand war, dass ich *nicht* anwesend war) war jedoch bedeutend mehr als nur Feldforschungssitzung, wie sie an den vorangegangenen Tagen mit den

jungen Sprechern am selben Ort stattgefunden hatte. Vielmehr wurde Lingala-Jugendsprache hier zum historisierenden Narrativ und zu einem *Ereignis*, das sich von da an mehrfach wiederholte. Häufig, wenn Bekannte unterschiedlicher Herkunft oder verschiedener Altersgruppen im Innenhof in Limete neben dem leeren Schwimmbaden zusammentrafen, nahmen sie sich das Mikrofon, das ich meist auf dem Tisch liegen ließ, und sprachen kurze Texte, teils ernst gemeint, teils humorvoll, Witze, kurze Geschichten, oder unverständliches Kauderwelsch auf Band (wohl um sich einen Spaß mit mir zu machen, da sie sehr wohl wussten, dass ich in den Folgetagen die Aufnahmen zuzuordnen und zu transkribieren suchte).

Meine teils grammatische Beschreibung des Yanké greift diese besondere Situation nicht auf und ebenso wenig die vielen anderen *linguistic leftovers* der Tage in Kinshasa, die ich auf Band vorfand; Situationen, in denen das Aufnahmegerät weiterlief, obgleich keine inszenierte Sitzung stattfand, oder Situationen, in denen meine Bekannten das Gerät an sich nahmen und während eines Spaziergangs über den Hof teils ernste, teils urkomische Aufnahmen machten, die eine sehr authentische Abbildung von Jugendsprache in allen ihren Facetten darstellte: Als Ereignis, als Performanz, aber auch als individuelle Reminiszenz an Jugend, die mit jeder Aufnahme in neuer Gesellschaft immer wieder anders ausfiel. Dieser Dialog unterschiedlicher Akteure mit meinem Mikrofon war von Agentivität geprägt und stellte, so denke ich heute, eine besondere Form von *Storytelling* dar. Obgleich ich in meiner Studie von 2014 betone, eng mit Sprechern im Kontext ihrer sozialen Praktiken gearbeitet zu haben findet dies keine Erwäh-

nung. Einige weitere kritische Fälle, unterteilt in Schlüsselkontexte, sollen im Folgenden (3.1–3.5) detailliert diskutiert werden.

### 3. Kritische Blicke: Fallbeispiele aus Uganda, Burundi, Kenia und dem Kongo

#### 3.1 Eine Stadt, zwei Wissenschaftler, diverse Daten: Junge Sprecher aus Norduganda

In den vergangenen Jahren haben zwei meiner Kollegen in Gulu, Norduganda, mit Sprechern des Acholi gearbeitet, und haben auch jugendsprachliches Sprechen untersucht. Obwohl beide teilweise mit denselben Sprechern gearbeitet haben, sind die Ergebnisse äußerst unterschiedlich ausgefallen. Die untersuchte Acholi-basierte Jugendsprachpraktik wich in beiden Forschungsprojekten stark ab, was beide Kollegen in dieser quasi als Laborsituation<sup>5</sup> zu wertenden Forschungskonstellation zur Annahme bewegte, dass es verschiedene Realisierungen von *Leb pa Bulu* („Sprache der vornehmlich männlichen Jugend“; von Rüsç & Nassenstein 2016 derart bezeichnet) bzw. *Leb pa Bwulu* (siehe Lorenz, dieser Band) geben müsse. Vor allem mag aber auch die unterschiedliche Herangehensweise, methodologische Ausrichtung und unterschiedlichen Auswirkungen der Forscherpräsenzen vor Ort (auch deren Gender) einen direkten Einfluss auf unterschiedliche Forschungsdaten gehabt haben.<sup>6</sup>

Das dargestellte Szenario sollte uns daher vor allem für die eigene Rolle als störender Faktor für Datenerhebung in der Erforschung von Jugendsprache sensibilisieren. Labov (1972) spricht in einer frühen soziolinguistischen Arbeit vom *observer's paradox*, das besagt, dass wir nur herausfinden können, wie Menschen kommunizieren, wenn sie nicht systematisch beobachtet werden, wir sie aber für die Generierung dieser Daten beobachten müssen:

The aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation. (Labov 1972: 209)

Unsere Präsenz, unser sprachideologisches ‚Gepäck‘ und unsere Direktiven in der Datenerhebung verfremden, exotisieren und objektifizieren Jugendsprachensprecher in unterschiedlichen Kontexten, wie am besten am Beispiel einer bekannten Fotografie (Abb. 3) erläutert, in der der Schatten des Fotografen und seiner Kamera nicht nur das Motiv verfremdet und den Betrachter vom eigentlichen Motiv ablenkt, sondern auch den Blick des Zeitungsjungen – hier das fokussierte Objekt der Betrachtung – auf eben jenen Schatten des Fotografen lenkt. Der Einfluss des Beobachters auf das Motiv ist fatal. Das Ergebnis ist ein Schatten des Beobachters, nicht eine objektive Betrachtung des Zeitungsjungen. So auch

<sup>5</sup> Der Laborbegriff sei hier nicht auf Taussig bezogen (s.o.), sondern soll eher verdeutlichen, dass die Analyse der parallelen Forschungssituation in Gulu einen direkten laborähnlichen Vergleich von Forschungsdaten ermöglichte.

<sup>6</sup> Hier darf man mein gewähltes Beispiel nicht falsch verstehen: Ähnliche Szenarien bieten sich in der Beschreibung von Sheng, vor allem mit zeitlichem Abstand und teils mit interdisziplinärer Perspektive (Linguistik, Ethnologie, Medienwissenschaften etc.). Das Beispiel aus Norduganda ist jedoch ein sehr griffiges, da beide KollegInnen (und ich) keine langen jugendsprachlichen Studien durchführten, sondern eher kurze Einblicke in *Leb pa B(w)ulu* gewährt wurden. Die Diskussion um die divergierenden Forschungsergebnisse wurde deutlich während der Besprechung des Aufsatzes von Rüsç & Nassenstein (2016) sowie im Rahmen mehrerer präsentierter Vorträge von Lorenz (u.a. 2016).



Abb. 3. Lewis W. Hine, 1908, Self-portrait with newsboy

häufig im Falle von Jugendsprache. Im Kongo macht Nassenstein (2016) eine spezifische ‚Fotografie‘ der Jugendsprache Yabacrâne in Goma, Wilson (2012) eine weitere von Kindoubil in Kisangani, und Mulumbwa (2009) knipst das Kindubile in Lubumbashi, alle teils

verzerrt, teils unter erkennbaren Schatten des jeweils Forschenden, und in sehr unterschiedlichen Formaten präsentiert. Die darunterliegenden sprachlichen Praktiken ähneln sich bedeutend mehr als ihre stark divergierenden Beschreibungen.

Zudem verursacht die dominante Präsenz des Linguisten auch äußerst heterogene Ergebnisse, denen dementsprechend flexibel in der Beschreibung begegnet werden muss.<sup>7</sup>

Dem *observer's paradox* zu entkommen bzw. dieses effizient auszuhebeln (s. Beyer 2015: 32), scheint schwer vorstellbar, wenn man sich den Eingriff europäischer Linguisten in lokale sprachpolitische Entwicklungen, in Bezug auf lokale Konzeptualisierungen von Sprache und Prestige und in Bezug auf die Förderung einiger und Mar-

ginalisierung anderer sprachlicher Formen bewusst macht, vor allem auch vor dem kolonialgeschichtlichen Hintergrund. Die Präsenz und der ‚Forschungsauftrag‘ des Linguisten in der Erhebung soziolinguistischer Daten haben eine klare Einwirkung auf eruierte Ergebnisse.

Wenn wir uns mit der Bedeutung von Kontext auf von uns erhobene Sprachdaten

<sup>7</sup> Siehe [[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9b/Lewis\\_W.\\_Hine\\_%28American\\_-\\_Self-Portrait\\_with\\_Newsboy\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9b/Lewis_W._Hine_%28American_-_Self-Portrait_with_Newsboy_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)] (aufgerufen am 20. März 2018).

beschäftigen, kommen wir an Bakhtin (1986: 88) nicht vorbei, der bemerkt, dass sprachliche Äußerungen in ihrem Kontext zudem unwiederholbar sind, d.h., dass jede Äußerung einmalig in einem bestimmten individuellen Kontext getätigt wird, und in dieser Form weder wiederholt noch normiert festgeschrieben werden kann. Wortlisten mit jugendsprachlichen Synonymen für ‚Bier‘, ‚Marihuana‘ oder ‚Sex‘ wären daher, aufbauend auf Bakhtin, nicht nur unrepräsentativ für die Sprache afrikanischer Jugendlicher, sondern an eine spezifische Situation gebunden (die im besten Fall ethnographisch einzufangen wäre, und vielleicht ähnlich wie in Taussigs Notizbuch nur durch eine Mischung aus Bild, Wort und Fantasie).

### 3.2 Imaginierte Dichotomien: Stadt- vs. Dorfsprache in Südoganda

Die scheinbar binäre Opposition von sprachlichen Praktiken in urbanem vs. ruralem Afrika bestimmt einen nicht geringen Teil der verfügbaren soziolinguistischen Literatur zu Kontaktsprachen in Megacities (Beck 2010, McLaughlin 2009) und findet sich vor allem in Studien zu Jugendsprachen (siehe vor allem das Label UAYL, *Urban African Youth Languages*, im Rahmen einer Konferenz in Kapstadt 2013 ins Leben gerufen). Auch wenn einige Studien diese Binarität anzweifeln und kritisch beleuchten (Hollington & Nassenstein 2018b) oder die Diversität und Dynamizität sprachlicher Praktiken in ruralen Räumen aufweisen (Mietzner & Storch 2015), formulieren viele der

jugendsprachlichen Arbeiten diese Kritik sehr milde (Hurst 2017; für eine radikalere Sichtweise siehe Nassenstein 2018 [im Druck]), oder beziehen ihre Forschung allgemein nur auf städtische Räume in Sub-Sahara-Afrika.

Luyaaye wurde bisher als Jugendsprache analysiert, die vor allem im urbanen Raum der ugandischen Hauptstadt Kampala verwendet wurde und nun langsam in rurale Gebiete vordringt, wie von Namyalo (2015) beschrieben:

Luyaaye is one of the urban youth language practices predominantly spoken in Kampala, Uganda. Most speakers are youths and young adults between the ages of 15 and 45. However, it is now gaining greater presence and legitimacy beyond urban settings and is slowly penetrating rural areas. (Namyalo 2015: 313)

Jugendsprache in ruralen Gebieten wird in Namyalos Analyse jedoch nicht weiter diskutiert, und der gesammelte Korpus an Daten stammt aus Kampala. Im Verlauf der Analyse wird immer wieder auf die Stadt und auf sprachliche Variation in allen fünf Stadtbezirken verwiesen (Lubaga, Kawempe, Central, Makindye, Nakawa), aber es werden keine Daten aus Bugandas<sup>8</sup> Dörfern präsentiert.

Im Februar 2015 hatte ich dank meines Kollegen Paulin Baraka Bose die Möglichkeit einige Interviews mit Motorradtaxifahrern zu führen, die vor allem im Stadtteil Bwaise operierten. Nach der Aufnahme gängiger Termini in Listen, wie beispielsweise *kazeeyi* (‚alte Person‘), *ganja/muyaaye* (‚Straßengauler‘) oder *kaveera* (‚hochprozentiger Alkohol

<sup>8</sup> Buganda bezeichnet eines der vier rekonstituierten ugandischen Königtümer, dessen Zentrum die Hauptstadt Kampala ist. Buganda ist hierbei deckungsgleich mit dem Verbreitungsgebiet der Bantusprache Luganda. Uganda bezeichnet den Nationalstaat, in dem mehr als 40 Sprachen gesprochen werden.

in Tüten') interessierte Paulin und mich vor allem die Verbreitung sprachlicher Innovation in ruralen Gebieten außerhalb Kampalas. Der *Bodaman* (lokaler Mototaxifahrer) Ivan berichtete mir, dass viele der in Kampala arbeitenden Motorradfahrer bis zu 50 Kilometer außerhalb der Stadt wohnten und daher als sprachliche Medien fungieren würden, die einerseits untereinander eine spezifische Form des Luyaaye verwendeten (ähnlich den Rikscha-Fahrern im Sudan, siehe Mugaddam 2015), aber andererseits auch die im Arbeitsumfeld verwendeten Lexeme in den Dörfern rund um Kampala verbreiten würden. Luyaaye sei somit keinesfalls mehr Ausdrucksmittel der Hauptstadt, sondern längst auch in dörflicheren Gebieten etabliert.

Am 27. März 2014 hielt ich einen Vortrag am Goethe-Zentrum Kampala zum Thema *Life mu City* ('Leben in der Stadt'), in dem es vor allem um Jugendsprache ging. Ich hatte vorher mit einigen Hip Hop Künstlern in Kampala Interviews geführt, die die Konstruktion einer urbanen Luyaaye-Identität kritisch sahen, und mir vor allem mitteilten, dass Dörfer und Städte im Königreich Buganda besser vernetzt seien, als dies zunächst den Anschein mache. Dies fasste ich in meinem Notizbuch zusammen, das ich kürzlich erneut auf meine Luyaaye-Eintragungen hin untersuchte:

Urbanitäts-Ruralitäts-Konzepte in Kampala sehr unterschiedlich zu anderen Settings; mehrsprachige Hip Hopper bringen Jugendsprache aus der Stadt in die Dörfer, wo sie herkommen. Auf Rukiga, Acholi, Lusoga, Luganda etc. Folglich hat jeder Jugendliche in Uganda mittlerweile fast Zugang zu Jugendsprache und Hip Hop auf Slang. (Notizbucheintrag nach mehreren Interviews mit Bana Mutibwa/Burney MC, März 2014)

In einem anderen Gespräch mit dem Musiker Bernard Nsubuga in seiner damaligen Malerwerkstatt im Stadtzentrum, der die Musik lange Jahre zuvor aufgegeben hatte und zum Zeitpunkt des Gesprächs Anfang 2014 in seinen frühen Fünfigern war, fragte ich nach der Variabilität von Luyaaye und der Verbreitung über die Städte hinaus. Bernard antwortete lächelnd mit einer Gegenfrage: „*A new T-shirt fashion takes two weeks to travel from the capital Kampala to the far off villages, so how long does it take Luyaaye youth slang to arrive there?*“. Mein Gesprächspartner war sich darüber bewusst, dass Luyaaye kein gänzlich urbanes Phänomen war, sondern vielmehr eine mobile Sprachpraxis, die mithilfe von Radios, durch Musik, Überlandbusse und Motorradtaxifahrer in das Umland getragen wurde. Vor allem Motorradtaxi spielten für die Verbreitung innerhalb Bugandas eine tragende Rolle, wie Ivan, einer meiner Gesprächspartner, bekräftigte. Junge Leute aus Kisoro im südwestlichen Grenzgebiet Ugandas mit der DR Kongo und Ruanda hatten mir einst erklärt, dass neue jugendsprachliche Termini aus der Hauptstadt (aus dem Luganda, Kiswahili etc.) mit großen Überlandbussen kämen, und sich sodann in den Dörfern rund um Kisoro, 600 Kilometer von Kampala entfernt, in Gemeinschaften jugendlicher Sprecher etablieren würden. Auch zahlreiche Studierende der einst renommierten Makerere University in Kampala wussten zu berichten, dass mit dem Campus assoziierte sprachliche Innovationen bereits nach kürzester Zeit in anderen Teilen des Landes vorzufinden seien, so zum Beispiel die Bezeichnungen junger Männer in den Wohnheimen für weibliche Studierende (mit Hilfe von Ziffern, deren Abbildung Körperformen entspricht, vgl. Nassenstein 2017b).

Die Erkenntnisse während längerer Gespräche (auch nach Konzerten) mit ugandischen Hip Hop Künstlern warfen zudem ein anderes Licht auf die Diskrepanz von Jugendsprache (als Ausdrucksmittel revoltierender Jugendlicher, sowie der von ihnen konsumierten Musik) und ihres vermeintlichen Gegenpols, der Standardsprache. Soziolinguistisch ist es kein Geheimnis, dass Standardsprachen Konstrukte sind, die an nationalstaatliche Gebilde gekoppelt waren oder aber in kolonial-missionarischem Kontext auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent geschaffen wurden. Im Falle von Luganda (der Standardsprache, die Luyaaye antagonistisch gegenübersteht), konzentrierte sich der Standardisierungsprozess auf eine bestimmte Zeitspanne und eine Ordensgemeinschaft:

I am referring to the French Catholic missionary congregation of the White Fathers and to the period between 1885 and 1921. In this period, the White Father missionaries, who arrived in the Lake Victoria region in 1879, published six Luganda grammars and dictionaries in French (and one in Latin) [...]. (Meeuwis 1999: 413)

Der Konstruktion von Standardsprache mag häufig auch eine Konstruktion von Jugendsprache folgen. Laut Bernard Nsubuga ist genau das auch im Falle von Luyaaye geschehen. Bis zur Mitte der 90er-Jahre wurde von ugandischen *Latin*-Sängern – ein westlich orientierter Musikstil, der Pop, kongolesische Rumba und kenianische Einflüsse mischte – immer wieder über Luyaaye und Bayaaye gesungen. Die Texte dieser Musiker, beispielsweise von Elly Wamala, Christopher Sebadduka und Paulo Kafeero, waren jedoch immer in standardisiertem Luganda gehalten

(laut Nsubuga). Luyaaye war daher beliebtes Thema auf der metasprachlichen Ebene, auf der das zweifelhafte Verhalten Jugendlicher und das negative Prestige auf der Straße adressiert wurde, wurde jedoch nie zum sprachlichen Medium der Musik. Obgleich sich dies sicher mit der Verbreitung von Hip Hop, Dancehall etc. gewandelt hat, sagt es viel über die Rolle aus, die frühe Jugendsprache im Musikbusiness in Uganda gespielt hat: Analog zur Konstruktion von Standardsprache (um ein bestimmtes sprachliches Prestige zu kreieren und Zugang zu Bildung und Macht in Anlehnung an ein europäisches Vorbild zu monopolisieren/hierarchisieren), wurde von ugandischen Sängern Luyaaye musikalisch konstruiert. Metalinguistische Referenzen waren hierbei deutlich wichtiger als die tatsächliche Verwendung der Sprache auf der Straße, wie von Namyalo (2015) historisch zusammengefasst. In meinem Notizbuch habe ich folgenden Eintrag zur kreativen Verwendung von Standardsprache vermerkt, inspiriert von den Ideen der Musiker, die ich befragen durfte.

Standardsprache kann Jugendbewegungen pushen: Der frühe Rapper Babaluku hat in Uganda seit 2005 engl. Rap in Std. Luganda übertragen. Mit neuen Ideen versehen und als Transportmedium von Messages wie „Hip Hop“ kann Standardsprache durchaus Ausdrucksmedium von Jugendlichen sein, ein Aspekt, der häufig übersehen wird. (Notizbucheintrag nach dem Gespräch mit B. Nsubuga, 2014)

Die Trennung von vermeintlicher Stadt- und Dorfsprache in der soziolinguistischen Betrachtung von Jugendsprachen ist eine imaginierte Binarität, die vor allem auf einer

Assoziation von Rückständigkeit ländlicher Gebiete in Subsahara-Afrika und einer assoziierten raschen Wandlung von Großstädten aufbaut, ohne deren Verflechtungen genügend miteinzubeziehen. Auch eine häufige Gegenüberstellung von Standard-Realisierung (als Sprache von nicht mehr Jugendlichen) und Nicht-Standardrealisierung (als kreative Sprache adoleszenter Sprecher) wirkt obsolet, gemessen am Beispiel ugandischer Hip Hop Künstler.

Im Sinne einer stetigen Vernetzung von Dorf und Stadt, die kein rezentes Phänomen ist, sondern in vielen afrikanischen Ländern schon in vorkolonialer Zeit Normalität darstellte (vgl. auch Hollington & Nassenstein 2018b), sollte in der Jugendsprachforschung auf eine Dichotomie von ruraler vs. urbaner Sprache in zukünftigen Studien im besten Fall verzichtet werden, weil sie seit der vermehrten Nutzung sozialer Medien und der Verbreitung des Internets über Mobiltelefon immer weniger ausgeprägt ist.<sup>9</sup> Obgleich die Analyse der Sprache jugendlicher Sprecher in den Dörfern des Buganda-Königreichs weiterhin aussteht, kann man davon ausgehen, dass sie wenig im Vergleich zur Sprache ihrer Altersgenossen in der Hauptstadt Kampala variiert. Dies wurde meinem Kollegen Paulin Baraka Bose und mir deutlich, als wir Westuganda (Mbarara und Umgebung) bereisten und uns dort mit Musikern über den Einfluss von Luganda/Luyaaye auf die dortige Jugendsprache Ruyaye (basierend auf Runyankore) austauschten. „*Luganda words, they go through to everyone*“, bemerkte Nick Lee, einer unserer Gesprächspartner, lächelnd.

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<sup>9</sup> Siehe dazu zum Beispiel einige der soziolinguistischen Panels auf der ECAS7-Konferenz in Basel (2017), die diese thematische Ausrichtung hatten.

### 3.3 Artefakte und Ideologien in Burundi

Nicht nur wirkt sich die Präsenz des Linguisten in der soziolinguistischen Feldforschung auf das Ergebnis aus, das oft viel ambiger und kontextgebundener erscheint als erwartet/erwünscht, sondern auch Sprachideologien können von jugendsprachlichen Sprechern übernommen werden und Sprache zu Artefakten machen, von Praxis zu einer Fixierung, die beispielsweise ein Printobjekt im Bücherregal der Bibliothek darstellt, wie von Blommaert beobachtet:

A 'language', ideally, can be carried in one's back pocket or briefcase; it can be stored on the shelves of a library and it can be passed around and traded as an object. (Blommaert 2008: 292)

Auch Lüpke & Storch (2013) führen an, dass die Dokumentation von Praktiken fixierte Sprachen kreiere, vor allem durch den selektiven Charakter der Feldnotizen, ganz nach Tradition der Kolonial- und Missionarlinguistik, die oftmals die ersten (präskriptiven) Beschreibungen afrikanischer Sprachen hervorbrachte.

In the African context, there is no clear notion of language that is independent of the activities of linguists or missionaries [...] A documentation or description is not of a language; it creates a language. [...] they describe a – more or less explicit and motivated – selection of the communicative practices they encounter in their field sites. (Lüpke & Storch 2013: 2–3)

Um dies weiter zu veranschaulichen, werfe ich einen kritischen Blick auf meine eigene Forschung zu einem Soziolekt des Kirundi in Bujumbura im Jahr 2014. Ausgehend von meiner Forschung zum (von mir und jungen Ruandern derart benannten) Imvugo y'Umuhanda, ‚Straßensprache‘, in Ruanda, berichteten mir junge Burunder von einer jugendsprachlichen Praktik des Kirundi, die sie *le slang* nannten, woraus im Rahmen der Analyse *Kirundi Slang*<sup>10</sup> wurde (Nassenstein 2017a). Während einer sehr kurzen Zeit war es mir möglich in Bujumbura Wörter, Sätze und auch kurze Dialoge zu sammeln, vor allem in Form von schriftlichen Notizen, die jugendliche Sprecher anfertigten, um aussagekräftiges Material zu liefern, zum Teil orientiert an meinen Mitschriften von Konversationen und Diskussionen. Die beiden jungen Männer, mit denen ich in Bujumbura arbeitete, erhielten für ihre Mitarbeit an der Analyse selbstverständlich eine angemessene Aufwandsentschädigung; verschriftlichte Sprache war somit unwissentlich kommodifiziert und zu einem starren Artefakt geworden, das beide Sprecher beflissentlich bei mir ablieferten. Meiner Bitte mir auch mit gesprochenen Daten auszuhelfen, wurde sodann nachgekommen, indem die verschriftlichten Wörter und Sätze des Kirundi Slang gelesen und aufgenommen wurden, und mir per WhatsApp und Email als Audioaufnahmen zugeschickt wurden. Basierend auf

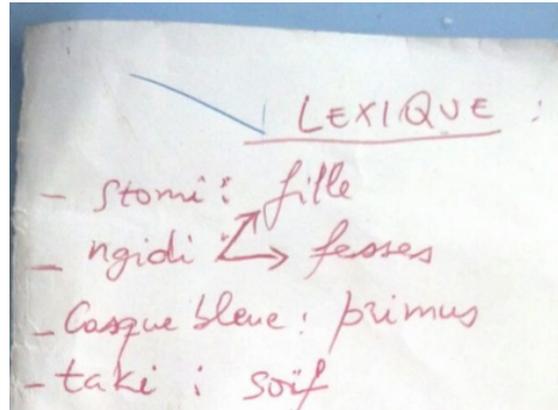


Abb. 4. Handgeschriebene Daten als sprachliche Artefakte (Kirundi Slang)

meiner Sprachideologie, Praxis auf- und festzuschreiben um dieser analytisch zu genügen, kreierte Sprecher Notizen und Audiodateien in sozialen Medien, die mit der sprachlichen Realität in den Straßen Bujumburas nur noch wenig gemein hatten (siehe Abbildung 4).

Meiner eigenen Verantwortung in der Ausprägung eines Sprachkonzepts von Jugendsprache als „fixierter Box“ an Realisierungen wurde ich bewusst, als ich zwei Jahre später mit denselben Sprechern zum Kiswahili von Bujumbura arbeitete. Eine ähnliche Methodologie antizipierend, schrieben einige Sprecher fiktive Kiswahili-Dialoge auf, ähnlich dem Skript für ein Theaterstück, fügten Wortlisten hinzu und nahmen die vorgelesenen Dialoge auf (siehe als Ausschnitt Exzerpt 1). Meine Verwirrung nach einer

<sup>10</sup> Das Versehen von fluiden Sprachpraktiken mit fixierten Namen (d.h. jede Form von Sprache, da jedwede Sprache immer fluide und von Wandel geprägt ist) durch Linguisten ist ein äußerst kritisch zu wertendes Unterfangen, und oft an Ideologien derjenigen Linguisten gebunden, die die Jugendsprache beschreiben. Das von mir untersuchte *Yanké* (2014) war zuvor in der Literatur vor allem als *Lingala ya Bayankée* (van Pelt 2000) bekannt, mit Sprechern einigte ich mich sodann 2009 auf *Yanké*, sowohl Sprache als auch (Straßen-)Identität verkörpernd. Konkurrierende Labels waren, wie von Sprechern vorgegeben, *Yakuza* (aus dem Japanischen abgeleitet, als Bezeichnung für die Mafia), *Kinoiserie* (in Analogie zur kongolesischen Hauptstadt Kinshasa) oder einfach *L'argot* („Slang“). Ich sehe meine Bemühungen, mit den Interviewpartnern ein festes Label zu finden, mittlerweile rückwirkend als problematisch und als Eingriff in ein von Fluidität gekennzeichnetes Sprachkonzept auf Sprecherseite an.

ersten Hörprobe hatte vor allem mit der getragenen Langsamkeit der vorgelesenen Passagen zu tun, aber auch noch mit einer zusätzlichen Beobachtung: Immer wieder um Kondome, Rotlicht, alkoholisierte Eskapaden zirkulierend, klang das Kiswahili von Bujumbura plötzlich auffallend stark nach Jugendsprache, obgleich es mir dieses Mal gar nicht um jugendliches Sprechen ging (siehe Wortwahl und thematische Ausrichtung in folgendem Ausschnitt).

(Bujumbura Swahili)

(1) Eloi: Zi-le zi-li-kuw-a ni talks, man!  
 PP<sub>10</sub>-DEM<sub>2</sub> SM<sub>10</sub>-PST<sub>1</sub>-sein-FV FOK NP<sub>9</sub>.Schlampe Mann

Ni-li-kuj-a ona ki-cano cha hatari  
 SM<sub>1</sub>SG-PST<sub>1</sub>-komm-FV sehen NP<sub>7</sub>-Geld PP<sub>7</sub>:KONN Gefahr

lakini ba-ka-zi-kul-a bi-a (bya) u-méchant.  
 aber SM<sub>3</sub>PL-KONS-OM<sub>10</sub>-ESS-FV PP<sub>8</sub>-KONN NP<sub>14</sub>-Gemeinheit

Ni-ka-renté na ma-chicha i-a (ya)  
 SM<sub>1</sub>SG-KONS-zurückkehr mit NP<sub>6</sub>-leere.Tasche PP<sub>6</sub>-KONN

nguvu lakini tu-li-pig-a dose trop!  
 NP<sub>9</sub>.Kraft aber SM<sub>1</sub>PL-PST<sub>1</sub>-schlag-FV NP<sub>9</sub>.Dosis zuviel

‘Das waren Schlampen, Mann! Ich habe viel Geld aufgetrieben. Aber aus Gemeinheit haben sie es auf gebraucht. Ich bin mit absolut leeren Taschen nach Hause gegangen, aber wir haben es echt ordentlich krachen lassen!’

Bryan: Ehh, kazi i-ako (yako), bro ...  
 INTERJEK NP<sub>9</sub>.Arbeit PP<sub>9</sub>-POSS<sub>2</sub>SG brother

u-ta-kuf-a na ma-kotso, bi-le bi-nayi  
 SM<sub>2</sub>SG-FUT-sterb-FV mit NP<sub>6</sub>-HIV PP<sub>8</sub>-DEM<sub>2</sub> NP<sub>8</sub>-Prostituierte

bi-na-mind bi-cano, man! Tumik-ish-a godillot!  
 SM<sub>8</sub>-PRS-denk.an NP<sub>8</sub>-Geld Mann arbeit-KAUS-IMP NP<sub>9</sub>.Kondom

‘Ach, das ist deine Angelegenheit, Bruder ... du wirst an Aids sterben, diese Prostituierten denken ans Geld, Mann! Benutz ein Kondom!’

Kirundi Slang	Bujumbura Swahili	Übersetzung
<i>umudemu</i>	<i>demu, kademu</i>	„Mädchen, Freundin“
<i>PNB</i>	<i>PNB</i>	„Polizei, Polizist“
<i>guchoma</i>	<i>kuchoma</i>	„Marihuana rauchen“
<i>gufata ku nguvu</i>	<i>kubana kwa nguvu</i>	„vergewaltigen“

Tabelle 1. ‚Doppelgänger‘ – fluide Lexeme in fixierten Kategorien

Im Dialog und in den Kiswahili-Wortlisten tauchten zudem häufig ‚Doppelgänger‘ auf (siehe Tabelle 1), die identisch waren mit Lexemen, die in anderen Listen zuvor für das Kirundi Slang notiert worden waren. Sprachideologisch hoch interessant, wurden die von mir erfragten ‚Daten‘ 2016 unter dem Label *Le Swahili de Bujumbura* festgeschrieben, waren jedoch zwei Jahre zuvor von denselben Sprechern als *Kirundi Slang* kategorisiert worden.

Sprecher hatten mehrfach betont, dass diese und ähnliche Wörter sowohl im Kirundi Slang enthalten seien als auch im Bujumbura Swahili („*tous ces mots sont utilisés dans le Kirundi Slang*“). Das Problem war eindeutig: In gesprochener Form hatten die burundischen Studierenden Eloi und Bryan (siehe Bsp. 1) keine Probleme dasselbe Repertoire an Lexemen in unterschiedlichen kontextuellen Praktiken zu verwenden, *ich* als Linguist schien die Praktiken jedoch trennen zu wollen. In Listen aufgenommen, erschienen die Termini leblos, separierbar, beliebig, Sprecher und Kontext ausblendend. Irvine (2008: 331) nennt in ihrem Aufsatz zu historischen kolonialen Sprachideologien häufig erzeugte reduzierte Repräsentationen

afrikanischer Sprachen, die aufgrund von Aufnahmen in ungleichen Machtverhältnissen mit marginalisierten Akteuren (Gefängnisinsassen, Kindern aus Missionsschulen etc.) herrührten. Die konkurrierenden Wörterlisten aus Bujumbura erschienen mir im Nachhinein ebenfalls wie inhaltsleere und reduzierte Formen von Sprache, die der Komplexität der sprachlichen Repertoires meiner Gegenüber nicht gerecht wurden.

Die Diskrepanz zwischen wohlmeinendem Verständnis in Bezug auf heteroglossische fluide Praktiken von burundischen Sprechern einerseits und andererseits der eigenen Verwurzelung in einem Fach, das als vor allem deskriptive Disziplin auf der Beschreibung von trennbaren Sprachen aufbaut, wird an diesem Beispiel sehr deutlich. Der afrikanistische Zugang zu afrikanischen Jugendsprachpraktiken birgt zahlreiche Stolperfallen und scheint oft unzureichend (beispielsweise, wenn Sprachideologien des Linguisten von den Gesprächspartnern in der Produktion von ‚Daten‘ kopiert werden). Alternative Zugänge, die in allgemeiner soziolinguistischer Theorie gründen, sind derweil selten (oder nicht

erwünscht); dies verursacht einen methodologischen Konflikt in der Annäherung an Jugendsprachpraktiken.

Bell (2017: 593) resümiert, in seinem Rückblick auf Entwicklungen in der Soziolinguistik während seiner Zeit als Herausgeber einer großen soziolinguistischen Zeitschrift, dass viele Aufsätze rund um das Thema *Translanguaging* (García & Wei 2014, etc.) ironischerweise Daten anführen, die darauf basieren, welche unterschiedlichen Sprachen von Sprechern gesprochen werden. Er führt weiter aus, dass diese Konstrukte von benennbaren Sprachen jedoch möglicherweise benötigt werden um sich Konzepten wie dem *Translanguaging* überhaupt zu nähern. In seiner Studie zum Kirundi Slang wählt Tacke-Köster (2016) die Schablone des *Metrolingualism*, die sehr gut auf Sprachverwendung junger Burunder im urbanen Setting zu passen scheint, wobei er vor allem eine soziohistorische Analyse des urbanen Raums von Bujumburas in die Studie einschließt, an den multilinguale Praxis und sprachliche Performanz von Sprechern gebunden sind (im Sinne von Pennycook & Otsuji's „*spatial repertoires*“). Die fluiden Sprachpraktiken junger Burunder werden dabei als eine Art „*everyday cosmopolitanism*“ oder „*multilingualism from below*“ (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015: 9–10) jenseits westlicher Superdiversitäts-Diskurse verstanden. Dies birgt möglicherweise weniger Gefahren für eine Artefaktualisierung von Jugendsprache.

### 3.4 Problematische jugendsprachliche Kategorisierungen in Kenia

Außer der Rolle und Einflussnahme des Linguisten im Forschungsprozess sind häufig soziologische Kategorisierungen problematisch,

wie das Beispiel Sheng (Kenia) zeigt. Sheng wird, obwohl oft auch von merklich älteren Sprechern gesprochen, wie mehrere Studien zeigen, weiterhin als „Jugend“sprache gehandelt, und ist weit verbreitet auch in Kontexten, die weder von jungen Leuten dominiert noch straßenbasiert sind. Die soziale Verbreitung von Sheng hat so weit geführt, dass der ehemalige US-Präsident Barack Obama während seines Besuchs in Kenia 2015 die kenianische Zuhörerschaft während des GES-Gipfels auf Sheng ansprach. Dies war von großem Beifall begleitet (Bsp. 2).

(Sheng)

- (2) Ni-aje wa-see, hawayu-ni?  
KOP-ITRG SM<sub>2</sub>-alter.Mann ITRG-PL  
Wie läuft's, Leute?

Auch Musik, Politik und Werbung machen Verwendung von Sheng. Abbildung (5) zeigt die Werbung einer Bank, die mit dem Slogan *Kunacha acre na milli tatu pap!* [Gewinn einen Morgen Land und drei Mio. KSh, los!] wirbt, wobei Kariuki, Kanana & Kebeya (2015: 243) das Wort *kunacha* als Metathese von *chanuka* erklären (‚blühen‘, hier ‚gewinnen‘) und *pap!* als eine Art Idiophon, das das Geräusch schnipsender Finger imitiert.

Beide Beispiele zeigen, dass Sheng zwar keine Jugendsprache mehr ist, aber gerne als vermeintlich solche im Diskurs konstruiert wird (mit Überraschungseffekt, junger/revolutionärer Aura, verstärkter Aufmerksamkeit etc.), und sich gut verkauft. Obwohl Sheng weit verbreitet weder *resistance identity* verkörpert (und auch Castells' 1997 „*project identity*“ scheint hier nicht recht passen zu wollen), noch als *antilanguage* zu werten ist



Abb. 5. *Kunacha acre na milli tatu pap!*  
(Kariuki, Kanana & Kebeya 2015: 244)

(vgl. Hollington & Nassenstein im Erscheinen), wenn wir Kießling & Mous' (2004) Kategorien verwenden, sondern vielmehr eine Vielzahl an urbanen, ruralen, ethnisierten und kreativen Registern umfasst, fanden sich Schlagwörter wie *urbanity*, *resistance* und *street* in den meisten Abstrakten der Sheng-bezogenen Vorträge auf der vergangenen Jugendsprachenkonferenz in Nairobi im Dezember 2015.

Die gegenwärtige Forschung zur heute oft als neue *Lingua Franca* Kenias beschriebene Sprachpraxis, ist vor allem von engagierten kenianischen Linguisten mitgeprägt, deren Ansätze vor allem die epistemische Marginalisierung von Sheng als Sprache der Jugend oder Sprache der Straße, als chaotische Sprachpraxis aus dem Globalen Süden angreifen (da diese Herabstufung bzw. das Nischendasein auch gleichsam die akademische Beschäftigung mit dieser Sprache herabsetzt).

Sheng schwebt in metalinguistischen Diskursen, in denen sehr viel über Sheng und seine zukünftige Rolle als neue kenianische Sprache geschrieben wird, zwischen avisierter Standardisierung oder aber Dekonstruktion (siehe unten). Vor allem kenianische Linguisten plädieren auf linguistischen Konferenzen, z.B. auf einer Tagung in New Haven/Yale im Oktober 2016 und dem jährlichen Swahili Kolloquium in Bayreuth, für eine Standardisierung von Sheng, um es zu einer „Sprache“ werden zu lassen (und eine artifizielle Sprachgeburt einer längst existenten und weitverbreiteten Sprache zu betreiben, wie auch im Internet; siehe Abbildung 6)<sup>11</sup> und um ihm somit ein Prestige jenseits des marginalen Jugendsprachenbereichs zu verschaffen. Dies ist ein Unterfangen, das aufgrund seiner stark sprachplanerischen Ziele und des damit einhergehenden Eingriffs in etwas, das sich als fluide Praxis so nicht normieren lässt, über kurz oder lang scheitern muss.

Gemeinsam mit dem kenianischen Linguisten David Barasa hatte ich die

<sup>11</sup> Online-Wörterbücher wie das in Abb. 6 dargestellte versammeln eine Vielzahl von historischen wie aktuellen Sheng-Wörtern und wollen somit der schnellen Wandelbarkeit der Sprache entgegenwirken und Sheng möglichst umfassend dokumentieren. Die Beispielsätze regen zum Nachsprechen an; die Wahl des Sheng-Worts des Tages zelebriert Lexeme nach ihrem (vermeintlichen) Seltenheitsstatus (“*word rarity*”).



Abb. 6. Das Sheng-Wort des Tages und die Markierung von Seltenheit (*rarity*)<sup>12</sup>

Möglichkeit 2015 mit älteren Ateso-Sprechern Telefoninterviews zu führen, die sich im kenianisch-ugandischen Grenzgebiet befanden. Sheng in ruralen Iteso-Gemeinschaften stellte dort keine exzeptionell jugendsprachliche Praktik dar, sondern wurde ebenfalls von älteren Männern gesprochen, durchsetzt mit Teso-Elementen, wie wir erfuhren. Barasa selber erinnerte sich ebenfalls an seine Jugend in den 1990er-Jahren, als Sheng in ruralen Gebieten Kenias bereits vielmehr „linguistische Normalität“ darstellte denn geheime, mit Widerstand assoziierte Sprache.

I stayed in a small Teso village town, Chakol in my early life. By then 'Sheng', Kenya's urban youth language, was common. (D. Barasa, 2015)

Aus anderen ruralen Gebieten Kenias wird Ähnliches berichtet. In einem Telefoninterview mit der jungen Dame Wendy Awuor aus Westkenia wurde mir erklärt, dass

rurale Formen von Sheng mit Einflüssen des westnilotischen Dholuo unter anderem über Facebook verbreitet und in Facebook-Gruppen gepflegt würden (vgl. Nassenstein 2018 [im Druck]). Auch Rüschi (persönliche Kommunikation) berichtet von einer weiten Verbreitung von Sheng in Dholuo-sprachigen Gemeinschaften in Kisumu und Umgebung, was einer sehr gängigen lokalen Praxis (entsprechend dem Konzept von Pennycook 2010) entspricht, in Verbindung mit lokalem Wissen und (um) gedeutet von lokalen Akteuren.

Wie ist Sheng daher am ehesten zu klassifizieren, und wie ist damit umzugehen? Festgeschrieben und nicht selten als separate linguistische Entität gehandelt, als etwas Geheimnisvolles, das eigentlich jedes Geheimnis verloren hat, muss Sheng daher demystifiziert oder *disinvented* werden (vgl. Makoni & Pennycook 2007). Dabei ist die Ironie, oder sogar das Dramatische, dass dem „Erfundenen“ (oder Kolonialem) lokal nichts gegenübersteht, und keine Binarität besteht. Das Lokale (in Form von kenianischen Linguisten, aber auch präkolonialen Sprachkonzepten) ist immer von Sprachideologien des Nordens durchdrungen, sei es in Standardisierungsbestrebungen von Sheng, und in Debatten aus Sheng eine zwar negativ behaftete aber fixierte Sprache zu machen. Wenn wir Makoni & Pennycooks (2007) „*disinventing*“ auf Sheng anwenden, haben wir – nichts. Was uns bleibt, ist Sheng als Prozess zu werten.

<sup>12</sup> Siehe [http://www.sheng.co.ke] (aufgerufen am 18. März 2018).

### 3.5 Kreativität und Subversion im Kongo

Der letzte Aspekt betrifft, was lokal oft tatsächlich als sprachlich zerstörerisch angesehen wird, nämlich individuelle agentive und teils subversive Manipulationen von Sprechern, die an *broken language* erinnern und an ein Spiel mit unkontrollierbaren Wörtern. Da Soziolinguisten Kreativität und Manipulation von Sprache dokumentieren möchten, wenn jugendsprachliches Sprechen in Afrika untersucht wird, muss auch erkannt werden, dass Lexeme individuell kreiert, mit manipulierter Sprache spielerisch umgegangen, und im Rahmen des breiten linguistischen Repertoires Agentivität durch idiolektale Abweichung ausgedrückt werden kann, obgleich dies selten Eingang in jugendsprachliche Beschreibungen findet.

Dies kann in freien sprachlichen Realisierungen das Prestige des Sprechenden erhöhen, oder als subversive Kritik oder Mimikry dienen, um die Lücken in Wörterlisten oder elizitierten Sätzen kreativ zu füllen, die von Linguisten vorgegeben werden, aber denen lokal keine Entsprechungen gegenüberstehen, oder welche, die wenig aussagekräftig wären. Eine fehlende Einbeziehung des Sprechers als agentive individuelle Kraft kann somit zu nichtssagenden Datenkorpora führen. Mein kongolesischer Gesprächspartner Omende, vertraut mit den Praktiken Yanké und Langila, erklärt in Bezug auf die *supériorité* des Sprechers:

De la création pour inventer des mots... exemple: Quand je dis *óyo palesting nanga*, donc, ça c'est ma maison', je peux aussi dire *ça óyo pallaso nanga*. Donc, c'est aussi 'ça c'est ma maison'. Alors, j'ai inventé le mot *pallaso*. Alors, quand je parle

avec des jeunes, ça va bien s'entendre, parce que ça tient une référence au *palesting*. *Kosála mobúlu té, óyo pallaso nangái*. Donc, c'est-à-dire, 'c'est mon palais', *palesting* en référence... Par rapport à la supériorité, tu comprends et tu as cette capacité la en référence à quelque chose, quelque chose que tu peux exprimer et que sera facilement adaptée, juste pour faire une différence du milieu.

[Über Kreativität in der Erfindung von Wörtern... zum Beispiel: Wenn ich sage *óyo palesting nanga*, also ‚das ist mein Haus‘, dann kann ich gleichermaßen sagen *óyo pallaso nanga*. Das ist also auch ‚das ist mein Haus‘. Ich habe also das Wort *pallaso* erfunden. Wenn ich dann mit jungen Leuten rede, klingt das gut, weil das einen Bezug hat zu *palesting*. *Kosála mobúlu té, óyo pallaso nangái* (‚kein Chaos verursachen, das ist mein Haus‘). Also, das heißt das ist mein Haus, in Bezug zu *palesting*. Was Überlegenheit angeht, *du* verstehst es und *du* hast diese Fähigkeit in Bezug auf etwas, etwas, das du ausdrücken kannst und das leicht angepasst werden kann, nur um einen Unterschied des Milieus zu machen.] (F. Omende, 2016, meine Hervorhebung)

Kritik an der Aufnahmesituation oder den hierarchischen Verhältnissen zwischen Sprachassistent (meist mit dem unsäglichen Terminus „Informant“ betitelt) und Linguist kann genauso sehr Ursache für unerwartete und unverständliche Antworten sein. In diesen Fällen ‚spricht‘ das Feld ‚zurück‘ (von Hollington, Nassenstein & Storch im Erscheinen als „*ideologies of the unpleasant and the incomprehensible*“ bezeichnet), und zwar in großer Ordentlichkeit gemäß den linguistischen Vorgaben: Wörterlisten werden gefüllt, etymologische Erklärungen werden aufgenommen, Texte werden gesprochen, in der

Annahme (des Linguisten) adäquate Sprachdaten zum Yanké oder Langila zu erhalten, die bisherigen Beschreibungen entsprechen und tiefergehende Einblicke bieten. Dass die Performanz des Sprechers hier lediglich Ausdruck von Langeweile, geschickt verborgener Kritik an der Aufnahmesituation oder kreative Wortneuschöpfung sein mag, wird deutlich in den folgenden Beispielen (3-4), von meinem Gesprächspartner zur Veranschaulichung spontan modifiziert.

(Langila)

- (3a) óyo palesting nanga  
DEM NP<sub>9</sub>.Haus POSS<sub>1SG</sub>  
 ‚dies ist mein Haus‘

(Idiol. Manipulation)

- (3b) óyo pallaso nanga  
DEM Haus POSS<sub>1SG</sub>  
 ‚dies ist mein Haus‘

(Yanké)

- (4a) Ya’á na dinero nanga!  
komm:IMP mit NP<sub>9</sub>.Geld POSS<sub>1SG</sub>  
 ‚Komm mit meinem Geld!‘

- (4b) o’-o-sál-a dinero nanga bien  
SM<sub>2SG</sub>-FUT-mach-FV Essen POSS<sub>1SG</sub> gut  
 ‚Dann bereite mir mal eine gute Mahlzeit zu!‘

Wie können wir sicher sein, dass beforschte Jugendliche nicht viel öfters von der Aufnahmesituation (oder der teilnehmenden Beobachtung etc.) Besitz ergreifen und nicht mehr länger nur *acteurs*, sondern auch *auteurs* sind? Dies würde nicht nur unser Verständnis von Jugendsprache und der häufig stattfindenden Benennung und Klassifikation solcher Praktiken ändern, sondern auch die oft gestellte Frage nach Innovationsprozessen und deren Verbreitung (vgl. Martinet 1955 zu den „*chaînes de traction/chaînes de propulsion*“, Keller 1989 und die unsichtbare Hand, Labov 2001 zu „*saccadic leaders*“, Aitchinson 2001 zum Vierstufenmodell von Innovation, und viele mehr). Scherzhaft erwog ich einst mit meinem oben erwähnten Gesprächspartner Omende in Kinshasa im Jahr 2011 die Möglichkeit ein Yanké-Wort zu erfinden und in Umlauf zu bringen, aus reiner Neugier, allen Theorien zur Verbreitung von Jugendsprache zum Trotz (das beliebig neugeschöpfte Wort lautete *weko*, ‚die Frau eines anderen Mannes begehren/verführen‘). Vier Jahre später, als Omende längst Student in Uganda war, kamen wir eines Abends plötzlich auf das Thema zu sprechen. Nach eigener Aussage hatte er es seitdem mehrfach in Kinshasa gehört.

#### 4. Erforschung und alternative Konzepte: Jugendsprache 2.0?

Kritik ist weitaus leichter zu äußern als wegweisende neue Richtungen vorzugeben. Wie kann die Erforschung von jugendsprachlichem Sprechen in Afrika daher aussehen, und welche methodischen Neuerungen können umgesetzt werden? Childs, Good & Mitchell (2014: 182) betonen in ihrem inspirierenden Aufsatz über ein mögliches Modell für soziolinguistische Sprachdokumentation

the need for an expansion of the documentarian's task and for an orientation of the field's methods to a more sociolinguistically informed and reflective perspective. [...] [I]t has been further suggested that we need a change in how we view the role of language, [...] as a way to escape the tyranny of colonial language policies.

Die reflektiertere Perspektive, die auch in der Beschreibung von Jugendsprachpraktiken notwendig ist, wurde anhand mehrerer Beispiele ausführlich erläutert. Die Tyrannei kolonialer Sprachpolitik wirkt in Form latenter und häufig unbewusster Ideologien in der Feldforschung fort, die uns gleichermaßen im Weg stehen als dass sie auch unsere Forschungsergebnisse beeinflussen:

A related pervasive theme [...] was the relevance of understanding 'latent' ideologies – that is, ideologies that are so embedded in our way of acting that it is difficult to avoid them – that can prevent or minimize the application of sociolinguistic approaches to language documentation. (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014: 182)

Weiter führen die drei Autoren an, dass methodologische Neuerungen in der Jugendsprachforschung einerseits die Notwendigkeit interdisziplinärer Kooperationen erforderten (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014: 183), andererseits jedoch auch *neue* Formen der Interaktion zwischen Linguist und jungen Sprechern. Vor allem eine Kooperationsbasis auf Augenhöhe zwischen Forschern und Sprechern wird hierbei weitaus andere Ergebnisse erzielen können als teilweise noch stark hierarchisierte Beziehungen. Auch die Einbeziehung von Ästhetik und Poetik (wie in Formen ethnocinematographischer Dokumentation, vgl. Dimmendaal 2010: 155) könnte hier neue, ergiebigere Resultate bringen. Selbstdokumentarische Zeugnisse, in denen Sheng, Tsotsitaal oder Yanké in verschiedenen Formen dargestellt oder performiert würde (Musik, Poetry Slams, oder Street Art; siehe auch Lianza & Mietzner, dieser Band), wären in diesem Fall ausdrucksstärkere Repliken als mancher soziolinguistische Aufsatz; siehe auch Maribe & Brookes (2014) inspirierende Methodik. Auch neue soziolinguistische Theorien sind hierbei gefragt: Anstelle von einer Annahme separierbarer linguistischer ‚Codes‘ oder fixierter zu dokumentierender Jugend,„sprachen“, können rezenter soziolinguistische Trends wie *Translanguaging* (García & Wei 2014) und *Metrolingualism* (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015) als fluidere analytische Zugänge zur Sprachpraxis von afrikanischen Jugendlichen dienen.

Jugendsprache muss ferner nicht zwangsläufig als linguistische Abweichung von einer Norm, in einem ständig fixen Verhältnis zu einem standardsprachlichen Konstrukt gesehen werden, wie dies oft scheint, wenn Sprechen in Afrika von Nicht-Jugendsprachensprechern fokussiert, exotisiert oder

humorisiert wird. Sprache von jungen Afrikanern, oder solchen, die sich als junge Leute kategorisieren (würden), kann in alltäglichen Interaktionen ebenfalls ‚Jugendsprache‘ sein, beispielsweise als kreativer Ausdruck künstlerischer Praxis. Dies illustriere ich anhand dreier Beispiele von wenig konventionellen Jugendsprachensprechern aus Ostafrika. Sprachbiographien könnten als Genre beispielhaft den akteurszentrierteren Blick auf Jugendsprachensprecher und ihre agentive, teils sehr konventionelle Verwendung sprachlicher Repertoires (trotz Jugend) deutlich machen. Repertoires, in denen Jugendsprache eventuell nur eine marginale Rolle zukommt, oder als Teil kommunikativer Repertoires an die Verwendung in Musik, Body Art oder Fotografie gebunden ist.

Einige Beispiele mögen dies illustrieren: Léon Moka aus Kisangani (DR Kongo; siehe Abb. 7), beispielsweise, der seit seiner Ankunft in Uganda vor einigen Jahren in der Band *R’Afrika* rappt, versteht Sprache, und auch Jugendsprache, vor allem als Emotion. Lingala ist die Sprache der Liebe, der Nostalgie für seine Heimat (und habe ihn bei einem Konzert auch schon einmal zum Weinen gebracht), Kiswahili eher ein weit verbreitetes Medium im Rap, das Zuhörer von Dar es Salaam über Nairobi bis Kampala erreiche, für ihn jedoch viel weniger persönlich. Das gleiche gelte für Swahili-Jugendsprachen aus Kenia oder Tansania, also *Lugha ya Mitaani* und *Sheng*. Die Varietät des Kiswahili, die er in seinen Texten verwendet, ist daher das Kiswahili von Kisangani (DR Kongo), ein vereinfachter und nicht-standardisierter

Dialekt (vgl. Nassenstein 2015). Jugendsprache kann Eingang finden in seine Texte, jedoch nicht zwangsweise. Jugendsprachliche Termini aus dem Kindoubil (wie die Lingala-Jugendsprache in Léons Heimatstadt Kisangani genannt wird, siehe Wilson 2015) würden Würze verleihen und Abwechslung in die Stücke bringen, wenn vom Musiker in Alltagssprache eingeflochten, drückten jedoch keine Identität aus. Léons Vorbild ist Youssoupha, ein französischer Rapper mit kongolesischen Wurzeln; *R’Afrikas* Stücke



Abb. 7. Léon Moka, Mitglied der Band *R’Afrika*

erinnern stark an französischen Banlieue-Rap, auch durch die Häufigkeit von *Verlan* in den Texten.<sup>13</sup>

Kurzbiographien könnten auch Repertoires beleuchten, in denen Jugendsprache sehr strategisch verwendet wird, kommodifiziert als künstlerische Ressource im Falle des kenianischen Tätowierers Drulvin Carl aus Nairobi, wenn Kunden ihn auf *Sheng* via WhatsApp anschreiben und Preise diskutieren, oder aber Tätowierungen wünschen,

<sup>13</sup> Das Interview mit Léon Moka wurde von Studierenden der JGU über Skype im Rahmen einer Lehrveranstaltung zu Variation und Standardisierung im Februar 2018 geführt. Für *R’Afrikas* Clip „*Un Jour*“ siehe [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luCPWaMu8Kc] (aufgerufen am 3. Februar 2018).

die Sheng-Bestandteile aufweisen, Sheng ansonsten im Alltag jedoch keine Rolle spielt. Oder aber Fidele Omende (bereits mehrfach erwähnt in diesem Aufsatz), der heute Medienwissenschaften in Uganda studiert: Mit seinem Mobiltelefon fotografiert er nicht nur Sprache an Hauswänden, in Bars oder postet multilinguale Screenshots, sondern er fotografiert und ‚taggt‘ sich selbst (unter anderem auch unter Verwendung von Yanké- und Langila-Termini), oft in Verbindung mit falschen geographischen Koordinaten oder kreativen Foto-Collagen. Lingala-Jugendsprache ist hierbei schmückendes Accessoire, aber auch langer (indexikalischer) Arm in sozialen Medien, der Omende weiterhin mit seinen Altersgenossen in Kinshasa, DR Kongo, Kontakt halten lässt, wenngleich er seinen Aufenthaltsort bisweilen durch Fake-Koordinaten verschleiert.

Alim (2009) porträtiert Hip Hop Künstler als „*cultural theorists*“, die sowohl partizipieren als auch auf der Metaebene Theorien aufstellen in Bezug auf translokale Stilisierungen der „*Global Hip Hop Nation*“. Für den datensammelnden ugandischen Rapper Jungle de Man-Eater (siehe Nassenstein, Storch & Hollington, dieser Band), aber auch für Léon Moka, Drulvin Carl oder Fidele Omende gilt sicher eine ähnliche Charakterisierung. Alle drei Akteure sind ebenfalls *auteurs* von Jugendsprache, indem sie ihre sprachlichen Repertoires anders nutzen als dies vom außenstehenden Betrachter zunächst erwartet würde. Anstelle von Überinterpretationen von Jugendsprache als Kommunikationsmedium street-smarter Diebe in Subsaharas Megacities stellt jugendsprachliche Verwendung als künstlerische Praxis immer nur eine von vielen Optionen dar, und kann Teil einer Performanz sein, die

weniger fixierte Identitäten und Gruppenzugehörigkeit ausdrückt als häufig beschrieben.

Anstelle eines gekritzelten „*I swear they said this*“ kann als Beobachtung festgestellt werden: Fluide ambige Ergebnisse erfordern Sprachkonzepte, die wie Taussigs (2011: 73) Notizbuch voll bunter Zeichnungen („*play, to be contrasted with the text, which is work*“, Hervorhebung im Original) die „*imaginative logic of discovery*“ einfangen, bevor Jugendsprache festgeschrieben, Sprecher ihrer Agentivität und Kreativität beraubt werden und Sprachpraxis in der Beschreibung zu einem linguistischen Artefakt wird. Ein selbstkritischer Blick des Linguisten auf seine Forschungspraxis, das Feld und die beobachteten Sprecher ist hierbei unabdingbar, und es müssen sowohl methodologische Neuerungen (und teils sehr individuelle Wege) anvisiert werden, als auch die Limits der Repräsentierbarkeit von kurzlebiger und kreativer Sprache ausgetestet werden. Ein gesteigertes Maß an Selbstreflexivität bedeutet hierbei auch notwendigerweise, sich als Linguist selber kritisch über die Schulter zu schauen, oder sich gar als Jugendsprachenforscher abzuschaffen (indem man jugendsprachlichem Sprechen methodisch völlig anders begegnet).

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## Abkürzungen

8	Nominalklasse 8
DEM	Demonstrativum
FOK	Fokusmarkierer
FUT	Futur
FV	auslautender Vokal
IMP	Imperativ
IND	Indikativ
INTERJEK	Interjektion
ITRG	Interrogativum
KAUS	Kausativ
KONN	Konnektiv
KONS	Konsekutiv/Narrative Verg.
KOP	Kopula
NP	Nominalklassenpräfix
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessivum
PP	Pronominalpräfix
PRS	Präsens
PST <sub>1</sub>	Nahe Vergangenheit
SG	Singular



03

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Silencing youth

# 03

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## Silencing youth

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These are images of two men who wear red. To me, both seem youthful.

The man on the left patiently and nonchalantly stares right into the camera of my smart phone. He doesn't do anything else, unless he is removed for redecoration, tidying-up or closing down. The other man (on the right) happened to be there at the moment I had wanted to take a picture of a group of people. He realized he would be in my picture and made sure he would not be recognized. Because he said he doesn't like being in my pictures, I will concentrate on the man on the left.

The man on the left and all those whom I have found near him represent a complex image of the youthful. Maybe somebody like him could be called a teenager, but yet all effects of adolescence are erased from this face, the pimples and the curiosity. Nor is this a juvenile delinquent; I rather see a stereotyped image of the self-absorbed middle-class youth. The gaze is cold, a bit arrogant maybe, and the bone structure of his face is perfect. Youth is about bodies and embodiment, and youthful bodies are about beauty: "Clothed, adorned with jewels, powdered, perfumed, and shaped, their bodies also bear the scars left by the struggle for survival or the longing for 'a good life'", writes Mamadou Diouf (2003: 9) on African youth culture. This body, of course, is not African, but from elsewhere (I suspect of European manufacture, most likely Dutch, because the shop where I took him belongs to a Dutch chain). There are no visible scars on this body, but the melancholic gaze and pouting mouth suggest that his struggle was such that it left scars inside. Youth is nostalgic, of course, and temperamental and foolish. He even is dressed as a fool. There is a good reason for this, because he actually stands in a large department shop that exclusively sells carnival costumes. This fits rather nicely, because youth is about the carnivalesque, and about inversion, losing it entirely and going berserk. Perhaps he is tired, because of all the partying.

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While young people and youthful bodies have been viewed as being particular in many societies and in different historical settings (e.g. Savage 2007), the invention of a youth culture that might be represented by the left man most likely has to be located in contexts of commodifiable cultural practices and consumer culture of late modernity. Even though we seem inclined to speak about youth culture mostly as protest, resistance, and subversion, this is also a discussion of practices, attitudes and concepts that are very much about the ubiquity of liminality and non-places (Augé 1992, Roberts 2016) on the one hand, and about the representation of desirable social prestige and privilege (e.g. Mintz 2015) on the other. Andreas Reckwitz, writing about the invention of creativity (2012), argues that the constant (re)making of the Self and its representation is very much a project of late modernity that bears in itself the contradictory notion that we are supposed to desire what we also are forced to: we want to be creative and we ought to be creative, in the ways we furnish our lives and design our bodies, for example. From this point of view, youth culture with all its creativity and yet also its consumerism is not something that belongs to young people, but a desirable form of representation for people of different ages.

This contribution is about what youth languages might be, and what they might not be. It is concerned with silences, tough and sweet words, with stereotyped imageries of young people and with the presences of those whose practices and appearances differ from commodified youth culture. It is concerned with the fear of decay and debris, and with gestures of colonial violence. By doing so, this text concentrates on African youth languages and the ways they tend to be presented and rationalized. Because of this particular interest,

the urban character of youth language is put into the focus. Even though young people outside large cities share specific language practices – such as initiation languages and certain in-group codes (Hollington & Nassenstein 2015a, Storch 2016) – the phenomenon of youth language has been much associated with the urban, a concept that today seems rather unhelpful in explaining non-European social history (e.g. Kopytoff 1987). It does explain, however, much of the social history of the European archive on these practices and phenomena, as we shall see further below.

As a consequence, I seek to present an alternative take on communicative practices in African urban spaces, as practices that do not put societal norms and values into question as such but are seen as a form of representation of postcolonial experiences, firmly placed in an arena where deconstruction as a social stance can also be conceptualized as desirable and productive. From such alternative points of view, the topic of the discussion itself – (urban) youth language – is a problematic concept. It bases on ideas about YOUTH, LANGUAGE, and DIVERSITY that have been developed in linguistics by scholars based at metropolitan universities and research labs, and largely refer to the social environments of precisely these people. My contribution is concerned with how our own identity constructions as academics working on a particular topic and in a particular environment are relevant for the ways in which we fail to consider such representations and conceptualizations. It is therefore also concerned with issues of ownership and of participation, as well as with questions of positionality, of the researchers and the researched.

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(Urban) youth language is a language-that-isn't: incomprehensible to adults, broken, fast, strange. This metapragmatic narrative permeates much of the available linguistic work on how young people in Africa speak, and has only recently produced critical comments. In their introduction to the volume on *Youth Language Practices in Africa and Beyond* (2015a), Andrea Hollington and Nico Nassenstein provide an overview of what has been in the focus of the linguistics of urban youth languages in the past twenty years, and what seems problematic and unsatisfactory. Together with Klaus Beyer's essay on research on 'Youth language practices in Africa', in the same volume, and Eyo Mensah's (2016) article on the dynamics of African youth language, this text is one of the recent contributions that present a substantial portrayal of the state of the art in this field (outdating the pioneering and influential paper by Kießling & Mous 2004) and also raise critical issues. Hollington & Nassenstein observe, in spite of the substantial work they discuss, "a lack of recognition of and academic interest in these linguistic varieties, which can be associated with an often prevailing stigmatization of youth languages within society" (2015a: 1). This stigmatization most likely prevails in the young speakers' environments, as linguists working on these languages have developed a quite different attitude towards youth language: both the strong impact of variationist approaches (as in the stupendous reception of Labov's work) on descriptive and historical linguistics and the many case studies of individual urban youth languages attest for a strong interest shared among linguists in studying these practices, very often in order to come to a better understanding of innovation, agency in language change and its pace

(also Hollington & Nassenstein 2015b). Yet, as these authors point out, such pre-existing approaches had in common that they were largely embedded in epistemes in linguistics that have been critiqued as limiting, eurocentric and rooted in power inequalities deriving from colonial contexts (e.g. Deumert & Storch forthcoming).

As a consequence, the above-cited authors (among an increasing number of others) highlight the necessity of coming to a more holistic understanding of language in general, rather seeing it as practice instead of structure, and including forms of expression such as clothing, music, gestures and placement (for an African[ist] perspective see e.g., Lüpke & Storch 2013). Moreover, language is seen as fluid, dynamic and not as an isolated thing, but as a part of changing repertoires. Hollington & Nassenstein (2015a: 2 ff.) furthermore write about the need to understand these language practices as ways of making secrecy, as a device of stylizing and constructing identity, challenging social norms and restrictions, and claiming agency against others. Even though such perspectives on language practice have now been adopted by a relatively large group of critical sociolinguists, most of the relevant theoretical work deals with practices shared by people in the global north, with only few contributions on African urban spaces (Deumert 2014, among others), and even less in relation to rural spaces (Mietzner & Storch 2015).

Critical work on issues such as naming languages, linguistics' ideologies, data mining practices, and linguists using binary concepts of YOUTH and ADULTHOOD, NORM and DEVIATION, CENTER and MARGIN would be a timely task in order to turn the geo-epistemological bias in (youth) linguistics into a productive debate.

Unless such a debate *also* leads to a reflected evaluation of linguists' practices of producing knowledge about urban youth languages – documenting, describing, analyzing them – these contributions remain helpful only to a certain extent. As Beyer (2015: 24 f.) mentions, the field is underwhelming in terms of its epistemological productivity (meaning with regards of both theory and methodology) as long as it relies on mostly Western-oriented frameworks.

There is, in all these attempts to define and critique, a curious moment of negation – language practices of the urban and the young are what they are not. They are socially undesirable, anti-normative, not existing like other languages but crossing borders more quickly, and they are not theorized adequately as other languages are claimed to be. This can perhaps be seen most clearly from continuously repeated observations about (urban) youth languages as language practices that change quickly, both in terms of structure and their social semiotics. The dynamics in which words and meanings change are usually taken as a core feature of these language practices as opposed to the seemingly slow, or non-existent, change in normal languages (which have linguistic standards). There is a notion of language change being out of control, anarchy and disorderly linguistic processes. Youth and the life on the street seem to shine through here, as if the uncontrollable creativity, multimodality, and fast pace of change could stand for the unruliness of lives lived in the edgelands of society – an image that is part of youthful performance as well as its representations. Gerrit Dimmendaal (2011: 249), very much to the point, suggests that this is precisely how (urban) youth languages and other language practices differ, namely in terms of the consciousness

and deliberate engineering on the side of the speakers, which ultimately affect the pace and mode of change:

In all these register-like languages, conscious language engineering appears to be involved, i.e. the speakers are controlling the language. These speech varieties contain special vocabulary, and phonological features that are emblematic of non-conformity to social norms in a community. [...] The function of the youth language itself is to defy the linguistic norm; yet the way this is established is by rapid and continuous renewal of antinorms, and so there is a paradox of norms.

Yet, these social semiotics seem to quickly and repeatedly change as well, as language practices such as Sheng and Naija were first conceptualized as (urban) youth language and urban vernacular respectively in linguistic work, and now have turned into their former opposites: Sheng is presently constructed as a new vernacular, which awaits standardization and incorporation into a national linguistic canon in Kenya, while Naija, through a different form of enregisterment, is suddenly presented as a language of the youth (Storch 2018).

And many African linguists suddenly find themselves in a very odd situation: raised in a norm-oriented and normative tradition, they now become standardizers of the ultimate non-standard. There is a historical context of all this, of both linguists' appraisals of the relevant language practices, and of the practices themselves. This context is colonialism, and the social uncertainty, disruption, and racialized injustice associated with it. The historical tableau in which the first accounts of urban youth languages have been depicted is one of colonial cities (Nassenstein 2014), colonial trade

networks (Storch 2018), European and American popular culture (Deumert & Mabandla 2015), and the colonial geographies of power inequality and racialized difference. Speaking disorderly in such contexts meant not simply to perform anti-identities in order to challenge the norms of one's parents and the repressive, corrupt, and self-righteous society they represented, as in postwar European-American youth culture, but served as a means of speaking back to colonial players. There is in these early performances a form of colonial mimesis that rather bluntly refers to hegemonic cultural practice of Europe; this is not about being anti-social, but about not even being part of the social system. Young people turned into marginalized street gangs, alphabets, into nameless people competing for few and badly-paid jobs, living in segregated townships, poor quarters, pitied, othered, and feared, are an experience made in colonial contexts and continue to be associated with the postcolony<sup>1</sup>.

Mamadou Diouf, writing on postcolonial cultures, African youth and public spaces (2003), suggests that the predominantly "youthful population of Africa" (2003: 2) is portrayed in public discourse in a fundamentally contradictory way:

Particularly in light of the failure of the nationalist political enterprise, which had set itself the double objective of economic development and social justice, African societies increasingly are looking to young people as instruments of change. The sense that they are uniquely positioned to speak a language of both universal rights and specific African cultures has led to

continual redefinitions of their role in the social sphere. At the same time, however, the dramatic irruption of young people in the public and domestic spaces seems to have resulted in the construction of African youth as a threat, and to have provoked, within society as a whole, a panic that is simultaneously moral and civic. (Diouf 2003: 2-3)

The crisis of the nationalist project, Diouf further observes, persists since the 1970s, precisely the era of the youth revolution in the West, and has – in a transnational discursive formation – resulted in a replacement of a concept of youth as the "hope of the world" (Diouf 2003: 2) by a concept of the dangerous and decadent youth. This youth may make use of "spaces deserted by political power and outside the communities and their dominant cultures, to the advantage of the margins and the unoccupied areas in which emptiness and indetermination are dominant [...]" (Diouf 2003: 5), but this does not result in remaking society, or in a revolution. Rather, Diouf observes, a different form of 'doing youth' emerges (or happens), namely one in which opportunities emerge there where others didn't seem to want any:

[The streets, suburbs, frontier regions and prohibited zones are] also a geography of possible developments outside the conventional images of success. Erasing the national territory and its histories, it offers African youth opportunities for entry onto the world stage, though usually in pain, tumult, and violence. As migrant or clandestine workers, or sometimes as musicians, artists, and "Golden Boys," they become actors

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<sup>1</sup> This term is used in the sense of Mbembe (2001), who highlights the grotesque, contradictory, obscene, vulgar and carnivalesque as crucial experiences of those whose lives are led in a postcolonial world.

in the theater of globalization, resolved to make their way into the world market's economy of desires and consumption. [...] The world that, paradoxically, is both inhabited by young Africans and escapes them is one of opportunity and abundance, in which they are perpetually on the margins and the borderlines of the increasingly xenophobic West. (Diouf 2003: 5–6)

There is a significant difference between discourse on young people as led in Europe, for example, and the discourse on postcolonial cultures as presented by Diouf; these young people do not move out of mainstream society but never were part of it, and their creativity and revolutionary gestures point at a nation that will not bear them anyway; this is not about a revolt against establishment, but about nothingness to deal with.

Ann L. Stoler and her colleagues (2013) see this as crucial and central for any understanding of the meanings of marginality, hybridity, messiness and disruption in postcolonial settings. And this produces distorted pictures that are equally destructive: the 'African youth' being left without a 'real language', but speaking a 'register' that emerges out of the conscious tattering of languages, maiming words and sounds, performing otherness as a form of linguistic cannibalism, are representations of key concepts of postcolonial thinking. They are embedded in an entire array of ambiguous representations and performed mimicry of the experience of the separation of the civilised and the savage, of language and jargon, and of development and poverty.

In an ironic way, the continuous dissociation of young people from society, or rather, bourgeois and rural classes alike produces ambivalent images, namely 'Western

modernity' and 'African primitivism' merged – a strangely unabashed way of using colonial imagery and thought. Like tropical moss overgrowing colonial buildings, humidity wearing down architecture, (urban) youth languages here turn out to be imperial debris, rubble piling up. And this debris needs to be controlled, or removed, as debris and rubble are reminders of the destructiveness of the present; making them visible will "contribute to a collective awakening from the nightmare of the bourgeois dream world" (Gordillo 2014: 27). Hence, this language that isn't, speech ruined and made into rubble, in order to symbolize anti-ness, or rather: nothingness, evokes precisely what Gastón R. Gordillo calls the "fear of the crack":

The void that the fetish of the ruin seeks to conceal from mainstream sensibilities is the perceived nothingness of rubble and, in general, of the haunting of a space devoid of the positivity cherished by the cult of full objects: skyscrapers, cars, malls, monuments, gadgets. This fear acquires its most microscopic expression in the fear of the crack, an attitude that sees the ruination of modern places "as the enemy of human beings" (Ginsberg 2004, 287). The scholarship on ruins has examined the modernist anxiety about ruins from multiple perspectives, yet its class components are often overlooked. Berman wrote that one of the features that distinguishes the bourgeoisie as a class is that it "cannot bear" to look into the moral, social, and physical "abyss" created by its own destructiveness (1982, 100–101). The fetishization of ruins is one of the ways in which the rubble created by capitalist and imperial expansion, and thereby the abyss generated by their destruction of space, is deflected and disregarded. (Gordillo 2014: 254)

As the afterlife of colonial destruction and imperial ruination, language becomes its own negation. And while this is an experience, and a creative practice, that is shared by people of different age and different class, it is young people who are most associated with the role of the linguistic cannibal, the wretched and obscene annihilator of norm and order. This is the most ironic and yet the most profitable twist in the story – silenced youth, disfigured and expelled from society. There is, this seems to suggest, no future left, with the youth turning formerly lively spaces and practices into nothingness.

Why, one then might want to ask, is the image of youth languages such a successful one? What makes it appealing and why should so many different communities in postcolonial settings make use of various urban youth languages, which are visible, named, audible and semiotically salient? In his essay on the constructedness of adolescent language, Crispin Thurlow seeks an explanation. Rather than affirming the assumption that there is, after all, such a thing like ‘youth language’, Thurlow points at the multitude of ways of speaking and cultural practices that can be meaningful to young people:

Although it is still very common to hear reference to phrases like youth culture, many contemporary scholars [...] now reject the tendency to present young people a uniformly oppositional and monolithic in terms of their social norms and cultural values. From this more critical perspective, it is acknowledged that adolescent ‘development’ and ‘trajectories’ can only ever be described as patterned generalizations; that for every young person whose life is marked by the proverbial sex, drugs and rock and roll, there

are countless others whose lives do not feature unwanted pregnancies, substance misuses and criminal activities. (Thurlow 2005: 2)

Regardless of which label is used in order to make young people look uniform (‘youth’, ‘adolescents’, ‘teenagers’) and what is seen as defining criterion in terms of the particularity of young people in terms of appearance, activities, attitudes, and so forth, Thurlow argues, there are so many differences, speaking of individual persons, that any generalization becomes problematic at one point of the discussion. Moreover, not much of what young people seem to share amongst peers is an exclusive feature of the youth. Even the search for identity, being one of the prime arguments for young people’s need for anti-language and other such registers, is a lifelong project and not one of our earlier years. Hence, we will need to rethink youth as a label and a period in a lifespan in order to come to a better understanding of whose practices are actually portrayed in descriptions of urban youth languages. The problem of using particular labels and presenting a particular group in a particular way is, in short, that this almost necessarily results in

overcategoriz[ing] people and, in this case, to exaggerate social distances between young people and other people. In terms of social identity theory, we know that this is often all that is needed for adults to construe and experience their communication with young people as a form of intergroup or even intercultural communication. (Thurlow 2005: 4)

This asks, I assume, for a change of the topic of our discussions, and for thinking more about context and contact, conversation

and confusion. Adulthood, Thurlow (2005: 5) suggests, can also be understood, in a less hegemonic way, as ruination and cracks hidden under paint and concealed, with the fear of rubble lingering on underneath the surface: "That we, as adults, learn to feel it in silence – or rather feel it silenced – is another matter. We simply learn to be 'grown up' about our uncertainty and confusion in the struggle to tell a meaningful, coherent story about ourselves." To take this serious as part of our ideologized demand to categorize others, to negate the constant change and decay which we produce ourselves, and dust and rubble emerging from our lives and work, helps considerably to find new ways of deconstructing received stereotypes, such as those of young urban African people and ourselves as experts who look at them, using a bird's eye perspective that helps us to ignore the fact that we look at individual people. Our fear of cracks, decay and ruination, Thurlow writes, translates into the construction of "scapegoat generations", young people who do not know any longer about doing things right:

[...] young people (and especially young men and boys) are too often defined as inadequate communicators or language users and it is not infrequently that one hears the exaggerated folk-linguistic complaint, 'I just can't understand what teenagers are saying these days – it's like a different language!' [...] communication between young people and adults is thus all too frequently construed in both public and academic discourse as *intergroup* communication. (Thurlow 2005: 7)

Yet, there is a strange persistence of the discourse on the idea of a generation gap. Thurlow, among others, argues that the media and the popular entertainment industry

play a significant role here. Moreover, in an intensively semiotized world and in post-modern contexts, design, labels and imagery have become more important than the actual objects themselves. The commodification of the idea of a generation gap, of youth as a separate part of society and of overemphasized practices of young people here is a politically and economically profitable strategy, which is used both in media representations and in other contexts, such as advertisements and other means of disciplining people. And youth in such commodifying contexts is stereotyped as an attack on adulthood, the inability to speak (properly), unidimensionally negative and different. Moreover, youth as the Other, a being unfinished but in transition and not yet integrated in society is here constructed as yet another ambiguous foil – one that appeals to our hidden desires of breaking free from social constraints, shedding received humiliation and disciplining.

Thus, the dominant picture of young people in African cities in this particular discourse of academic approaches and commodification shows tough hip hoppers, street boys, sex workers, ganja smokers, people hanging around at bars and as revolutionary students on campuses. This stands indeed in considerable contrast to other available representations of young people in urban contexts, either constructed by the pictured young people themselves, or by the media. These alternative pictures show a kind of urban normal life that does not seem so interesting for music producers, film makers, linguists and others. It seems as if we miss out that what is not so easily commodifiable, not so salient. Instead, we seem to reproduce, in a semiotically complex way, notions of 'anti-language' and revolt

as part of the parcel of commodification: this is, in the end, something that does not tell us much about young people and their habits of speaking, but about linguists' stylizing themselves, trying to be cool, to collect some very colorful bugs and butterflies – this is, as part of the 'great tradition', a form of orientalism and exoticism in linguistics.

What we might miss altogether is that what Diouf suggests as an utterly real new language of the African youth:

Thus they are defining new modalities of action and proposing a new language in their musical, iconographic, and military expressions, and sometimes in political, economic, and religious life [...]. The best illustration of these youthful gestures of self-creation is the extraordinary vitality of "born-again" Christian movements and sects, in particular Pentecostalism, and the reform-minded efforts of indigenous Muslims or the subversive form of Islam that is often called "fundamentalist". (Diouf 2003: 7)

Not, in other words, language practices that help to construct super-virile 'boys', as well as either oversexed or invisible 'girls', counter-bourgeois attitudes and anti-identity, but language that is part of religious practices and thought. Yet, the discussion among those who seek self-creation often is about how one is seen by others – as decadent and obscene for example: creativity and self-authorship require a look at the mirror and a gaze at the monstrous Other. This gaze is not without any gain. It produces solutions, which however seem far from what professionally drawn images of the young in Africa tend to show. This has not been unnoticed though, as a large number of contributions on the language of Pentecostal songs and

services and other communicative practices situated in religiously inspired self-creation illustrate (e.g. Tranberg Hansen 2015, Ugot & Offiong 2013, among others). This work is often presented by linguists who work at African universities and who do not claim to explicitly work on youth language – academic work dedicated to the study of African youth languages and work on young Africans' new language (in the sense of Diouf) seem to be two different genres.

A closer look at expressions of self-creation elsewhere shows how the gaze into the objectifying mirror produces constant counter-images. The "hope of the world" who had turned into the abjected inhabitants of non-places in the representations of the young are frequently, in various contexts, turned into new hope – of the state, global politics, and so on. This year, in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, the youth are, in a nation-wide movement, portrayed as *young professionals*, Golden Boys and Girls throughout, who are representations of a new form of an elite, who stand behind a future president. The *Atikulate* movement emerged out of the campaign of the politician Atiku Abubakar. After having left his former party and joining the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku relatively quickly turned into a figure that symbolized new ideals and futures to many. His name soon was used to coin the emblematic term *Atikulate*, which is now not only used in context of the 2019 election campaigns, but also signifies anything "positive" and "change" in relation to an aspiring youth:

[...] a youth movement, 'IamAtikulated2019' emerged in Abuja with the sole objective of drumming support 'For the candidacy of Atiku Abubakar as President of the Federal Republic



**#Atiku is very okay! Atiku is for restructuring. Progressive elements must queue behind him for a progressive and united Nigeria.**

**Atikuist  
Atikulated  
Atikuism  
Atikunation  
Atikumania  
Atikulise  
Atikulogy  
Atikusis  
Atikusphere  
Atikulaw  
Atikuquation  
Atikuthesis...2019....**

of Nigeria come 2019.' [...] To this group of young employed youths, the term, 'Atikulated' connotes sundry layers of meanings. According to the national coordinator of the movement, Ike Bishop Okoronkwo, the term is synonymous with excellence, honesty, capacity, the chosen one, unifier, bridge builder among others. [...] Thus, while introducing themselves, members revealed the depth of their belief in the former Vice President by prefixing their names with the new political buzzword. 'My name is Atikulated Ike Bishop Okoronkwo' he said as another gave his as Atikulated Gbenga Akanji. (Yakubu 2018<sup>2</sup>)

This image of the youth contradicts those representations of young Africans that are usually relevant in youth language research. These people happen to be young, but they are integrated (for example in a populist movement, in power structures at the metropolises), employed, not members of the anti-society, no artists and hip hoppers. These are forms of representation that rather fundamentally challenge the cool and Western images of African youth, and yet the imagery that unfolds around the movement strikingly resembles stereotyped images of youthful presences among the wild publics of the web, youths' communication strategies and creativity: there is the meme and hashtag, the motto t-shirt and the linguistic creativity, all circulated on social media.

The boundaries between what might be 'real' and what might be a performance for

Fig. 1–3: Atikulated posts<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See [<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/atikulated-new-political-buzzword/>].

<sup>3</sup>1,2:[<https://www.facebook.com/ATIKU-Youths-FORUM-2019-285933035083831/>], 3: [<https://twitter.com/TheAtikulates/status/886888880175271936>].

the campaign are blurred; perhaps they are not even relevant to those who play with the new words that are brought into circulation here. Rather, I think that this is part of a much larger representation game – something that creates meaning out of itself, by placing oneself in a particular discursive environment, by stylizing one’s communicative and physical presences with emblematic words and clothes, and by positioning oneself in the vicinity of critique (on government, coloniality, populism, etc.). In other words, the forms of the signs that mark or announce a particular communicative event are already invested with so much meaning themselves so that rather than being semiotically transparent they create representative excess. Representation is so strong here that positionality and emblematicity seem to do the work of conveying what is actually said – about the youth as the hope of the world and as its renewers. An author who calls himself *Comr[ade] Eddy* has written more extensively about these meanings of ‘youth’ in a blog that is dedicated to the *Atikulate* movement. In a post on the meanings of youth, he suggests that the term and its semiotic context are fundamentally underspecified: “let me quickly drop in this stanza that, Youth is that clay which can be moulded in either shape one wants. In my belief, this is the sole reason for both exploitation and utilization of youth in the destruction and construction of any nation respectively”.<sup>4</sup>

Why, one seems in urge to ask, is this translucent construct represented in a particular uniform way that now seems to be almost canonic in sociolinguistics and descriptive work on youth languages? What is so convincing in

portraying youthful speakers as being foremost interested in sexist gendered talk (the wordlists of sexist misogynic terminology in youth languages are legion, cf. Hollington & Nassenstein 2015a and other recent work for overviews)? What makes them speak ‘anti-languages’ when there is so much meaning in representation itself, and so much play with positionality? It has frequently been observed that the rapid change of linguistic construction strategies, words and styles might be the most striking and the most characteristic feature of urban youth languages. This has often been explained with the linguistic creativity that is associated with young people, the norm-breaking of adolescents, and the necessity of keeping secrets among peers. However, sociolinguistic approaches to different aspects of linguistic creativity demonstrate that this is not a privilege of young people, but has to do with specific contexts, power relations, as well as with notions of linguistic ownership and control.

I assume that there are two things that come into play here, and both have to do with the positionality of the researchers and linguists themselves, who work on young people’s language practices in a particular way. One point is, as already suggested above, that topics can be ‘cool’ and ‘sexy’, and youth languages and cultures are such topics, for a number of reasons. For example, they might be easy to promote and market because they are so closely connected to mainstream popular discourse and are connected to cultural practices that seem attractive anyway, such as music and clubbing. But first and foremost, youthful language practices are what we all know

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<sup>4</sup> [<https://headlinetracks.wixsite.com/news/single-post/2018/02/02/Role-of-Youths-In-Nation-Building-The-Atikulated-Perspective>].

already and what we do ourselves – however, usually outside academic spaces, at home or when we are with friends. Youth language, in other words, is also a description of our other linguistic Self, and us before our professional lives. To invest professional interest in youth languages therefore might not be so much about giving *them* a voice, but about giving *ourselves* a voice. This is about ‘data’ that suddenly relates to personal experiences, and about faintly making our real voices heard that exist somewhere underneath the nicely composed academic text. If this is a reason for the ways in which youth languages are presented in academic work, it feels legitimate and necessary – writing about transgression within a hierarchic and restricting environment is liberating, I think, and reflected.

Yet, I assume there is another, less transparent motivation for the ways in which youth language is constructed as particular and peculiar. What strikes me is that so many contributions do not only highlight the gendering and transgression in youth language, but also the creativity correlated to it. Even though language practice as such is increasingly understood as fundamentally creative in sociolinguistics (e.g. Swann & Deumert 2017), youth language practices tend to be seen as extraordinary in terms of the creativity invested in them. Moreover, there is anti-ness in such an unusual creativity (e.g. Maribe & Brookes 2014, Brookes & Lekgoro 2014), as well as artistry and urban-ness (e.g. Mose 2013, Milu 2015). The latter, I suppose, is the actual feature ascribed to youth language that is crucial for its sociohistorical emergence as DIFFERENT, REMARKABLE and AMUSING, yet also DISTRESSING and OBSCURE. The city as the site of youth and youth language has its very

particular semiotics in the European context, in which these imageries are still situated.

Cities are not only highly semiotized spaces, where linguistic landscapes turn into a form of symbolic architecture that partly exists detached from built environment. Saskia Sassen, in her essay ‘Does the city have speech’ (2013), argues that cities are also places where social and political processes can take place as detached from the institutions and control of the nation state. Cities, she argues, have speech in a particular way: they speak back. In another text, Sassen discusses how urban subjects are made in these spaces. In global cities, this happens in different ways than before, she observes:

Cities are one of the key sites where new norms and new identities are *made*. They have been such sites at various times and places, and under diverse conditions. This role can become strategic in particular times and places, as is the case today in global cities. Current conditions in these cities are creating not only new structurations of power but also operational and rhetorical openings for new political actors who may long have been invisible or without voice. A key element of the argument here is that the localization of strategic components of globalization in these cities means that the disadvantaged can engender new forms of contesting globalized corporate power, including right there in their neighborhoods. Critical in this process is the capability of urban space to produce difference: that being powerless does not necessarily mean being invisible or impotent. The disadvantaged, especially in global cities, can gain “presence” in their engagement with power but also vis-à-vis each other. (Sassen 2017: 37 f.)

The production of presence as a key political practice may well serve as a crucial moment of linking the visibility of the powerless in global cities with the availability of stereotyped images and means of commodification of young people and their social, linguistic and cultural practices. Cities on the one hand have the capacity to “generate norms and subjects that can escape the constraints of dominant power systems – such as the nation-state, the War on Terror, the growing weight of racism in a national political culture” (Sassen 2017: 43), but they also are arenas where presence and attention turn into valuable currencies that help to remake these new subjects into commodifiable objects. Hence, any performance of youth identity, urban youth language, counter culture, and so on, is filled with multiple meanings, as a semiotically complex action and event (Mose 2013). It expresses postcolonial continuities and experiences, constructions and ascriptions by linguists and players of the media and culture industry alike, gestures of subordination and revolt of individual performers and speakers, ideas about how the imageries of others can be made useful for one’s own constructions of identity.

But these semiotic connotations of the urban have a social history. The meanings attributed to the city also relate to, and emanate from, a much larger canon of texts – than, for example, is suggested by the work cited in the references sections of sociolinguistic studies. These meanings and their sources are less obvious, because they are partly based on texts that are now beginning to fall out of the canon, such as literary work of the 19th century. In other words, the textual weaving from which these imageries of the creative urban youth emerge is one that is now bleaching a bit, not

only because the language of these much older texts begins to exhaust us with all its unfamiliar words and symbols, but also because today, we suffer from different diseases than those described in these texts.

This deserves, I assume, a closer look. The young urban creative, whose creativity (or talent, or creative potential) stands out and ultimately results in change that affects others – consider, for example the *saccadic leader* (Labov 2001) – is (even though the young creative appears contemporary, a figure of late modernity) a concept of the nineteenth century. The ‘innovative youth’ has a social history too, and the intellectual text production and ideology surrounding this figure has its sociohistorical context as well. This is what the inherently static sociolinguistics of variation appears to ignore – that linguistic variants, saccadic leaders, urban spaces, etc. are concepts that form part of very dynamic ideologies and thought that must be historicized in order to be productive topics of a discussion. And, as I will suggest further below, the stereotyped image of the young urban creative is, like the dehumanizing images of the Black Other that form part of colonial constructs and phantasies, a form of alterity, albeit one that is directed at the *Other within* and not at the Other elsewhere. In his work on the unreflected and unquestioned epistemic violence that continues to produce monstrous Others, Frantz Fanon suggested to “reexamine the question of cerebral reality, the brain mass of humanity” (2004 [1963]: 237), and by asking for a reexamination of collective consciousness, and its deconstruction, Fanon was directing the gaze to what that actually was. I find it very inspiring to think about the semiotic connotations of youth, namely being excessively creative, decadent, criminal, and

distressing, along the lines of Fanon's postcolonial critique. Interestingly, these constructions have much to do with the social change that affected Europeans by the time the colonial project was firmly afoot. In Europe's fast growing urban environments of the 19th century, configurations of the Other were increasingly informed by concepts and ideologies of the disciplinary state (Foucault 1972 & 1975) and the transgressive individual as othered, expectorated and medicalized. There is a remarkable twist in the representation of the genius by that time; before, the transgressive ingenious artist was conceptualized as being outside the grasp of moral normativity and the state – now, the notion of the ingenue was that of the *sick* transgressive. And precisely this concept of ingenious creatives turned into a narrative that formed part of the classic canon of the subsequent generations of bourgeois audiences. Everybody who became acquainted with the string quartet *Der Tod und das Mädchen* by Franz Schubert would also have learned about the circumstances under which the composer worked when he finished the piece in 1824: suffering from syphilis in its advanced stages, Schubert's physical conditions must have been pitiful, and yet he was able to do intellectual and creative work in an unparalleled way, in terms of its originality as well as its dimensions, before he finally succumbed to the disease (Winkle 1997). The trope of the fatally sick artist who, suffering from a disease acquired at the margins of society (in brothels and on the street), achieves the height of his (almost never her) creative power before perishing, was both romanticized and turned into a subversive text. The poetic work of Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Zola, Flaubert, Keats, Poe, among many others, bases on the experience of ingenuity

as the result of the venereal disease or treats motifs that relate to them. Later, Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus* (1947), would create a hero – Adrian Leverkühn – who craves an infection with syphilis in order to turn into a genius.

I assume that the novels of Baudelaire or Mann are now less known to middle-class audiences than they were before; however, the motifs of such work continue to shape collective consciousnesses, as do representations of creative people (musicians, hip hop artists, etc.) as people who live their hyper-intensive lives on the margins of society, as ingenious or saccadic or whatever leaders of change. The concept of urban youth languages is one of languages spoken by members of street gangs and prostitutes, as anti-languages, and as languages that are excessive in the creativity that shapes them, that refer to secrecy and gender inequality, and that emerge out of African cities that – in the same collective consciousness – resemble the European cities of *then* (cities that are not yet fully electrified, sanitized, tarred). This concept, that underlies a large body of academic work on African youth languages, strikingly parallels those bourgeois narratives on the syphilitic genius: YOUTH LANGUAGE here is SICK LANGUAGE, beautiful and iridescent but fading quickly, each giving way to the next spectacular one. It seems that the urban and the sick belong to each other in this imagery, because we faintly remember those bohemians of times long gone by. The urban as a space that is thought as being destructive and as removing roots, health, safety, and so on, is the location of language that is connected to sick, self-destroying youth whose legacy, however, is what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) calls the sublime – the unexpected, novel, emotionally moving and particular in cultural production.

And while working away with our unconscious collective brain mass, we continue to construct such figures, who are no longer fading away because of an infection with syphilis, but because of deadly drug addictions and bipolar conditions. And perhaps, we become infected as well – with a linguists' virus that makes us search frantically for yet more spectacular languages of the young and broken.

The *Atikulated* young urban professionals in Abuja and the youthful members of religious movements do not fit in here. The historical context and colonial experience on which the language practices shared by urban people are *also* based, the processes of ruination that affect, as a consequence of this experience, individual lives, and the continuing removal, through commodification and consumerism, of control over resources and strategies that would help in finding a solution may as well suggest that language practices change so fast in order to escape precisely this, the control and violence executed by others. Speaking in a different way is therefore not only a matter of not being understood by others, but also one of not being owned by them.

The multitude of meanings emerging out of the excessive labeling and play with representation, and the meanings associated with performances of postcolonial experiences are part of a huge number of possibilities and ascriptions – ambiguous, diverse and confusing. This is a noisy concert, which silences the voices of individual young people to the ears of those who do not share their lives.

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# 04

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Digital writing practices  
and media ideologies of  
German adolescents

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## Digital writing practices and media ideologies of German adolescents

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### **1. Introduction**

This paper explores the media ideologies of German adolescents, which play a crucial role in naturalizing, rationalizing and justifying young people's media choices in their daily digitalized social interactions. I argue that digital writing practices can only be fully understood when taking the interdependencies between their underlying language

ideologies and media ideologies into account. Moreover, the sociolinguistic differentiation of writing forms can be seen as interwoven with these systems of socially and culturally shared beliefs about communication. Rather than being determined by technical infrastructures, non-standard spellings and punctuation seem to be highly intentional in the shape of ideological-informed enregistered styles. From this perspective, digital media becomes a socially

meaningful sign of its own, presupposing and entailing contextual settings in interaction (such as formality and informality).

This paper addresses these issues by examining a corpus of *WhatsApp*-text-messaging enriched by group interview data of German adolescents discussing their media and linguistic choices and their underlying communicative strategies. These moments of media-ideological reflexivity offer interesting insights into the organization of young people's social lives by means of digitally mediated communication.

## 2. Metadiscourse on digital media and adolescents: A first example

The public discourse regarding digital writing practices has been investigated in several studies (cf. Thurlow 2006 & 2007, Brommer 2007, Squires 2010). Scholars' findings tend to stress the pessimistic attitudes in public opinion towards adolescents' communicative behavior as a potential danger to 'language' in its totality – misconstruing the restricted social contexts of stereotypical features of digital writing. There is an ongoing anxiety about teenagers losing their linguistic competences (discursively equalized with orthographic competences) because of their extensive digital writing. Next to these worries of declining structural linguistic abilities, concerns about the pragmatic competences needed for 'civilized' social interaction remain. As interperso-

nal-private communication increasingly takes place on digital online platforms, societies start negotiating the (new) norms of mediated interaction via metapragmatic discourse.

A striking example of these metadiscursive negotiations is provided by the German *State Office for Communication* of Baden-Württemberg (*Landesanstalt für Kommunikation, LFK*), a public department supervising private broadcasting stations. As part of their educational duty, the state office initiated a so-called *Medien-Knigge*-project ('media etiquette project'),<sup>1</sup> which is described on their website as the following:

*Sowohl Jugendliche als auch Erwachsene benehmen sich häufig schlecht in Bezug auf den Umgang mit neuen Medien. Smartphones, Tablets und Apps tragen dazu bei, dass wir immer und überall unser Gerät in der Hand haben – oft auch in unpassenden Situationen. Das Projekt ‚Medienknigge‘ forderte Jugendliche (zwischen 12 und 16 Jahren) auf, ihren Alltag zu überdenken, sich Gedanken über den Umgang und das Miteinander mit Medien zu machen und ihre Vorschläge medial darzustellen.*<sup>2</sup>

'Both adolescents and adults often behave inappropriately when it comes to using new media. Smartphones, tablets and apps lead to us using our mobile devices anywhere and everywhere – often in inappropriate situations. The project '*Medienknigge*' called on young people (between 12 and 16 years) to reflect on their everyday lives,

<sup>1</sup> The book *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* [On Human Relations] by Adolph Freiherr Knigge, published in 1788, is known as *Knigge* in Germany. The book was widely received and has been reprinted in numerous editions. The *Knigge* derives its social value from the fact that it is associated with 'courtly behavior' in public perception and thus often stands *pars-pro-toto* for etiquette in general. This is expressed in the labeling of various etiquette guidebooks such as *Business-Knigge*, *Tie-Knigge*, or *China-Knigge*.

<sup>2</sup> See [<https://medien-knigge.de/projekt/>] (accessed 2 March 2018).

to think about how to use and interact with media and to digitally present their proposals.'

The central feature of the website is the so-called *Medien-Knigge-Meter* 'media-etiquette-meter' in which users are encouraged to participate. Users can upload their own 'rules of media etiquette' or just vote for the ones already uploaded by others. The outcome of this user voting is a top-10-list of 'rules' concerning an 'appropriate' handling of digital media. While some 'rules' deal with privacy and security issues, e.g. *Don't add your mobile number to your public Facebook account!*, the majority of these 'rules' can be labeled metacommunicative or rather metapragmatic rules, e.g. *Don't argue via mobile phone, deal with it in person!* The 'rule' with the highest ranking by 1448 users fits into this category as well: *Don't break up via SMS/WhatsApp!*

The *Medien-Knigge* seems interesting because it exposes the metapragmatic discourse on digital media from two perspectives. Firstly, there is a top-down-perspective initiated by the state office: Its website proclaims the condensed and thereby institutionalized judgment that there is an often problematic and inappropriate handling of digital media by adolescents. Thus, the website's educational goal is the reinforcement of 'media competence'.<sup>3</sup> This top-down-notion of media competence is fundamentally bound to metapragmatic typifications, in that it depends on the labeling of media usage with social values. Secondly, the participatory approach of the website offers us insights on how adolescents themselves take part in this metadiscourse from a bottom-up-perspective, creating their

'own' rules and revealing their beliefs within the framework of the project.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of shared metapragmatic beliefs about digital media choices for the daily organizations of social life, which can be described with the term of *digital literacy*. Taking the literacy perspective, communicative appropriateness is not only a top-down-value; it is constructed and iteratively re-constructed by metapragmatic discourse carried out in localized communities.

### **3. Mediation, media ideologies, and their sociolinguistic dimension**

Digital literacy is much more than just the technical skill of using a set of electronic devices. Media are always embedded in a cultural system of socially organized practices of producing, disseminating and interpreting meaning. Being *digitally literate* means being able to "engage in particular *social practices*" by the means of digital tools (Jones & Hafner 2012: 12; emphasis in original). Rather than having a reductive notion of media as merely technical devices, the literacy perspective asks for a dynamic notion of media as socially structured procedures of semiotic materialization (cf. Schneider 2017).

Therefore, it may be useful to focus the discussion by turning to the concept of *mediation* as it is used in communication studies, linguistic anthropology and media linguistics (cf. Couldry 2008, Agha 2011, Kristiansen 2014, Androutsopoulos 2016). In its broadest sense, mediation "refers to the cultural, material, or semiotic conditions of any communicative

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. [<https://www.lfk.de/medienkompetenz-fortbildung.html>] (accessed 02 March 2018).

action” (Androutsopoulos 2014a: 10). Given that every form of communication depends on some sort of mediation, i.e. material substance and structure, the concept describes the particular settings of semiotic materialization (e.g. what kind of participant structure is enabled by the medium? What is the temporality of its communication? Does it enable recontextualization?). The metadiscursive negotiations of specific communicative activities (e.g. breaking up), which materialize with particular semiotic tools (e.g. *WhatsApp*-text-messaging), implicitly deal with questions of mediation and re-mediation (cf. Gershon 2010a: 287 f.): How does the medium affect the social meaning of an intended activity, and how does it change when we use another medium? In this respect, metadiscourse such as the *Medien-Knigge* addresses the social value that is tied to specific media choices. Therefore, the interrelation of social activities and structures of semiotic mediation is moderated by a third dimension, i.e. media ideology (cf. Hanks 1996: 230; see Fig. 1).

The concept of media ideology, developed and elaborated by Gershon (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), draws on earlier work on language ideologies carried out in Linguistic Anthropology (Schieffelin et al. 1998, Blommaert 1999, Kroskrity 2000). In his influential article, Silverstein defines *linguistic ideologies* as “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silver-

stein 1979: 193). In this sense, the notion of ideology is not meant to be political but refers to socially shared systems of assumptions about language structure and use. These assumptions become ‘articulated’, i.e. materialized, in metapragmatic discourse, when users implicitly and explicitly evaluate linguistic behavior. Hence, language ideology is essentially connected to sociolinguistic differentiation in that it functions as a rationalizing backdrop for the ascription of divergent social values to linguistic heterogeneity. As Irvine and Gal

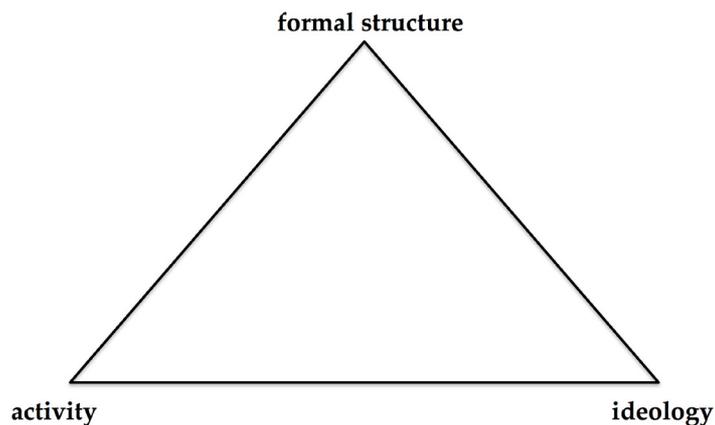


Fig.1. Three dimensions of communicative practice (Hanks 1996: 230)

stein 2000: 35). put it, language ideologies are “the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 35).

Gershon (2010a) transfers this perspective to the socially shared beliefs about media repertoires and the evaluative practices of ascribing distinct social value to media

choices. Drawing on Gershon and Silverstein's definition, we can say, that media ideologies are 'any sets of beliefs about media articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived media structure and use' or, as Gershon summarizes, "[i]n short, media ideologies are what people believe about how the medium affects or should affect the message" (Gershon 2010b: 391).

Language ideologies and media ideologies are strongly intertwined in that they both can be subsumed under the umbrella term of *semiotic ideology* (Keane 2003 & 2018). Both types of ideology coin the normalizing perspectives of a population on how social interactions can or should be executed by means of a heterogeneous semiotic repertoire. As a language-ideological metadiscourse, media-ideological statements reflect people's communicative strategies and at the same time mold these strategies into continuous social practices (cf. Gershon 2010a: 284). This should not be misconstrued as determination through ideology. Rather than determining a particular media choice, media ideological values should be regarded as resources for emergent, situated communicative practices. For example, the shared media-ideological imperative of 'not-using-WhatsApp-for-breaking-up' can be intentionally violated for a particular communicative effect, e.g. for devastating one's future ex-partner. Furthermore, a characteristic feature of both language and media ideologies is their heterogeneity: They are "multiple, locatable, partial, positioned, and contested" (ibid.). The ideological rationalization of types of mediation is expected to differ between populations, which leads to competing ideologies and thereby potential communicative irritations, e.g. a metapragma-

tic disagreement whether text messaging is an appropriate way to contacting one's professor. In this respect, the underlying arguments of media-ideological ascriptions might differ, although they refer to the same sort of mediation. The ideological rationalization can selectively draw on some aspects of a medium's structure while ignoring others. Gershon, who studied the media ideologies surrounding breaking up, discusses the example of how her interviewees vary in their conceptualization of their cellphones:

Yet the structure of the technology by no means determined how the students I interviewed understand what it meant to communicate by that particular medium, and thus what it might indicate when a conversational task (such as breaking up) moved from one medium to another. Not everyone understood how a medium affected a message in the same way. Some saw texting as intimate because one always carried one's cellphone on one's body, it was an ever present form of contact. Others saw it as distancing because every text message has a limit of 160 characters – how much can actually be said in any text? People's media ideologies affected which aspect of the structure of the technology mattered in an exchange. (Gershon 2010a: 394)

In this example, both individual media-ideological perspectives draw on the same media structures (cellphone), while rationalizing it in a contrasting manner (intimate vs. distancing). However, it is striking that the continuum between formality and informality seems to be at the heart of media-ideological metadiscourse. Accordingly, media ideologies are inherently relational. A medium can only be *more formal than* another – formality and

informality are no absolute values. On this basis a system of oppositions emerges:

A society's media repertoire is systematically organized by media-ideological distinctions. Such a system has implications for the social value of new media, in that "[e]ach new medium is instantly enmeshed in a web of media ideologies" (Gershon 2010b: 287). The appearance of a new medium triggers the metapragmatic reflexivity of its population in order to negotiate the media-ideological system as a whole:

As media for communication proliferate, people are developing culturally specific, nuanced understandings of how these media shape communication and what kinds of utterances are most appropriately stated through which media. Just as people's ideas about language and how language functions shape the ways they speak, people's ideas about different communicative media and how different media function shape the ways they use these media. (ibd.)

Metadiscursive encounters such as the *Medien-Knigge* are good examples for these dynamics in the course of media proliferation. By adopting a sociolinguistic perspective, I suggest, the contemporary digital media proliferation and its corresponding metapragmatic discourse seem to be highly relevant because of their overlap with a "rise of writing" (Brandt 2015). While traditional mass literacy mainly referred to a reading literacy, digital media pioneered "writing as a mass daily

experience" (ibid.: 3). Social Media Networks, instant-text-messaging, microblogs – the everyday encounters of reading *and* writing are manifold.<sup>4</sup> But the 'rise of writing' is not only striking in terms of quantity, it has far-reaching consequences for the quality of writing practices. As Androutsopoulos points out, this new mass literacy generates a diffusion of writing across new social contexts, traditionally rather associated with speech:

Rather than being restricted to specific purposes and occasions (and segments of the population), language mediated by keyboards and screens is now being used by almost everyone and to all sorts of purposes, including spontaneous and informal networked writing [...]. The widespread assumptions that authentic language in the community is limited to spoken language and that written language is the most homogenous, or invariant, area of language, seem no longer tenable. (Androutsopoulos 2016: 288)

Writing and our conceptualization of writing become emancipated from its traditional formal, often professional or even elitist settings (cf. Sebba 2003, Blommaert 2008). An unregimented writing characterized by spontaneity, interactional orientation and informal communicative purposes gives rise to variable spelling and creatively claims new orientations to orthographic norms (cf. Sebba 2012, Deumert 2014). Thus, a sociolinguistic differentiation of writing mirrors the digitalization of our social lives. This interconnection of "mediatization

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<sup>4</sup> Yet, these digital writing practices become more and more linked to oral speech again, for example in the shape of audio messages on *WhatsApp* and *Facebook Messenger*, *Viber* calls, *Facebook* calls and so forth. In this respect it needs to be stressed, that digital writing practices are also characterized by multimodal media convergence. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

and sociolinguistic change” (Androutsopoulos 2014b) exhibits semiotic-ideological implications as well. The media-ideological metadiscourse on mediation ‘appropriate-to-context’ is interwoven with the language-ideological metadiscourse on writing style ‘appropriate-to-context’. Therefore, the question of how a population socially organizes its semiotic repertoire can only be answered by focusing on both types of metapragmatic reflexivity.

#### 4. Media-ideological registers of writing

To theorize the ideological interrelation of mediation and writing style, the linguistic-anthropological concept of enregisterment seems to be a productive approach. Enregisterment refers to “processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population” (Agha 2007: 81). In Agha’s understanding registers are “reflexive model[s] of behavior” (ibid.: 147) in which a repertoire of semiotic features (i.e. co-occurrence style) gets metapragmatically connected to social values (e.g. social identities, types of activity, interpersonal stances, etc.). Materialized (patterns of) signs only become socially meaningful when people’s metapragmatic awareness typifies them *as* socially meaningful. Again, this process is fundamentally dependent on ideology in that people’s shared beliefs about

semiotic heterogeneity reanalyze and naturalize variation into distinct semiotic registers.

As Agha points out, semiotic registers are typically “cross-modal” (ibid.: 22) formations: linguistic and non-linguistic signs form a socially coherent repertoire. Assuming that media choice functions as an ideology-moderated, socially meaningful sign in its own right (presupposing and entailing a certain social context), we can focus on the *enregisterment of mediation*. Following this idea, the interrelation of media and digital writing practices can be regarded as cross-modal registers – or rather clumsily but accurately as *media-ideological registers of writing*.

Referring to the triangle of communicative practice (cf. Hanks 1996: 230; see Fig. 1), such media-ideological registers of writing can be illustrated as an interplay of two triangles, resulting in four constituting dimensions:

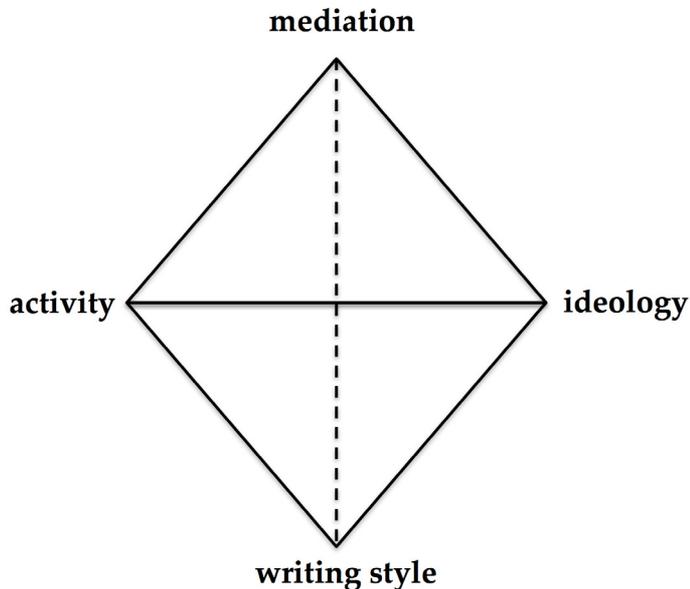


Fig. 2. Dimensions of media-ideological registers of writing

ideology, activity, mediation, and writing style (see Fig. 2).

We can see that the dimension of (*semiotic ideology*) includes both media ideologies as well as language ideologies. These metapragmatic ideologies clasp the register model by evaluating structures of mediation as well as patterns of written linguistic features (i.e. writing styles) and linking them to social activities.

The realm of *activity* is the realm of interaction-in-context, where enregistered structures of mediation but also enregistered linguistic styles “formulate [...] a sketch of the social occasion [...], indexing stereotypic features such as interlocutors’ roles, relationships, and the type of social practice in which they are engaged” (Agha 2007: 148).

*Mediation* refers to the structures and processes of semiotic materialization. During the process of media-ideological enregisterment these structures become socially meaningful in that they are stereotypically linked to social activities (e.g. formal job applications are linked to business letters; making social appointments with close friends is linked to digital instant-text-messaging, and so forth).

The sociolinguistic differentiation of digital mass literacy is represented in the dimension of *writing style*. Sets of graphic features (including orthographic and heterographic spellings, patterns of punctuation, integrated pictographic features, typography, etc.) become metapragmatically linked to social activities (e.g. formal job applications are linked to orthographic spellings; making social appointments with close friends to abbreviations and emojis, and so forth).

One key observation that needs to be stressed is the indirect interconnection between mediation and writing style (illustrated

by the dashed line in Fig. 2). Rather than being modeled after a media-technological determinism, the stereotypical correlations between a particular medium and a particular writing style become moderated by semiotic ideology and social activities (e.g. business letters are stereotypically correlated with orthographic spellings; digital instant-text-messaging with abbreviations and emojis, and so forth). This dynamic model copes with the fact that registers function as communicative resources, which are always available for creative tropes and register stylizations (e.g. job applications including non-standard spellings and emojis for intended pragmatic effects; orthographic, elaborated texts via *WhatsApp* in interactional moments of controversy, and so forth).

From an integrated perspective, media-ideological registers are sets of cross-modal signs selected from the media and the written-linguistic repertoire of a community. These selections are motivated by emic models of social ascriptions moderated by semiotic ideology. Hence, the analysis of register models fundamentally depends on ethnographic methods for reconstructing people’s metapragmatic reflexivity and their semiotic-ideological metadiscourse. This will be further illustrated in the following section.

## 5. Register awareness in digital writing of German adolescents

The digital ‘rise of writing’ had a strong impact on German adolescents’ daily social lives. An annual representative study of adolescents’ media use found that 94% of German teenagers were users of the text-messaging application *WhatsApp* in 2017 (mpfs 2017: 35). The following exemplary case study is an excerpt from a

broader sociolinguistic investigation on how this extensive digital writing leads to a differentiation in writing styles. The overarching project deals with how adolescents' metapragmatic reflexivity creates (media-ideological) registers of writing and how these register models are brought into interaction (Busch, forthcoming). The study draws on different types of data, collected in four high schools in northern Germany during the years 2015 and 2016. This paper focuses on a partial data set which is based on a corpus of 61 informal *WhatsApp* chat logs and seven group interviews with adolescents between of 12 and 19 years. The interview groups were divided according to age and gender. By means of an interview guideline, the participants were questioned on their general metapragmatic awareness of variation in writing as well as on writing practices such as phonetic spellings, letter repetition, letter substitution, and non-standard punctuation, but also on their reflections regarding media choices and their underlying media ideologies. These metapragmatic statements function as a contextualizing backdrop to the linguistic analysis and interpretation of the collected chat logs.

The two types of data inform the following discussion of the participants' media-ideological reflexivity. Firstly, there are traces of media-ideological metadiscourse within the *WhatsApp* data. Secondly – and much more explicitly – reflections on media and linguistic choices can be found in the recorded group interviews. Both types of data offer insights into the dynamics of media ideology and its overlap with language ideology and linguistic choices.

### 5.1 *Media-ideological metadiscourse in WhatsApp chat logs*

A general characteristic of semiotic ideologies is their tendency to be invisible, often naturalized as common-sense-knowledge, which does not require further discussion. Semiotic ideology can be imagined as transparent strands functioning as guidance of semiotic choices. This is especially the case when referring to media ideology, since it relies on the strong media-ideological imperative of 'only-an-invisible-medium-is-a-good-medium' (cf. Krämer 1998: 74). Drawing on ethnomethodological "breaching experiments" (Garfinkel 1967), it is evident that communicative moments trigger the interactional exploration of the unsaid, in which these common-sense assumptions are violated. To this effect, the explicit discussion of media choices within the *WhatsApp* data is strongly connected to moments of interpersonal crisis among participants. Media choice is mentioned exclusively in a negative manner, i.e. when evaluated as 'inappropriate'. An example is provided by the fourteen-year-old Anne.<sup>5</sup> In the following message Anne responds to accusations by her friend Lisa. Lisa accused Anne of having gossiped about her with Nelly. Anne justifies herself by stating that this is a misunderstanding.

(1) *WhatsApp*-chat – Anne/Lisa (14-years-old).<sup>6</sup>

18:35:07, Anne:

*Nelly hat mich gefragt was wir besprochen haben .....  
da wir ja eigentlich nicht über sieh gesprochen haben*

<sup>5</sup> All participant's names are pseudonymized.

<sup>6</sup> The spelling of all *WhatsApp* data has been retained and, if possible, emulated in my English translation.

*dachte ich das wäre nicht schlimm ..... ich glaube das alles ist ein missverständnis vllt hat nelly sachen anders verstanden denn ich habe geschriebn auch gesprochen aber halt auch geschrieben und beim schreiben versteht man manche dachen eben falsch ich rufe sie mal an aber ich glaube es ist besser wenn wir morgen in der schule reden und nicht auf whatsapp denn da versteht man alles falsch ..... ok ich bin gleich wieder on sprech kurz mit ihr bis gleich*

'Nelly asked me what we discussed ..... since we did not really speak about her I thought it wouldn't turn out bad ..... I think all of this is a misunderstanding, Nelly probably understood things differently because I was writing also speaking but also writing and when writing one just gets some things wrong, I will call her but I think it would be better if we talk tomorrow at school and not on whatsapp because there you get everything wrong ..... ok I'll be back online in a bit talking with her shortly be right back'

Anne's strategy of stating a misunderstanding is strongly based on the evaluation of media choices. Media gets evaluated concerning its 'potential of misunderstanding' – the further away a medium is from face-to-face-conversation, the greater the inherent danger of *misunderstanding*. In this sense, Anne constructs a ranking of media choice concerning its appropriateness in precarious interpersonal situations, beginning with the worst option (writing), turning to the compromise solution (speaking via phone), and finally promising the optimal solution (talking face to face at school). The starting point of these ascriptions is always the structure of mediation (especially regarding spatial co-presence vs. spatial separation, temporal synchronicity vs. temporal asynchronicity, written mode vs. spoken mode), which becomes attributed to

social activities moderated by media ideology. The data demonstrates that the media-ideological organization is repeatedly ordered by these kinds of rankings. At the same time, the ideological character of these enregisterments of mediation becomes striking when turning to interactional sequences of competing media-ideological rationalizations. One of these moments can be found in the chat log of the seventeen-year-olds Melanie and Jonas, who are engaged in a romantic relationship. Melanie is irritated after Jonas just left the class without saying good bye, so she asks for an explanation via *WhatsApp*.

(2) *WhatsApp*-chat – Melanie/Jonas (17-years-old).

22:12:23, Melanie:

*Wieso bist du nach Psychologie dann so schnell weggegangen?*

'Why did you leave so quickly after the psychology course?'

22:15:39, Jonas:

*Hatte um halb sechs einen Arzttermin*

'Had a medical appointment at half past five [i.e. 5.30]'

22:16:08, Melanie:

*Ach so*

'Oh, right'

22:47:06, Melanie:

*Was ist dein Problem?'*

What's your problem?'

09:33:37, Jonas:

*Du willst das über whatsapp klären ?*

'You want to discuss it via whatsapp?'

09:51:49, Melanie:

*Ich würde gerne erst einmal wissen, wases zu klären gibt*  
'First off I would like to know what there is to discuss'

11:57:55, Melanie:

*Ok dann wohl nicht*  
'Okay I guess not'

11:59:01, Jonas:

*Hä*  
'Huh'

11:59:09, Jonas:

*Ich will einfach nicht über whatsapp darüber reden*  
'I just don't want to talk about it via whatsapp'

12:30:32, Melanie:

*Ja aber du kannst mir doch einmal sagen worüber du mit mir reden möchtest*  
'Yeah, but you can tell me what you want to talk about with me'

15:55:57, Melanie:

*Ich hab keine Lust dir hinterher zu rennen und zu fragen was los ist. Wenn du ein Problem mit mir hast kannst du mir ja schreiben, mich anrufen und in der Schule ansprechen aber böse Blicke helfen glaub ich jetzt auch nicht so weiter*  
*Ich find es unnötig einfach nicht zu antworten*  
'I don't feel like running after you and asking what's going on. If you have a problem with me you can write me, call me and talk to me at school, but mean looks don't help at all I think I think it's unnecessary to just not answer'

After half an hour has passed without any further explanation by Jonas, Melanie calls a spade a spade and directly asks: *What's your problem?* Jonas blocks this relatively open attack

by metapragmatically evaluating it as inappropriate regarding its mediation: *You want to discuss it via whatsapp?* While Melanie wants to primarily discuss their interpersonal problem early, Jonas does not deviate from his point of view – he just repeats his metapragmatic statement: *I just don't want to talk about it via whatsapp.* Even the apparent compromise that Melanie suggests (*I would [only] like to know what there is to discuss*) does not help to align their competing media-ideological evaluations. In the end, Melanie implicitly argues against Jonas's media-ideological constraints, by enumerating all his possible media choices (*write me, call me and talk to me at school*) and by clarifying she does not care about mediation as long as verbal communication is happening. However, at the same time, it is striking that Melanie reproduces the apparently socially shared media ranking that was already analyzed in Anne's example. Melanie seems to be aware of media-ideological rankings of intimacy/social distance even though she does not commit herself to these assumptions in this particular socially-situated interaction. In any case, we can state that media choice is metapragmatically reflected regarding its enregisterment with social relations. However, depending on the peer group, the social value enregistered with a medium may differ. While *WhatsApp* is ascribed the attribute of 'being impersonal' in some communities, for example, there is the quite opposite conceptualization in many teenage peer-groups, in which digital networks play a crucial role in constituting communities of practice. To what extent *WhatsApp* can be interpreted as a 'social yardstick' in some of these communities becomes clear in an interaction with fourteen-year-olds Lisa and Anne, who already provided the first example:

(3) WhatsApp-Chat – Anne/Lisa (14-years-old).

21:26:46: Lisa:

*Bist du eigentlich noch in jorge??*  
'Are you still into jorge??'

21:26:28: Anne:

*Wieso*  
'Why'

21:29:39: Anne:

*Wieso möchtest. Du das wissen*  
'Why do you want to know that'

21:31:19: Lisa:

*Weil du ihn dan ja bei watsapp haben könntest*  
'Because you could have him on whatsapp'

21:30:51: Anne:

*hast du ihn*  
'do you have him'

21:32:12: Lisa:

*Nein*  
'No'

21:32:18: Anne:

*Dann möchte ich ihn auch nicht (das bedeutet aber nichts)*  
'Then I don't want him either (but that doesn't mean anything)'

21:32:34: Anne:

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
'!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'

Lisa's question whether Anne is *still into jorge* is part of the social practice of observing one's friends' romantic interests within the school community. The verbal construction of *person X is into person Y* is the contracted linguistic distillate of this practice, repeated over and over again. After Anne hesitates to answer, Lisa reveals her plan: If Anne indeed still is *into jorge* she *could have him on whatsapp*. The mere technical addition of a new contact has its own social value (besides the actual communicative interaction with that contact), it functions as a social index to a certain kind of social relationship. Just as some people do not consider their romantic relationship over until they have removed each other as *Facebook* friends (cf. Gershon 2010c),<sup>7</sup> so do Lisa and Anne show an understanding of what it means socially to collect contacts in their *WhatsApp* accounts. Even though Anne insists that her negative answer *doesn't mean anything*, it quite clearly stresses the opposite of that statement. Especially the extensive iteration of exclamation marks presupposes that the decision of adding or not adding a boy to her contacts on *WhatsApp* is in fact immensely meaningful. Again, this example shows the semiotic value of the medium – it is a semiotic structure of its own, charged by ideological rationalizations.

By drawing these exemplary discussions back to the model of media-ideological registers of writing (Fig. 2), there have still only been three out of four dimensions investigated so far: Mediation, activity, and (media) ideology. In order to relate these three aspects to the fourth dimension of writing style, the group interview data becomes essential.

<sup>7</sup> The interviewees of Gershon even coined "the common phrase [...] 'It's not official until it's Facebook official'" (Gershon 2010b: 397).

## 5.2 Media-ideological metadiscourse in group interviews

Similar to the chat log interactions, meta-pragmatic reflexivity on media choices can be found in the group interview data. But unlike the *WhatsApp* interactions, the interview questions elicit participants' explicit reflections on the entanglement of written-stylistic and media choices. Hence, the following discussion showcases a sample of interview excerpts, in which the participants comment on the interconnection of language and media ideologies. Typically, these interconnections are described on the basis of comparative oppositions, as can be seen in the case of sixteen-year-old Benni when he compares his writing of e-mails to his interaction on *WhatsApp*.

### (4) Interview 7 – Benni/Jan (16-years-old).

Benni:

*Wenn man jetzt den Unterschied zwischen E-Mail und WhatsApp nimmt, klar ist da ein großer Unterschied. Zumal, wenn ich eine E-Mail schreibe, dann hat es eigentlich immer was mit formelleren Dingen zu tun. Aber selbst wenn ich jetzt, sagen wir, ich würde Jan über E-Mail schreiben – was eigentlich nie passieren würde – aber ich würde es machen, wäre schon was anderes. Ohne Smileys auf jeden Fall.*

'Now, if you take the difference between email and WhatsApp, obviously there's a big difference. When I write an e-mail, it's always something more formal. But even if I, say, were to write Jan via e-mail – which would never happen – but if I did, it would be something else for sure. Definitely without smiley faces.'

First, Benni describes the enregisterment of e-mail with formal activities. In his prototypical perception writing an e-mail *it's always something more formal*. This media-ideological enregisterment seems to be so fixed that even the mere thought of writing an e-mail to his close friend Jan seems absurd to Benni – *it would never happen*. After considering the hypothetical possibility further, Benni concludes that his writing style would remain committed to the style demanded by writing an e-mail, *definitely without smileys*. Thus, Benni describes a double-enregisterment of the medium. There is a primary enregisterment of the e-mail with formal activities which leads to the indirect interconnection with a specific writing style (i.e. graphic/writing features enregistered with formal activities in their own right). The more e-mail as a medium is prototypically regarded as a formal medium, the stronger the link between e-mail and a particular style of writing becomes (the dashed line in Fig. 2). Therefore, this interconnection of e-mails and features of formal writing can be understood as the result of a secondary enregisterment.

In the further course of the interview, a contrasting hypothetical scenario is introduced. What would happen if Benni and Jan were *forced to write to [their] teacher via WhatsApp*?

### (5) Interview 7 – Benni/Jan (16-years-old).

Interviewer:

*Wenn ihr dazu gezwungen werden würdet, eurem Lehrer bei WhatsApp zu schreiben, wie würde das dann aussehen? 'If you were forced to write to your teacher via WhatsApp, what would that look like?'*

Benni:

*Keine Emojis.*

'No emojis.'

Jan:

*Absolut wie ein Brief. Wie eine E-Mail mit Einleitung, Hauptteil, Schluss.*

'Definitely like a letter. Like an e-mail with an introduction, main part, conclusion.'

Of course, this kind of question is highly hypothetical, but it helps to elicit reflections on the intersection of media and language ideology. Compared to Benni's reflections on 'writing an e-mail to a close friend' it seems that the enregistered value of formality is always noticed as primary, be it on the side of mediation or on the side of social activity. Benni and Jan's answer is typical for the group interview data, in that it focuses on the formal social relation in context rather than on the stereotypical enregisterment of the medium. Both immediately agree that recipient design is the most important aspect when texting with one's teacher. This strongly aligns with the underlying questions of re-mediation: The recipient design evokes a particular linguistic (in this case explicitly textual) structure (*introduction, main part, conclusion*), which is strongly enregistered with another medium (*definitely like a letter*). In fact, Benni and Jan would write a virtual letter in the disguise of a *WhatsApp*-message.

Interview excerpts such as these prove a highly elaborated metapragmatic awareness, which enables to strikingly flexible linguistic practices. The next example also shows this complexity of metapragmatic awareness, especially regarding recipient design. The fourteen-year-olds Lea and Anne reflect on the

linguistic as well as the medial differences in relation to different groups of addressees.

(6) Interview 3 – Lea/Anne (14-years-old).

Lea:

*Ähm, also wenn man jetzt zum Beispiel mit Lehrern oder auch mit Leuten, die man nicht so kennt, schreibt, ist es halt so, dass man lange Texte schreibt, finde ich. Ganze Sätze. Und mit besten Freunden halt so 'Hi wg' oder halt so Abkürzungen. Aber wenn ich jetzt jemanden ganz neuen kennenlerne über halt zum Beispiel WhatsApp, dann schreibe ich 'Hallo, wie geht's dir' und dann noch einen Smiley noch dahinter. 'Ich bin's, Lisa aus der alten Klasse' sowas halt. 'Um, so if one texts for example with teachers or with people one does not know very well, it's just that one writes long texts, I think. Whole sentences. And with best friends it's more like 'Hi HRY' or just abbreviations. But when I get to know somebody new, for example via WhatsApp, I write 'hello, how are you' and then a smiley behind that. 'It's me, Lisa from your old class', stuff like that.'*

Anne:

*Also ich finde, mit besten Freunden schreibt man auch nicht so viel auf WhatsApp. Wenn man mit allerbesten Freunden schreibt, schickt man sich so manchmal, also wenn der eine nur eine Kamera dabei hat, schickt man sich dann die Bilder rüber oder so. 'Well, I think with best friends one doesn't write that much via WhatsApp. If one is texting with very best friends, one sometimes sends, like if one only has a camera with you, then you send photos or something.'*

Lea:

*Und Sprachnachrichten.*

'And voice messages.'

Anne:

*Ja, Sprachnachrichten. Aber mit allerbesten Freunden telefoniert man eigentlich am meisten oder schickt Snaps.*  
'Yes, voice messages. But with very best friends you actually mostly phone or send snaps.'

Lea:

*Und ich würde jetzt auch nicht mir Leuten, die ich noch nicht gut kenne, Sprachnachrichten machen. Also da immer schreiben und mit guten Freunden, also mit wirklich richtig guten Freunden fast nur Sprachnachrichten.*  
'And I would not record voice messages for people I do not know well yet. So there I always write and with good friends, like with really really good friends, almost only voice messages.'

Similarly to the metapragmatic rankings of mediation, discussed in the last section, the interviewees develop differentiated categories of addressees (defined by social relations), each enregistered with different sets of linguistic features as well as structures of mediation. Based on *WhatsApp's* technical affordances Lea and Anne engender a proper architecture of four media-ideological registers of writing:

1. *People one does not know very well get long texts with whole sentences.*
2. *New, rather unfamiliar people get a dedicated, more accurate written message without abbreviations, but including smileys out of courtesy.*
3. *Best friends get abbreviations (HRY – how are you) and rather short texts, but writing is not the primary mode of communi-*

cation anymore. Best friends are more likely to get *voice messages* and *photos*.

4. *Very best friends and really really good friends get phone calls, voice messages, and photos via another medium (snaps [in Snapchat]).*

A striking aspect of this four-level-categorization is not only that the enregisterment of addressees and linguistic/medial structures is thoroughly ideological, the construction of the social groupings is also based on ideological rationalizations. For example, the defining characteristics of a *very best friend* might differ between peer groups and age cohorts. Furthermore, the linguistic as well as the media choices can be grasped as communicative resources for actively constructing a *very best friend*, i.e. a person who receives abbreviations, voice messages and photos via *WhatsApp*. In this sense, the four dimensions of media-ideological registers of writing are bi-directionally interconnected.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper I explored some issues at the intersection of media and language ideologies and their impact on digital writing practices of German adolescents. I have argued that the concept of media ideologies is a necessary theoretical tool to investigate sociolinguistic differentiation in the digital age of mass literacy. The model of media-ideological registers of writing can offer an analytical orientation to explore such differentiation regarding the four dimensions *ideology, activity, mediation, and writing style*. As the exemplary analysis of *WhatsApp* chat logs and group interview data

revealed, register models are highly flexible in interaction and characterized by the bi-directional interconnections of their constituting dimensions. A particularly important insight concerns the interrelation between writings styles, i.e. linguistic choices, and mediation. Unlike implicitly media-deterministic approaches this paper pointed to the indirect interconnection between both dimensions – always moderated by semiotic ideologies and oriented towards social activities. Media do not work as mere technical devices, they are semiotic resources embedded in social practices. Drawing on the investigated group interview data, the linchpin of digital registers of writing seems to be the recipient design. Patterns of social relations become metapragmatically relevant and ideologically motivate choices of mediation and writing styles. Furthermore, the ideological dependency manifests itself in the fact that register models can vary greatly between communities of practice. While abbreviations and short digital messages socially indicate a trusted and friendly relationship within an adolescent’s peer group, it is very likely that completely opposite linguistic features are enregistered with ‘friendship’ and ‘familiarity’ within a group of more conservative adults for example. Therefore, ‘appropriateness’ not only depends on situational context, but it even more so depends on social communities and their metapragmatic reflexivity.

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# 05

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Transatlantic translanguaging in  
Zimdancehall: Reassessing linguistic  
creativity in youth language practices

# 05

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## Transatlantic translanguaging in Zimdancehall: Reassessing linguistic creativity in youth language practices

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### **1. Introduction**

The importance of the relationship between music and youth language has been underlined by scholars of African youth language phenomena, especially with regard to the role of Hip Hop (e.g. Vierke 2015). The present contribution explores this relationship by focusing on Zimbabwean youth language practices in

Zimdancehall music. Among other creative strategies, the examples analyzed in this paper feature transatlantic translanguaging practices and thus illustrate the often called upon global dimension of youth language practices with regard to connections between Africa and its Caribbean diaspora.

In Zimdancehall, young people draw creatively on the semiotic resources in their

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multilingual repertoires and engage in a range of linguistic strategies and practices which can be described in terms of translingual practices (Canagarajah 2013) or translanguaging (García & Wei 2014). The music artists also make use of other creative youth language practices in their music, for instance by coining new expressions in their lyrics which are then popularized through the music.

While youth language practices have often been marked as 'specially creative' practices by linguistic scholars, my objective is to show that while the youth language practices found in Zimdancehall music are certainly creative, they are as such not different from linguistic practices in other sociolinguistic contexts. In fact, linguistic creativity should not be regarded as a special practice, but rather as a common phenomenon in the way human beings use language (see Carter 2004). In this regard, this paper presents a fresh look at youth language by deconstructing the myth of its *otherness* and placing it in its contexts as common language practice.

The study of African youth language practices has gained momentum in the past two decades and continues to attract academic attention. Scholars have dealt with various practices in different countries and have discussed a range of theoretical issues and creative linguistic strategies. It has repeatedly been argued that youth language practices are embedded in global, urban and youth culture and that they are connected to other social practices such as clothing choices, hair styles, music, and so forth (e.g. Kießling & Mous 2004, Hollington & Nassenstein 2015). In this context, and especially with regard to the creative linguistic strategies of language manipulation, youth language practices have often

been treated as 'special' languages, different from 'standard' language and from adults' or other language practices. While the examples of youth language illustrated here and in other contributions do reflect linguistic creativity, this paper argues that similar forms of creativity are employed by all human beings, especially in multilingual contexts.

With regard to music, a range of scholars have outlined the impact of Hip Hop on youth language practices, illustrating influences from global Hip Hop repertoires as well as developments in local African Hip Hop scenes (e.g. Vierke 2015). However, in many African societies and especially among youths and adolescents, Jamaican music, in particular Reggae and Dancehall, play an important role and have an impact on local linguistic practices. In Zimbabwe, Reggae (and later Dancehall) have been very popular for decades, especially since the release of Bob Marley's song *Zimbabwe* in 1979. In recent years, a unique Dancehall genre called Zimdancehall emerged in the country and currently constitutes the dominating popular music genre in Zimbabwe and its diaspora. This chapter looks at Zimdancehall by focusing on the use of youth language and translanguaging practices (see below for a definition of the term) in the lyrical performances of music artists. The notions of translanguaging and linguistic creativity have gained momentum in recent sociolinguistic approaches to language practices. Sociolinguists have been less concerned with analyzing language structures and more with examining real linguistic and communicative practices in their social contexts, with the help of ethnographic methods. This perspective has led to new approaches to language and multilingual practices. They

have also impacted views on African youth languages, especially because the very nature of most youth language practices is that they are fast-changing, multilingual, creative and unbounded, and thus require a focus on actual performances in order to understand the complex communicative and semiotic resources involved and the way they are put together in bricolage (see Nassenstein & Hollington 2016). While these new perspectives in sociolinguistics (see also Deumert 2014) reflect a general paradigm shift in the discipline and relate to language and linguistics at large, it seems that they had a special effect on (African) youth language research: While they have certainly brought fresh looks on youth language, they also seem to have reinforced the (often implied) view that youth languages are special due to their creative nature. The creativity of manipulative strategies and multilingual practices which also involve fast-changing youth styles and culture as well as global influences seems to exhibit some extraordinary glow. This view will be questioned in this contribution.

The recent paradigm shift in sociolinguistics has brought new terms such as the above-mentioned *translanguaging* (García & Wei 2014) or *translingual practice* (Canagarajah 2013). Such terms are intended to focus on the performative nature of linguistic practice and to reflect a new perspective on language as such, namely a focus on the messy realities of parole. In multilingual communicative situations, this also means that speakers do not separate 'languages' by switching from one language to another, but rather draw resources from a large multilingual repertoire which they use in creative and unbounded ways. The

term 'translingual practice' was employed by Canagarajah as an umbrella term for communicative practices which transcend individual languages and words, involving diverse semiotic resources (Canagarajah 2013: 6–8). In other words,

[t]he term translingual conceives of language relationships in more dynamic terms. The semiotic resources in one's repertoire or in society interact more closely, become part of an integrated resource, and enhance each other. The languages mesh in transformative ways, generating new meanings and grammars. (ibid.: 8)

In a similar vein, García and Wei adopt the term *translanguaging* and state that it refers to

a trans-semiotic system with many meaning-making signs [...] that combine to make up a person's semiotic repertoire. [...] Bilingual [or multilingual] speakers select meaning-making features and freely combine them to potentialize meaning-making, cognitive engagement, creativity and criticality. *Translanguaging* refers to the act of languaging between systems that have been described as separate, and beyond them. As such, *translanguaging* is transformative and creates changes in inter-active cognitive and social structures that in turn affect our continuous languaging becoming. (García and Wei 2014: 42)

These terms and the approaches they imply are highly useful for multilingual countries and societies as we often find them on the African continent.

In multilingual Zimbabwe, youth language is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon involving mainly the languages

Shona, Ndebele and English (see Hollington & Makwabarara 2015).<sup>2</sup> Depending on the local set-up and context of the various communities of practice, the mix of resources that form an individual's repertoire can vary. For instance, while youth language practices in Harare (the capital city of Zimbabwe and center of Mashonaland) are mostly Shona-dominated, Bulawayo, the capital of Matabeleland, exhibits a stronger focus on Ndebele and an orientation towards South Africa (see Ndlovu 2015 for Bulawayo-based youth language practices referred to as S'ncamtho). English, or rather various Englishes, also play an important role in Zimbabwe, on the one hand as the former colonial language, while on the other hand there are influences from various world Englishes through contact and global flows. This is especially evident in youth language and in music. Apart from translanguaging practices, youth in Zimbabwe engage in a range of common strategies of linguistic manipulation such as metaphor or semantic shift which also find their way into Zimdancehall lyrics (for more details and examples see Hollington & Makwabarara 2015).

Section 2 will introduce Zimdancehall in more detail and discuss the music genre with regard to its Jamaican influences and its musical context in Zimbabwe, while Section 3 will look at the lyrics of three Zimdancehall songs by Winky D, Da Ruler Mambokadzi and Bounty

Lisa. The discussion in Section 4 will reconsider the creativity of youth languages in comparison to other linguistic practices, followed by a short conclusion.

## 2. Zimdancehall and its emergence in the Zimbabwean music scene

Zimbabwean music is a versatile and complex phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> While it is sometimes common to distinguish between 'traditional' and 'popular' music, these labels are also problematic and the two are by no means clearly distinguishable from each other. For instance, 'traditional' Zimbabwean music is usually strongly associated with the *mbira*,<sup>4</sup> to the extent that the instrument is regarded as *the* symbol of Zimbabwean music. In the development of popular music in Zimbabwe, the *mbira* also plays an important role and features in many music genres and styles from *Chimurenga* to Zimdancehall. *Chimurenga* is regarded as one of the earliest pop music genres in Zimbabwe and was created by Thomas Mapfumo during the liberation war against colonial rule in the 1970s. The Shona word *Chimurenga* means 'struggle' and stands for anticolonial war against the White imperialists.<sup>5</sup> *Chimurenga* music, which combines Shona music featuring the *mbira* and other African instruments with Western instruments such as the electric guitar, became popular among

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<sup>2</sup> These three languages constitute the major languages of Zimbabwe. However, it should be pointed out that there is a range of minority languages and that the country recognizes 16 official languages.

<sup>3</sup> The complex history and development of Zimbabwean music cannot be recounted in this article. The interested reader is referred to contributions such as Berliner (1993), Turino (2000) or Chikowero (2008, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The *mbira* is a musical instrument of African origin belonging to the class of lamellophones (also classified as 'plucked idiophone'). Sometimes referred to as a 'thumb piano', the instrument is made of a wooden board and metal keys which are plucked with the two thumbs while holding the instrument with both hands. The board is usually placed in a calabash which serves as a resonator and amplifies the sound.

<sup>5</sup> The 'first Chimurenga' is associated with the Ndebele and Shona uprising against colonial rule at the end of the 19th century. The 'second Chimurenga' refers to the guerrilla war from 1966 to 1979, which resulted in the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

the Zimbabwean freedom fighters.<sup>6</sup> With the evolution of the music industry, other pop music genres came up such as Afro-Jazz or Sungura (a Zimbabwean version of Rumba). In the second half of the 1980s, Jit emerged as a highly popular genre through the high profile of the Bhundu Boys. In the 1990s to 2000s, Urban groove (Zimbabwean Hip Hop) became the most popular music style (Mate 2012). Jamaican Reggae had been popular in Zimbabwe since the late 1970s, especially since the release of Bob Marley's song *Zimbabwe* in 1979, which expressed solidarity with the Zimbabwean freedom fighters ("so arm in arms with arms we fight this little struggle") and the subsequent independence of the country at whose celebrations Bob Marley played in April 1980. Since then, numerous Jamaican Reggae and Dancehall artists have performed in Zimbabwe. Moreover, Zimbabwean Reggae (and later Dancehall) artists and bands arose and became popular in the 1980s. Over time, this music scene built the foundations for the emergence of Zimdancehall, which has evolved in the last decade under the influence of Zimbabwean popular music, and of course with strong parallels to the Jamaican Dancehall scene. Zimdancehall thus evolved in a context of Jamaican-Zimbabwean cross-fertilization spiced up with influences from other music genres, such as Zimbabwean urban groove (Hip Hop), Sungura and South African Kwaito.

In Jamaican Dancehall culture, producers create *riddims* ('rhythms', i.e. instrumental

tracks) and have several artists (i.e. singers) voice the same instrumental *version* with their respective lyrics. This means there are usually several songs by various artists on the same *riddim*. The *riddims* are usually named and there are riddim mixes that compile various artists on the same riddim, mixed by *selectahs* (i.e. 'disk jockeys') or *soundsystems*. These practices were adopted and adapted by Zimdancehall producers who have created instrumental tracks such as the award-winning *Zimbo Flavor Riddim* produced 2013 by Levels/Chillspot Records featuring artists such as Soul Jah Love, Ras Pompy, Qounfuzed, Tocky Vibes among others (for more details see Hollington forthcoming). Zimdancehall artists have also adopted, reshaped and recontextualized other Jamaican Dancehall practices, including *deejaying*,<sup>7</sup> certain similar themes in the lyrics, clothing style, dreadlocks and other symbols of Rastafari identity (such as the colors red, gold and green or the Lion of Judah) attitudes (and resistance) to *Babylon* (a term which stands for oppression, colonialism/neo-colonialism, corruption, exploitation, *sufferation*<sup>8</sup> etc.). In some cases, Jamaican *riddims* are used by Zimdancehall artists. The great majority of the *riddims* used in Zimdancehall however, are local productions by Zimbabwean producers. While some *riddims* resemble Jamaican Dancehall *riddims* very closely in terms of the musical set-up and structure, other *riddims* show a clear Zimbabwean flavor, incorporating Zimbabwean melodies and/or instruments (such as the above-mentioned *mbira*). Thus, Zimdancehall

<sup>6</sup> While Mapfumo's lyrics supported the war against the colonizers during colonial times, the singer continued to make songs about social and political injustice after Zimbabwean independence.

<sup>7</sup> The term *deejaying* refers to a singing technique which is characterized by fast, melodious speech-singing (akin to rapping) over a *riddim*.

<sup>8</sup> A term adopted from Jamaican Rastafari discourse which stands for the suffering of the oppressed masses.

is not a mere copy of Jamaican Dancehall but also contains lots of features that reflect its Zimbabwean context and community of practice and constitute new creations that reflect transatlantic cultural ties.

### 2.1 Zimdancehall, language and youths

With regard to lyrics, Shona (ChiShona), the African *lingua franca* of Zimbabwe, features most prominently in the lyrical practices of Zimdancehall artists. However, English and especially Jamaican are also used in the lyrics. While some artists confine themselves to the use of a few emblematic expressions that index Jamaican as an international symbol of Reggae and Dancehall<sup>9</sup>, other artists combine Jamaican and Shona in very creative ways, while some artists perform songs which are entirely in Jamaican/English (e.g. Spiderman *She love me*). The use of Jamaican, the international and dominant language of reggae, also serves to mark authenticity and connection to the original Jamaican reggae and dancehall scene, as some examples in the next section will illustrate. On the other hand, content and language of the music also express a strong focus on the local context. The comparability of Jamaican and Zimbabwean practices in this regard is also due to shared cultural and social experiences including colonialism, white supremacy and ghetto life with its daily struggles (see Hollington forthcoming).

The linguistic choices in Zimdancehall also reflect the cultural politics of the country (Mate 2012). In 2001, a Broadcasting Services Bill was passed that demands “75% local con-

tent” from local broadcasters. This may have triggered or reinforced a stronger focus on Shona in the Zimdancehall lyrics and can be seen as an attempt to control language practices in public media. As Samy Alim states: “We begin with language as power, that is, the view that language *is* the revolution, a powerful discourse in and of itself. We know that the most powerful people in society tend to control speech and its circulation through mass media” (Alim 2006: 10). Practices of banning songs and censoring lyrics, as has commonly occurred in Zimbabwe, testify to these politics. However, Zimbabweans including Zimdancehall artists have a great repertoire at their disposal and have many ways with words, so that political and cultural restrictions and social expectations relating language and music practices do not prevent the youths from “doing their thing”, and nor does censorship. One strategy is to use manipulations like metaphor to make ‘critical statements’ or to talk about socially unacceptable topics. Moreover, youth language also helps the mostly young artists to bond and express solidarity with their young listeners and fans.

While it is an oversimplification to equate Zimbabwean youth language practices with Zimdancehall lyrics and performances, the two are certainly connected and influence each other. On the one hand, artists use youth language practices in their lyrics and on the other hand they also lead changes through innovative linguistic behavior and their role as models for many youths. Thus youth language practices are commonly employed in Zimdancehall lyrics by the artists as cutting

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<sup>9</sup> This might be due to limited knowledge of resources from Jamaican language practices, as linguistic repertoires can contain “bits and pieces” of linguistic resources (see Blommaert 2010).

edge language and style, as a manipulative strategy to express things more indirectly and as a marker of identity. At the same time, expressions coined or popularized by Zimdancehall artists may be taken up by listeners and become popular among youths.<sup>10</sup> One example of a linguistic practice which is fruitful in youth language as well as in Zimdancehall is the use of labels to denote groups of people (in-group and outgroup). As youths often want to set themselves apart from other parts of society, they may create labels to denote themselves and others (Kießling & Mous 2004, Hollington 2015). With regard to Zimbabwe, a common label used for Zimbabweans is the term *zimbo* (see also *zimbolicious* and the discussion of the term in Veit-Wild 2009). In analogy to this word formation, the Zimbabwean community on Twitter are referred to as *twimbos*.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, there are labels such as *matsaga* (*masaga*) and *mabonga* to refer to 'rural people' or 'people who are not switched on', people who do not know what is going on. The term *matsaga* literally means 'sack' (according to a common belief that sacks are used more often in agricultural contexts, i.e. in the countryside), while the word *mabonga* denotes a wild cat, which is associated with the countryside. The term *masalad*, in contrast, is used for 'people with money and

swag', who listen to Urban Grooves, speak more English than Shona and belong to the middle class (and who, unlike most Zimdancehall-associated people from the 'ghetto', are believed to 'eat salad', a habit that is associated with the middle class). The term *manosebrigade* refers to people who 'speak through the nose', as they intentionally change their accents and try to imitate a British accent. While some of these terms (such as *manosebrigade*) are quite old and have been in use for some decades, others (like *twimbos*) were coined more recently. In the context of such labels, Zimdancehall artists have also come up with terms to denote and address their fan-base and the people from their 'ghetto'/part of town. 'Ghetto identity' plays an important role in Zimdancehall, as the music is associated with Harare's 'high density' areas.<sup>12</sup> Artists and others proudly refer to the place where they grew up and thus claim their 'ghetto roots' as part of their identity.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the artist Winky D, who comes from the 'high density' area Kambuzuma in Harare, coined the term *maninja* ('ninjas'), and more recently also the term *gafa* ('boss'). While these labels are strongly associated with the singer and are used by him in his songs and when addressing his fans and audiences, they are also finding their way into the linguistic practices

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<sup>10</sup> This point was also made by Vierke (2015) for Kenyan Hip Hop and Sheng. In this regard, it is especially interesting to look at aesthetics with regard to conscious linguistic choices and practices and to take the poetic function of language into consideration (Vierke 2015, Jakobson 1981).

<sup>11</sup> It seems that the term has been widened to include Zimbabweans active on other social media besides Twitter. See for instance the group *Twimbos giving hope* on Facebook [<https://www.facebook.com/Twimbos-Giving-Hope-1046101418749325/>].

<sup>12</sup> It should be pointed out that Harare (like other urban centers in Zimbabwe and beyond) is divided into so-called 'low density' areas (where middle and upper class people live) and 'high density' areas (which are often referred to as 'ghettos' by Zimbabweans). To identify with the 'ghetto' proudly and openly is a common practice of Zimdancehall artists which also finds parallels in the Jamaican dancehall.

<sup>13</sup> This also has parallels with reggae and dancehall scenes and practices in Jamaica and other parts of Africa, especially since reggae is often believed to be music that defends and speaks for the poor and oppressed.

of youths, especially of those who listen to his music and identify with Kambuzuma. In a similar vein, the term *mabhanditi* ('bandits') is used by Seh Kalaz, a Zimdancehall artist from Mbare, Harare's biggest 'ghetto' and the stronghold of Zimdancehall. Therefore we can conclude that the place where people grow up or associate with plays an important role with regard to Zimdancehall identity.

### 3. Zimdancehall lyrics – creative linguistic practices

This section will examine Zimdancehall lyrics by looking at three songs. The three songs have been selected because they represent artists of varying levels of popularity, different gender and especially; the songs exhibit a spectrum of phenomena analyzed here with regard to the thematic of this contribution. As already mentioned, Zimdancehall lyrics constitute a site of linguistic creativity and playfulness. One

of the most popular and long-standing artists in the Zimdancehall scene is the already mentioned Winky D (aka 'Di Bigman', 'Musarova Bigiman', 'Dancehall Igwe'). Born Wallace Chimuriko, the artist states that his stage name, Winky D, is a nickname given by his fans and is derived from 'Wicked Deejay'.<sup>14</sup> The Jamaican term *deejay* (not to be confused with the 'disk jockey' reading of DJ) refers to an artist in terms of his or her singing style: *Deejaying* is a usually fast and melodious speech-singing or 'toasting' over a riddim.

In his songs, Winky D uses a multilingual repertoire drawing mainly on resources from Shona, English and Jamaican. This is already evident when looking at some of his song titles:

Table 1: Winky D songtitles

Jamaican/English	Shona-English	Shona
<i>Head ina war</i> (‘Head in war’)	<i>Pakitchen</i> (‘In the kitchen’)	<i>Tinokurura</i> (‘We will beat you up’)
<i>Buss di shot</i> (‘Fire the shot’)	<i>Type Yezvimoko</i> (‘Type of girls’)	<i>Isusu</i> (‘Us’)
<i>Ghetto sufferation</i> (‘Ghetto suffering’)	<i>Musarova Bigiman</i> (‘Don’t beat up Bigiman’)	<i>Ndini Ndakatanga</i> (‘I started it’)
<i>Girl dem plenty</i> (‘The girls are many’)	<i>Taitirana Pafirst sight</i> (‘We did each other at first sight’)	<i>Vashakabvu</i> (‘The Dead’)

<sup>14</sup> See [<http://www.newzimbabwe.com/showbiz-4758-The+Truth+About+Winky+D/showbiz.aspx>].

While the song titles in the right column are in Shona, the left column shows the strong Jamaican influences in Winky D's music, and the column in the middle shows creative combinations and translanguaging, bringing English and Shona together. Taking a look at the lyrics of his song *Woshora*, these practices become more evident:

Hanzi kurikupisa kunge <i>oven</i>	they say it's hot like an oven
Huya kuno <i>often</i>	come over often
<i>Prezha</i> tirikutambira <i>paopen</i>	we are having pleasure/playing in the open
<i>Life</i> ichikika se muchina zhong zheng	life is kicking like a Chinese Zhong Zheng
Ndabvisa .... <i>Abortion</i>	I took out/I removed... abortion
Zvimoko zvondibhida kunge <i>auction</i>	ladies bid for me like at an auction
Asi kune twzvirwere <i>parotation</i>	but there are diseases on rotation
Ndinotyia kuzorwa kunge <i>lotion</i>	I am afraid of being used like lotion
Ndinoda kutamba <i>summer</i> ndiri <i>healthy</i>	I want to enjoy summer being healthy
Ngavondimbundira totora <i>kaselfie</i>	let them surround me we take a little selfie
Nekuti musummer gafa rinodhura	because during the summer things are expensive
Fanga Taurus paakaenda ku <i>Chelsea</i>	just like Taurus's move to Chelsea
Tapinda <i>summertime</i>	we have entered into summer time
Usingazive zvatinoita chimbo <i>googola</i>	if you don't know what we do I suggest you google us,
Tapinda <i>summertime</i>	we have entered into summertime
Vasikana vakapfeka hembe dzino pinza mhapo	the girls are wearing outfits that allow free air ventilation and yet you complain
Iwe wo shora	you will regret it when the yellowbones
Uchanzwabhata mayellowbone akutosvora	reject you

Winky D, *Woshora*

In this song the artist plays with words and language but also with fun and morals: the song is about sexual activities during summertime, which are desirable and enjoyable on the one hand, but are also dangerous and may have consequences on the other. Winky D, while exploiting his Jamaican repertoire

in other songs, uses very 'Zimbabwenized' English in these songs and adapts many English words to Shona phonology in terms of pronunciation (see also his 2016 hit song *Disappear* for more examples of that type). In the excerpt of the lyrics shown above, the English and English-derived words are written

in italics. The adaption of English words to Shona phonology, which can also sometimes be seen in the spelling, is evident in cases like in the third line where ‘pleasure’ becomes *prezha* (there is no /l/ in codified standard Shona). Other examples include English verbs that end in a consonant and that receive the paragogic vowel *-a*, which not only produces the open CV syllable structure common in Bantu languages, but also marks the verb as indicative. In the excerpt above we find *googola* ‘to google’ in the chorus, *ichikika* (‘as it kicks’ involving Engl. ‘kick’) in line 4 and *zvondibhida* in line 6. The latter comprises the verb ‘bid’, which becomes *bhida*; the spelling with *bh-* also indicates Shona phonology and orthography, as <bh> is pronounced [b] in Shona while <b> represents the bilabial voiced implosive and would be pronounced [ɓ]. The latter examples also exemplify smooth translanguaging practices, where English words are not only pronounced according to Shona phonology, but they also receive Shona morphology, as also in the examples *kaselfie* (‘small selfie’) and *mayellowbones* (‘the yellowbones’, ‘the light-skinned’), where English words receive Shona noun class prefixes. This is also common practice with Shona locative classes, which can be attached to English words like *paopen* (‘in the open’ line 3), *parotation* (‘on rotation’, line 7), *musummer* (‘in/during summer’, line 11) and *kuChelsea* (‘at/to Chelsea’, line 12).<sup>15</sup> Extensive translanguaging involving Shona, English and Jamaican is common in many Zimdancehall songs, in Zimbabwean youth language practices and also in everyday communication between Zimbabwean multilinguals, as shall be illustrated below.

The next example is the song *Goodbye Taks* by Da Ruler. Da Ruler Mambokadzi, born Dorothy Karengo, started her musical career in 2010. While she was supported by the popular Zimdancehall artist Lady Squanda, for whom she had done backing vocals, she is now among the popular Zimdancehall artists herself. Translanguaging and bricolaging are essential in Da Ruler’s songwriting and lyrical ways with language. These practices often reflect the creative and boundless usage of a multilingual repertoire, a phenomenon about which a range of scholars have written already, also with regard to youth languages (see Nassenstein & Hollington 2016). Many of these practices also clearly illustrate the deliberate nature and creative potential of social semiosis. This becomes evident when looking at the artist’s stage name. While choosing a stage name is certainly an act of identity (as the name stands for the self), it can also reflect various sign-relations on the indexical, iconic and symbolic level. Da Ruler Mambokadzi combines resources from English/Hip Hop and Shona in her name. *Da Ruler* certainly draws on US-Hip Hop language where the modified *da* (from standard English ‘the’) occurs frequently and is an emblematic and stylistic marker of Hip Hop linguistic practices. *Da Ruler* in this context can be seen as a title which indexes greatness and power (‘to rule over others’). Interestingly, the term ‘ruler’ is more frequently used by or associated with men. In this regard, the female appropriation of a male-dominated title also expresses a discourse of legitimization and the struggle of female voices in a male-dominated scene. The other part of the artist’s stage name,

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<sup>15</sup> Such practices are also sometimes referred to as “morphological hybridization” (see Kießling & Mous 2004).

*Mambokadzi*, renders the title in the Shona context and overtly expresses the female gender:

<i>mambokadzi</i>	<	<i>mambo</i>	<i>mukadzi</i>
'queen'		'king, ruler'	'woman'

Such titles or stagenames are also very common in Jamaican music culture, especially in the Dancehall scene, where various kinds of titles (in the broadest sense) are attached to or appropriated by artists (e.g. Bounty Killer → “di (five star) general”, “Ghetto Gladiator”; Vybz Kartel → “di worl’ boss”; Chuck Fender → “poor people defender”; Turbulence → “the future”, and many more). This is also com-

chorus

Husiku wakenda usina kundiita *goodbye*  
Waiti unondida asi yave *bye*  
Tichasangana chete *one day*  
Uripo ndaifara kunge mwana aripa *Holiday*

Wakasiya wandipinza pamaone  
*Life* haicha nakidza ndiri *one*  
Moyo wangu unobaikana  
Mmm unobaikana

verse

Hazvicha *meka sense*  
Zvino pane *distance*, wachinja mmm wave  
*different*  
*U always there pon mi mind* handidyeye  
Usipo *life* hainakidze  
Ndikukufunga ndichivata  
Chandakatadza handizive  
Pane vamwe vakomana  
ndiwe wegawandanga ndachiva  
Uri ikoko garauchiziva  
Moyo wangu urimudziva rerudo  
Anokwanisa kuutira ndiwe mudiwa

mon among Zimdancehall artists – recall for instance Winky D’s bynames outlined above.

In her song *Goodbye Taks*, Da Ruler performs bricolage in various ways. Singing and *deejaying* on the *partial riddim* (a popular Zimdancehall riddim in summer 2015), the artist starts the song with an intro, which is certainly influenced by the styles of Jamaican Deejays, with a tremolo voice (which has been in vogue in the Jamaican dancehall in the past years) in the long end parts of words or lines. The use of autotune, a strongly audible effect on the singer’s voice, follows the standard set by the Jamaican dancehall years ago.

chorus

In the night you left without saying goodbye  
you used to say you want me but now it’s bye  
we will meet for sure one day  
when you were there I used to be happy like a child  
on holiday  
you left me in a (crazy) situation  
life is no longer nice being one (alone)  
my heart is bleeding  
Mmmm it is bleeding

verse

It doesn’t make sense  
Since this distance, you have changed you are now  
different  
U always there in my mind I don’t eat  
When you are not there life is not nice  
I think of you when I sleep  
What I did wrong I don’t know  
Of all the men that were there  
you were the one that I desired  
wherever you are just know  
my heart is burning with love  
and the one who can switch it off is you

Da Ruler *Mambokadzi, Goodbye Taks*

The excerpt of the lyrics outlined here (and also the earlier example from Winky D) illustrates how poetics and aesthetics determine choices of words when it comes to the construction of rhyme. In the song *Mambokadzi* draws stylistically on Jamaican dancehall culture and deejaying techniques and combines them with a Zimbabwean flow. Shona predominates in the lyrics of the song and Shona intonation and pronunciation practices also have an impact on the flow of the song. Moreover, the song shows translanguaging practices in which the artist incorporates resources from English and Jamaican (or combinations of both, as in line 3 of the verse). We also find that word choices can be determined by rhyme: In the chorus, *Da Ruler* constructs rhymes with English words and the respective rhyming sounds at the end of each line [baji], [deji] and [wan]. At other points, the lyrics are constructed with rhyming Shona words at the ends of the lines. Thus the sound, pronunciation and phonotactics of the linguistic resources used play an important role with regard to the lyrics. Once started with a rhyme scheme based on English words (and thus sounds/intonation/phonotactics), the very sound of these words impacts the choice of the rhyming words and the translanguaging options at the end of the following lines (e.g. line 5 and 6 of the chorus where 'being one' is used to express 'being alone'). Such practices, as well as other pronunciation practices like the 'Bantuization' or adaption to Shona phonology of English words discussed above (here for instance in the first line of the verse: *meka*

*sense*, where the verb acquires the paragogic vowel), help to achieve greater similarity in the sounds of the rhyming words. Drawing on Jakobson, Clarissa Vierke argues that "the poetic function becomes particularly spelt out in a striving for symmetry or similarity [...]. Thus, in contrast with ordinary speech, the selection of lexical items to be put in a sequence governed by syntagmatic relations is not random, but comes about by a paradigmatic concern for similarity [...] (Vierke 2015: 239–240). Or, to use the words of Roman Jakobson himself: "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (Jakobson 1981: 25). The paradigmatic repertoire from which the artist can choose becomes bigger and more versatile in a linguistically diverse or multilingual context, where resources from various languages can be employed, exhibiting and enabling a greater variety of sounds and poetics.

Finally I want to introduce another young female Zimdancehall artist, *Bounty Lisa* (born 1993 as Lynette Lisa Musenyi), who used to practice rather hardcore deejay styles (especially in her early career, although she has extended her stylistic repertoire more recently, not least through collaborations with the artist *Soul Jah Love*). She chose her name with reference to the Jamaican deejay *Bounty Killer*, who she said was her favorite artist when she was growing up.<sup>16</sup> Her music is strongly influenced by Jamaican dancehall, which can be heard in her deejaying styles, her shouts and her social transgression (the

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<sup>16</sup> See [[http://www.pindula.co.zw/Bounty\\_Lisa](http://www.pindula.co.zw/Bounty_Lisa)].

latter making her a subversive and controversial artist in Zimbabwe). Paired with the clothing and life style depicted in her first videos and performances, the music and appearance of the artist were much commented on and discussed in Zimbabwean media.<sup>17</sup> Despite such responses and critiques, the artist embodies the transgressiveness of Dancehall culture, the glocality (being global and local at the same time) of Zimdancehall and the linguistic and musical creativity and style that emerges from these practices. *Basa Rangu*, one of her most popular songs, illustrates the use of youth language practices and translanguaging (see p. 119).

In the song *Basa rangu* ('my work') Bounty Lisa starts with an intro which is strongly influenced by Jamaican Dancehall practices: her shouts are in Jamaican and her way of introducing herself and 'bigging up' the crew (record label, producer etc.) is reminiscent of the Jamaican Dancehall. This includes mentioning her own name several times during the song and also mentioning names of producers, promoters and other crew members (in bold in the excerpt of the lyrics). Interestingly, Bounty Lisa mentions not only members of the Zimbabwean Zimdancehall crew (like the well-known producers Levels, Propa Bless and Jusa) and the infamous Zimdancehall recording studio Chillspot Records, but she also 'biggs up' the Jamaican artists Tanya Stevens and Tommy Lee Sparta. Thus she directly references her role models or influences and marks a connection to the Jamaican dancehall.

The intro is then followed by Shona-dominated lyrics in a Zimbabwean flow, with the lyrics legitimizing her linguistic, musical and stylistic practices as *basa rangu* 'my work'. The lyrics are mainly in Shona, but feature translanguaging involving English and Jamaican (in italics). The pronunciation of English words is sometimes also adapted to Shona phonology, as with *Koka Kora* 'Coca Cola' in the last line of the first verse. Moreover, her lyrics contain expressions and metaphors<sup>18</sup> which are commonly used in youth language and would be known and understood by her young listeners. For instance, one youth language metaphor that involves several aspects of manipulation is found in lines 1, 2 and 9 of the verse, where she uses the English word 'tip'. In Zimbabwean youth language *tip* means 'tell' ('give someone a tip (i.e. hint)' → 'tell'). Here, the English noun becomes a verb, which is not only inflected with subject and object prefixes, but also suffixed with derivational morphology and (contrary to the indicative *-a* attached to verbs and illustrated in the discussion of Winky D's song above) the subjunctive *-e*:

- (1) *ndi-va-tip-ir-e*  
1SG-3PLO-tip-APPL-SUBJ  
'let me tell them'
- (2) *ndi-ma-tip-e*  
1SG-CL6-tip-SUBJ  
'I (should) tell them'

<sup>17</sup> See for instance [<http://www.herald.co.zw/bounty-lisas-makeover-life-in-the-suburbs/>].

<sup>18</sup> It should be stressed though that metaphor is a very common device in Zimbabweans' communicative practices and features prominently in all kinds of speech and contexts. However, some of the metaphors used here are specific manipulations created and used by youths.

Intro 1

*Mi name* **Bounty Lisa**

Representing **Chillspot Records**

Big up **Propa Bless**, big up **Jusa**

*Outa dehya... yuh see mi?*

Intro 2

*Mi name* **Bounty Lisa**

Anotimisa tomupisa

Gore rino tirikutyisa

Big up **Jusa**, yo **Proper Bless**

Eh yo **Tanya Stevens**

Yo big up **Sparta** *blame di yutes*

Ayo lecoo kaboom

Yo **Levels**, **chillspot** *tell sem seh*

Chorus

Ibasa rangu **Bounty** ndiro zita rangu

Musandivhiringidzira pabasa rangu

Mondivengera mangoma kubasa kwangu

*One to dem* kutaura wevavengi vangu

Verse 1

Rega ndivatipire matsaga mabonga

Ndimatipe **Bounty Lisa**

Ndini ndaakutonga

Rangu itarenda, haridi mushonga,

Kubva kare muchizviona makapenga

**Bounty Lisa Duppy Lady** zita ndatora

Tiri pa**Chillspot** neganga chakatyora

Zvekuimba *steady* ne *lyric* rinotyora

Ayo **Sparta**, mira ndimatipe magora

Ndipe *mix* ne *leaf* ndimbosunga chamba

Zvangu zvauya vavengi

Motojamba jamba

Ndiri kuvava kunge tea yawanda masamba

Wese wekuMbare imombe yemudanga

Wakaita dzungu murukova vokunhonga

*Flow* rangu rinonyudza kunge rukova

Hatikwate ndinenge lacto ndakakora

Murivapfanha ndokutumai

Kunotenga *Koka Kora*

Intro 1

My name is Bounty Lisa

Representing Chillspot Records

Big up Propa Bless, big up Jusa

Outta there... you see me?

Intro 2

My name is Bounty Lisa

Who steps up – we will burn them

This year we are scary

Big up Jusa, yo Proper Bless

Eh yo Tanya Stevens

Yo big up Sparta blame di yutes

Ayo lecoo kaboom

Yo Levels, chillspot tell sem seh

Chorus

It is my work, Bounty is my name

Don't disturb me at my work

You hate me? Music is my job

One to dem: talking to my haters

Verse 1

let me tell them matsaga mabonga

I tell them Bounty Lisa

I am the one who is ruling

Mine is a talent, it doesn't need witchcraft

From way back you saw yourself off the hook

Bounty Lisa Duppy Lady the name that I took

We are at Chillspot with the gang chilling

To sing steady with lyrics that will break you

Ayo Sparta let me tell those haters

Give me the mix with leaf I roll a blunt of weed

My time is here the haters

Tremble (jump up and down)

I am bitter like tea with many tea leaves

Everyone from Mbare is a cow from the kraal

If you are confused in the stream they will pick you up

My flow is deep like a river

We are not afraid, I am thick milk, I am thick

You are small kids

I can send you to buy Coca Cola

Bounty Lisa, *Basa Rangu*

These examples (and the ones above) illustrate the smooth translanguaging practices which sometimes make English words unrecognizable for the non-initiated, as they can involve combinations of semantic, phonological and morphological manipulations. Other youth language expressions that illustrate semantic manipulations include the use of the verb *tyora* in line 7 of the verse. In Shona, *tyora* means 'break', while in the youth language it usually reads 'chill' (this metaphors works especially in the past tense; something that is broken 'chills' because it cannot move). Moreover, she uses *magora* in line 9 of the verse, which means 'haters' among youths and adolescents but 'vultures' in Shona. She also uses the common youth language expression *hatikwate* 'we are not afraid' (lit. 'we are not boiling'; boiling water 'trembles' and trembling is seen as a sign of fear) in line 17 of the verse. These are just a few examples of youth language use in these lyrics. Here, the semantic change is already established among the youths of Zimbabwe; youths can thus understand the lyrics and identify with the artist's linguistic style, while Bounty Lisa may express her linguistic identity as a young artist from the 'ghetto' through this kind of language use.

#### **4. Being linguistically creative: youth languages and other practices**

The examples discussed in the previous section have shown numerous creative strategies associated with youth language. The last two sections have revealed that Zimdancehall is a popular arena for youth language practices and youth culture and language and popular music are closely related and influence one another. The creativity in the youth language practices

in Zimdancehall has been demonstrated with a focus on two aspects: translanguaging (involving Zimbabwean multilingualism as well as transnational dimensions) and semantic manipulations, as these are the most common practices in the examples cited.

I want to argue that these very practices are also commonly found in other language practices in Zimbabwe (and of course elsewhere), that they are not new and not typical of youth language only. In fact, linguistic creativity is not something that is only practices by special people in particular contexts: As Carter (2004) illustrates, creativity is pervasive in all forms of everyday language. Drawing on numerous examples from many different contexts of spoken language, the author shows that "linguistic creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people".

With regard to the creative language practices discussed in Zimbabwean youth language in this paper, I want to turn to language practices in other contexts in the same country. In their inspiring paper, Makoni, Brutt-Griffler and Mashiri (2007) show creative practices in Zimbabwean language use: As the authors illuminate the complex historical and colonial construction of the language named "Shona", they also show the more fluid ways in which speakers actually use language. By drawing on examples from what they term "chiHarare", a so-called urban vernacular, they state that urban Zimbabwe is characterized by multilingualism, migration and fluidity and show that translanguaging has been a common feature of everyday speech for a long time and not only in recent years:

- (3) Translanguaging in chiHarare (Makoni, Brutt-Griffler & Mashiri 2007: 36)  
*chiChewa* is in italic, *chiShona* is in bold italic, **English** is in bold roman

- 1 Mr. Phiri: *Amai ndiri kupita kunchito.*  
 ‘My wife I am leaving for work.’
- 2 Ms. Phiri: *Zikomo fambai zvakanaka.*  
 ‘It’s all right, go well.’
- 3 Mr. Phiri: *Antu ambiri masiku ano. Kulibe mabhazi.*  
 ‘People are many these days. There are no buses.’
- 4 Ms. Phiri: (nods in agreement)
- 5 Mr. Phiri: *Antu amavhuta. Vanopindira makiyu. Antu ambiri masiku ano. Kulibe mabhazi (sic). Antu amavhuta. Vanhu vanopindira pamaqueue.*  
 ‘People are restless. They jump the lines. There are many people who use public transport these days, yet there are very few buses. People become restless and jump the lines.’
- 6 Ms. Phiri: *Masiku ano zintu zikuohuta. Hakuna, kulibe transport.*  
 ‘These days things are hard. There are no adequate buses.’

Apart from translanguaging, the authors also shed light on semantic processes like metaphor and metonymy, e.g. *muface* (Shona prefix *mu-* and English *face*, in this context ‘my acquaintance’, *ibid.*: 37) and other processes commonly found in youth language such as truncation (*ibid.*: 38). While this example reflects spoken language in an urban context, the authors deconstruct the urban/rural binary and state that these kind of practices are not exclusive for cities but can also be found in the countryside (*ibid.*: 39ff). These examples illustrate that the same linguistic creativity strategies analyzed in youth language practices are found among older speakers in urban and rural Zimbabwe. In fact, when taking a closer look at the various dialogues that Makoni, Brutt-Griffler & Mashiri discuss and analyze at length, one can detect highly skilled multilingual practices and creative as well as context-bound language use.

## 5. Conclusion

We have seen how Zimdancehall artists engage in translanguaging, youth language and other creative linguistic strategies in order to create a stylistic bricolage which can be observed linguistically and musically. Zimdancehall reflects the glocality of Zimbabwean youth culture and the youths’ translanguaging illustrates creative and conscious usage of their cultural and linguistic resources. In this regard we have seen conscious practices such as the creation of a stage name and lyrical bricolage with choices from the repertoire based on emblematicity, style, rhyme and aesthetics. Moreover, we have seen how Zimdancehall artists, as leaders of linguistic change, can bring new terms into youth language, such as the labels used for ingroup identity which are then adopted by listeners and fans and thus spread to wider society. While these processes

make use of cutting-edge linguistic and other communicative resources which are in vogue among youth, they are as such not exclusive to youth language practices. Strategies such as linguistic manipulation and multilingual juggling are common practices in many societies, in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. The songs discussed in this paper also show that music is often unbounded and transcends languages, cultures and places. It is therefore an interesting site to study phenomena of globalization with regard to cultural, linguistic and social practices.

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# 06

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How to get information on Sango  
Godobé and the Godobé of Bangui:  
A dialogue between Helma Pasch  
and Germain Landi

# 06

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## How to get information on Sango Godobé and the Godobé of Bangui: A dialogue between Helma Pasch and Germain Landi<sup>1</sup>

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### **1. Introduction**

Sango is the national and official language of the Central African Republic (CAR) (Pasch 1994). The predominant language spoken by the youth on the streets of Bangui, the capital of CAR is a variant of Sango and it is labeled as the language of street children (Godobé). Sango

Godobé differs from Sango with respect to the manipulations employed by the speakers of the former. These diverse manipulations involved, which are characteristic of many so-called youth or secret languages, are outlined by Landi and Pasch (2015). These descriptions are based primarily on observations carried out by Germain Landi between 2011 and 2012, prior

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<sup>1</sup> We want to express our deepest gratitude to Anne Storch for the invitation to contribute to this volume by the present interview. We also thank Asangba Reginald Taluah and Matias Pasch for revising our English and to Nico Nassenstein, Paulette Roulon-Doko and André Motingea Mangulu for their assistance in discussing the etymologies of specific terms in different languages in CAR and DR Congo. We are obliged to Monika Feinen for technical assistance with the pictures.

to the commencement of his PhD studies in 2014 at the University of Cologne. The motive for this research was to present findings on the manipulations involved in Sango Godobé for an international Workshop on *Youth Languages and Urban Languages in Africa* (Cologne, 30 May – 1 June 2012).

At the time, written information on the Godobé people was very scarce and that on their language practically non-existent. The linguistic manipulations characterized by Sango Godobé caught our linguistic sensitivities, and therefore necessitated an in-depth investigation of the ways and manner of manipulations involved. For lack of funds, “normal” fieldwork with paid language assistants was not possible. Hence, we had to develop ways of obtaining the required information. Unobtrusive observation of communicative situations where Sango Godobé is used is easier to discuss when sitting in Germany than to put into practice in Bangui. The main reason for this difficulty is that it is not easy to eavesdrop on conversations in conditions where speakers try to hide their language from outsiders. Clandestinely collecting linguistic data is not appreciated by members of a population who struggle hard every single day to survive, hence the observing linguist must exercise care.<sup>2</sup>

In the following dialogue, the whereabouts of the paper on Sango Godobé are discussed with a particular focus on how Germain Landi carried out fieldwork and how he managed to obtain the necessary data for analysis.

## 2. The dialogue

**HP:** In 2011 and 2012 you conducted fieldwork on Sango Godobé, in which you tried to find out what the language variant looks like, and what makes it different from common Sango,<sup>3</sup> and even more from standard Sango, which has been highly influenced by the writings of Diki-Kikiri (1986) and by radio programs. The results of this research were published in a volume on urban youth languages (Landi & Pasch 2015). Please let us know how you carried out your research, and the sources of your data for the description of Sango Godobé. To begin, when you ask people in the street about Sango Godobé, what answers do you expect?

**GL:** In the street, people might answer briefly that Sango Godobé is “the language of the thieves of KM 5”, probably the most vibrant suburb of the capital Bangui, or that it is “the language of hustlers and of drugs addicts”.<sup>4</sup> This attitude of normal people has been documented in the media, online as well as print, on

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<sup>2</sup> This difficulty holds true somehow for all kinds of linguistic and anthropological research. After so many years of political unrest, the situation in the country is such that “nobody trusts anybody anymore” as Séraphin-Personne Feikere of the Institut de Linguistique Appliquée de Bangui said at the international workshop captioned *Perception et catégorisation – dénomination, couleur*, 9–10 November 2017 at the Université de Lorraine in Nancy.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘common Sango’ corresponds to Wald’s (1986: 56) ‘Sango commun’ and refers to the variant of Sango actually spoken in Bangui and the rest of the country, while standard Sango is practiced only by a relatively small group of people and used for written purposes.

<sup>4</sup> This attitude towards the Godobé is, however, not only expressed by the better-off population in Bangui, but found its way also into scholarly literature. Titley (1997: 47) in describing the situation of constant instability and intimidations refers to the Godobé as “a criminal element” that in the popular residential districts surrounding the center of Bangui “preyed on the better off and the unwary”.

several occasions. For instance, on the occasion of 'Mother's Day' (*fête ti amaman*) on 31 May 1970, President Bokassa presents a speech on the value of an industrious life. At one point, he asks his audience repeatedly *godobé ayeke zowa?* which translates as 'What type of persons are the Godobé?' and every time the listeners answer in shouts unisono *zo ti nzi*, meaning 'they are thieves'. My elder brother recorded this speech on an audio-cassette and had me listen to it several times.

The weekly *Jeune Afrique* reported on May 5, 2013, that Michel Djotodia, president of CAR, following the looting of the town by young Godobé described them as scapegoats from the miserable suburbs of Bangui (*désœuvrés venus des quartiers miséreux de Bangui*), hustlers (*voyous*), former prison inmates (*libérés de prison*), jobless people (*chômeurs*) with empty stomachs.

Bouquiaux et al. (1978: 117) state explicitly that the term Godobé refers above all to young 'thugs' (*voyous*) or scapegraces who loiter around public places seeking occasions for petty theft. The term is, however, also used with reference to adults of up to 35 years of age.

**HP:** What is the earliest scholarly documentation of the term Godobé?

**GL:** That lexicon entry "Godobé" by Bouquiaux et al. is, to the best of my knowledge, the first documentation<sup>5</sup> of the term. Eight years later, Diki-Kidiri (1986: 92) in an analysis of the role of Sango in the formation of the nation, mentions the Godobé and presents them as a highly disadvantaged group.

According to him, the young Godobé of Bangui are gangs who love music and are boisterous and engage in the nightlife of the black town (*les bandes des jeunes « godobé » de Bangui adorent la musique et la grouillante vie nocturne de la ville noire*). In doing so they behave very much like young people all over the world who prefer enjoying a vibrant life to hard work.

Street children were, however, living in Bangui long before they were mentioned in the literature. According to Triangle (2012), the first gangs of boys were observed in the 1960's, this soon saw a follow up of groups of girls<sup>6</sup> and their numbers have been on the increase in the passing years.

**HP:** What is the meaning of Godobé, and what is the origin of the term?

**GL:** In written sources and on the internet, Godobé is used mostly with reference to street children who for lack of income are often forced to live on theft. We can see this, for example, in the title of a report by an NGO on street children in Bangui (CCFD-Terre Solidaire 2013) and in Landi & Pasch (2015). Kalck (2005: 41) in the historical dictionary of the Central African Republic, makes a distinction between children just living in the streets and delinquents, i.e. Godobé. Woodfork (2006: 146) defines Godobé as children who rely on their wits to live on the streets of Bangui, and who make their living by carrying out odd jobs for other people. When these sources fall short they also turn to thievery, begging or prostitution and many of them consume drugs. It should be well noted that Woodfork explicitly

<sup>5</sup> In the preface to our paper on Sango Godobé, we erroneously quoted Diki-Kidiri (1986: 92) as the oldest source.

<sup>6</sup> Today the girls among the Godobé are often called *Godobettes* by children and youths.

states that not all street children commit crimes, nor do they all use drugs. In Bangui however, people usually refer to both street children and delinquents by the term Godobé. An in-depth questioning of people about their personal experiences with Godobé reveals that the negative attributes of the Godobé are sometimes downplayed, people confess that it is not unusual to hire Godobé for jobs which nobody else wants to do. One such job is gravedigging, which entails permission for them to attend the funeral celebration. While people may admit that the Godobé are striving for paid jobs most of the time and are obliged to steal when they do not manage to earn enough money through legitimate means, they return to their old attitudes so long as they can ignore the economic difficulties of the Godobé.

As for the etymology of this term Godobé, there are two explanations. According to the NGO CCFD-Terre Solidaire (2013), there was once a merchant called Mr. Godobé who helped some homeless children by giving them little jobs. Before long, other children joined them, expecting to get the same support, and they continued to stay around Mr. Godobé's place. In the end, all these children were called Godobé. This story may well reflect historical reality, since in Bangui Godobé is a normal name for men), but at the same time it sounds like a piece of folk etymology and one cannot be really sure whether it reflects historical reality.

Bouquiaux et al. (1978: 117, 557) state that Godobé is a word of Gbayaorigin and that in Gbaya it means 'prostitute', i.e. it refers to persons of the lowest social rank.<sup>7</sup> However, this

etymology is not given in the dictionary (Roulon-Doko 2008), and according to Roulon-Doko (p.c.) it is erroneous.

**HP:** Are the Godobé really as dangerous and bad people as is often said?

**GL:** The title of Sylvestre Seme's (2000) thesis *Les godobé de Bangui (RCA) ou la construction sociale de la délinquance juvénile dans la ville africaine*<sup>8</sup> indicates quite clearly that the reputation of the Godobé as gangsters is above all a social construction. But because they tend to be involved in petty crime they have the reputation of criminals.

The institutions that care for the street children should bear responsibility; in Bangui street children are quite generally considered a criminal issue. For several years, different societal groups that engage with street children have made great efforts to solve these problems. On the one side, Christian churches and a number of NGOs (cf. e.g. Lazareva 2016) want to support at least the children among the Godobé and protect them against attacks by the population and the police. They also give them food, shelter and education in order to empower them so that they can be successful in their lives. On the other side, government, police and municipal administration want to protect the population from being robbed by Godobé, whom they consider criminals.

The fact that the youngest Godobé are only about six years old, and the occasional presence of babies (Triangle 2012) is the main reason why NGOs have found it necessary to extend their support.

<sup>7</sup> There is no Gbaya dictionary available which would confirm that in Gbaya *godobé* is the equivalent for 'prostitute.'

<sup>8</sup> This thesis was not accessible to Germain Landi.

Constant fear of persecution may be the instigation for the Godobé to continually create new words and syntactic constructions, which prevent outsiders from understanding them (Woodfork 2006: 146f). However, we are also aware that such urge for linguistic innovations is a feature which is characteristic for the so-called youth languages of Africa (cf. Nassenstein & Hollington 2015).

**HP:** How long has the term Sango Godobé been used to denote a variant of Sango?

**GL:** Diki-Kidiri's above-mentioned article is most probably the oldest scientific source about Sango Godobé, which he considers a slang (argot) of standard Sango or *sango courant*. He observes that specific words from Sango Godobé enter standard Sango, which reflects similar bottom-up development to what Nassenstein (2015) has noted with regard to the Langila variant of Lingala. This observation is quite important from a sociolinguistic point of view, since it documents the shaping of Sango by all layers of the society of Central African Republic and accepts even low-prestige variants as the source of innovations. Diki-Kidiri also mentions the influential role of Sango Godobé in popular music which can be observed in quite a number of videos on YouTube. A nice example is the video *Centrafrrique musique* from the group *Zokela – Hity Maïty* in which a number of words from Sango Godobé which are not used in standard Sango are heard. In the refrain, there is the following expression:

- (1) *Supu ti lo la a-kinda mbi.*  
 sauce POSS 3s PRES SM-turn.over 1s  
 'It is her mass (lit.: sauce) that knocked me down.'

In this clause *supu* refers to the stoutness of a woman who is knocked down by a very lean one. *Lo yeke na supu mingi* 's/he has much soup' is said about a well-built or strong person. In standard Sango and in more polite terms, one would describe such a person as *kono-ngo zo* (big-NOM person) 'a big, stout or fat person'.

Another Sango Godobé expression is the term *chambre à air* (< French) for the slip leaking out of the trousers.

- (2)  
*Tongana e hō na lege, chambre.à.air na gigi.*  
 when 1P PASS PREP way inner.tube PREP outside  
 'When we go along the street, our inner tube (lit. 'leaking slip') appears outside.'

**HP:** Are there other denotations for Sango Godobé?

**GL:** Sango Godobé is occasionally called *double Sango*. But while in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *double Sango* was characterized as a language of gangsters and criminals, as is the case with Sango Godobé today, it is now used to denote ludlings where words are manipulated by inversion of syllables, or by insertion of syllables according to specific phonological rules, i.e. the same type of manipulation that is practiced in Sango Godobé. It is practiced

primarily by children, but also by adults, some who may even organize events where participants compete with their capacity to produce and understand even long texts in double Sango (Voeltz 1992). The main difference is that the ludling double Sango is practiced in symmetrical communication<sup>9</sup> to enable all participants to use and to “decipher” it, while the same manipulations in Sango Godobé aim at making speech unintelligible in asymmetric communicative situations.

**HP:** Where did you learn about the structures of Sango Godobé? How did you get the specific examples published in our article?

**GL:** Surprisingly to some, research on Godobé has not been a topic of research at the University of Bangui until now. Note that the first scholars who worked on the Godobé and their language did so when they studied abroad. The first is a description of the language by Sélézilo (1999) published in Côte d’Ivoire and the second is a sociological study of the Godobé by Seme (2000) written in France.

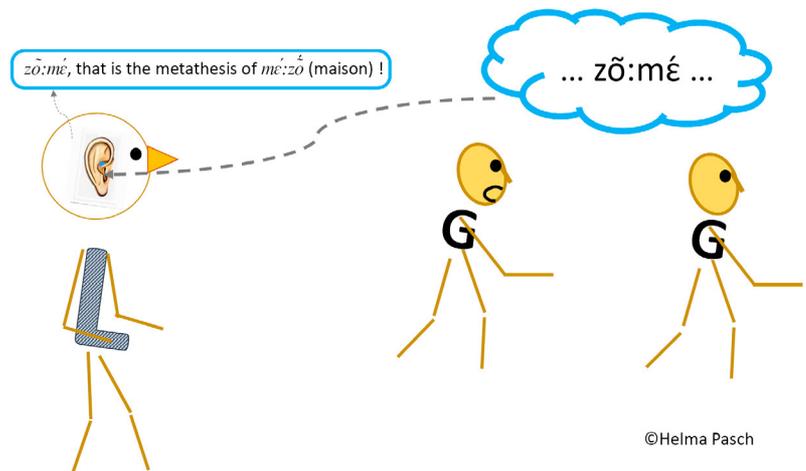
Since the speakers of Sango Godobé are in constant contact with other inhabitants of Bangui, nearly everyone has at least some knowledge of it. People may refuse to speak it but they can understand it to some degree. There were several occasions, where I could

observe unobtrusively speakers using Sango Godobé.

Sango Godobé is definitely not a secret language, and besides its reputation as a medium for gangsters, it still has a bad reputation. The prestige of the language is, however, improving and it is considered more of an appropriate means of communication, which journalists and politicians use when it is convenient for their purposes.

My first encounter was in the street where I (L = linguist) heard a conversation of two young Godobé (G) in which the word [zõ:mé] (a metathesis of ‘maison’) was uttered. I realized immediately that this was a typical Sango Godobé item and I tried to follow the speaker and his interlocutor unnoticed trying to get the rest of the conversation, but unfortunately without any chance to get more data.

Fig. 1. Overhearing a Sango Godobé word in a conversation of two young men in the street



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<sup>9</sup> At given moments, where one speaker utters a piece of manipulated speech which the interlocutor has to “decipher” these situations are asymmetric. But since roles keep changing the communication as a whole is symmetric.

The second encounter was on my way to town on a motorbike taxi. There was a fairly big woman sitting behind me as a second passenger.<sup>10</sup> The driver who observed that there was heavy pressure on the rear wheel and that driving the motorbike was difficult because of her weight made the following remark to her alluding to her obese stature: *lezba* which is derived from *balèze* 'stout, strong, fat' (< French) by metathesis: "*Soeur, mo ke lezba!*" The woman did not understand and the driver repeated his critical remark, now with the adjective in its basic form *balèze*, which she then understood. This scenario shows that the taxi driver (T) uses a Godobé form although he does not consider himself a Godobé. It might indicate further that the woman does not know Sango Godobé at all, or that she is not well-acquainted with it to decipher an unexpected utterance.

A friend of mine has a motorcycle repair shop. Certain Godobé who have a friendly relation with the owner loiter around the workshop. They converse with him – in common Sango – and when there is a need they give him

a hand. Amongst themselves, they also speak common Sango most of the time. However, when they do not want the clients in the shop to understand them, they use manipulated forms of Double Sango. It goes without saying that the shop owner understands Sango Godobé fairly well.

Once when I was waiting for my motorbike to be repaired, one of the Godobé sneaked into the workshop looking suspiciously around. The mechanic (M) was alarmed and said in a warning voice *ala sara ange na petit so* (3p make attention PREP young.man DEM) 'be careful with that guy'. The Godobé who overheard the warning turned around and left the repair-shop saying: *mbi zi gere awe* (1s seize leg already) 'I am already gone', which in common Sango would be expressed by *mbi gwe awe* (1s go already).

Fig. 2. *La grosse femme* – the big lady



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<sup>10</sup> It is not unusual in Bangui that motorbike taxis take two passengers.



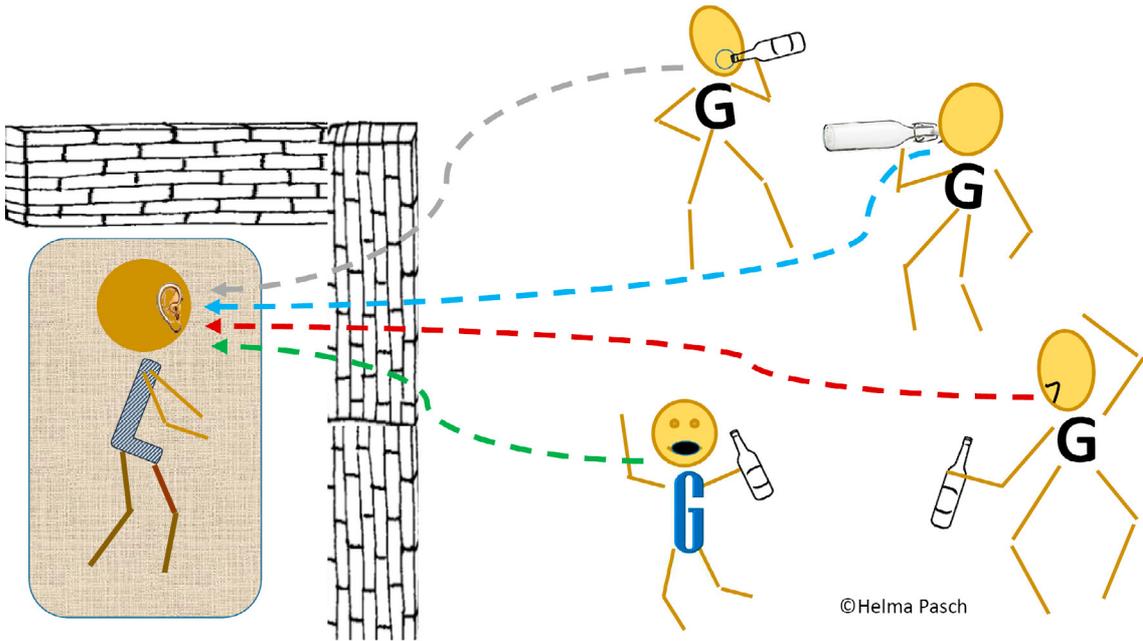


Fig 4. Listening to Godobé while in bed

**HP:** What were the special experiences investigating usages and forms of Godobé and what are your expectations with regard to the results?

**GL:** It was a new experience to find that it is possible to engage in fieldwork just by observing spontaneous speech. It takes more time than elicitation sessions with a language consultant, and you never know whether you will have specific data you are after, but the data that you get are reliable and valuable. In the end, you may happen to get data which you had not expected before and for which you did not even seek.

Let me make the following concluding remarks. I think that anyone with a good command of common Sango and who is acquainted with the word-formation patterns of Sango Godobé can do such kind of research.

It is important to know that certain aspects of Sango Godobé can also be investigated on the basis of music videos in the internet. As I mentioned earlier, most musicians sing in common Sango with Sango Godobé expressions interspersed as shown above in the first example and in the following lines (transcribed, glossed and translated) from a popular song. Note that here the expressions from Sango Godobé consist of words of unknown origin which do not exist in common and standard Sango, like *sepele* 'slender, lean', of loanwords from English, like *fair play*, or French in a specific new reading. For example, *chambre à air* 'the part of the underwear which peeps out at the back from under the pants. The latter term is used as a term of tender term of address and so are *sepele*, *sac à main* 'handbag' and *ye ti kua* 'working tool'.

- (4) *Matinda, sepele ti mbi*  
 M. slender poss 1s  
 'Matinda, my slender [woman]'
- (5) *Sac à main ti mbi*  
 bag at hand poss 1s  
 'My handbag, i.e. my darling who is inseparable from me like a woman's handbag from her hand, who walks hand in hand with me.'
- (6) *E a-sepele e ke na beauté naturelle.*  
 1P PL-slender 1P COP PREP beauty natural  
 'We slender women have the natural beauty.'
- (7) *Tongana e hō na lege,*  
 when 1P pass PREP way  
 'When we pass by'
- (8) *a-yeke iri e oo a-mannequin ti premier choix*  
 SM-COP call 1P EXCL PL-model POSS first choice  
 they are calling us "top models".'
- (9) *Tongana e hō na lege, chambre.à.air na gigi:*  
 when 1P pass PREP way inner.tube PREP outside  
 'When we pass our pants peep out from beneath the trousers.'  
 [lit. a part of the inner tube is outside and visible]
- (10) *Ndembo ti samba ni a-hunda ti lo gi fairplay*  
 rivalry poss co-épouse DEF SM-ask 3s only  
 'Rivalry with other women needs fair play, i.e. no violence.'
- (11) *Ye ti kua: Sepele ti mbi oo chambre à air ti mbi*  
 thing poss work/ leanness poss 1s inner.tube poss 1s  
 'My working tools: my slenderness and my peeping pants'
- (12) *ye ti kua ti Mbi oo, bata ni na mbi femme*  
 thing poss work poss 1s protect ANAPH PREP 1s woman  
 my working tools: don't destroy it on my behalf [lit.: protect it for me, woman].'

What fascinates me most is that Sango-Godobé has gained a certain prestige, which has made the former so-called “gangster language” a “cool” means of communication, which journalists and politicians use in some specific contexts. I would not be astonished if our two publications on this language will increase the prestige of Sango Godobé even more.

I hope that students of linguistics in Bangui will follow and appreciate the two new ways of obtaining linguistic data: observing and evaluating spontaneous conversations, and evaluating texts from the internet and particular YouTube videos. The advantage is not only that they get different types of data, but also that it makes research far more easily affordable.

**HP:** What was the language of communication between you and the speakers of Sango Godobé?

**GL:** I did not communicate directly with the Godobé but observed them, and whenever I had specific questions I asked some non-Godobé people who are competent in the variant, for instance, the motorbike mechanics, for clarifications.

**HP:** What attracted your interest in Sango Godobé?

**GL:** I have been living in Bangui for a long time and knew about the language but during my studies at the university it was never a topic of linguistic study. My interest in the structures was roused by the invitation to participate in the workshop on urban youth languages in Cologne in 2012 and to present a

paper on Sango Godobé. That was a wonderful chance for which I am very grateful.

### Abbreviations

1P	1st person plural
1s	1st person singular
ANAPH	anaphoric pronoun
COP	copula
DEF	definite marker
EXCL	exclamation
PL	plural marker
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PRES	present tense
L	linguist
G	Godobé
M	mechanic
T	taxi driver

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# 07

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Tuk-tuk slogans in the coastal towns of Kenya: A glimpse behind communication practices on three wheels

# 07

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## Tuk-tuk slogans in the coastal towns of Kenya: A glimpse behind communication practices on three wheels

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### **1. Introduction**

The writings on commercial vehicles have a long tradition in Kenya. This holds true especially for matatus, the mini-buses, for which more literature is available relating to Kenya than it is for the tuk-tuks. The slogans are never just words, painted on the tuk-tuk, but are always very personal stories. The article deals with slogans on tuk-tuks on the streets of the coastal towns of Mombasa, Kombani, Diani and Ukunda in Kenya. The findings reveal that, unlike in other countries such as Ghana and Liberia, slogans on Kenyan

tuk-tuks are categorized into four main fields: religious identity, private identity, effort given to the vehicles and information about the working-partnership relationship, when more than one owner exist. Often the slogans were different from other kinds of sayings, such as proverbs or advices, as it was not promptly (or even not at all) understandable what messages they meant to deliver. We had to seek for interpretation from the owner or their drivers to understand their meaning.

Interestingly, the decorations and the slogans found on the tuk-tuks are contextualized with youth languages by the

customers, even though the owners usually do not drive the vehicles. The drivers tend to be younger people, who are seen as the typical candidates of youth languages (see Mugaddam 2012) and who are expected to use a youth register. The slogans are nevertheless designed by the owners of the tuk-tuks and typical youth language terms are not commonly found on them.

The number of tuk-tuks (an onomatopoeic word deriving from the sound they make) on the streets of the coastal towns of Mombasa, Kombani, Diani and Ukunda has increased immensely over the past decade, with more than 7,000 tuk-tuks currently providing a cheap and stylish mode of transport in Mombasa alone. At least 20,000 youths are (in)directly employed in the tuk-tuk business as spare parts dealers, owners, drivers, mechanics and even as guards<sup>1</sup>. Requiring very little capital to start and to operate with, the tuk-tuk industry has enabled a large number of small-scale entrepreneurs to enter the public transport business. Often, many of the drivers are not the actual owners of the vehicle and work for a nominal salary which is usually a percentage of the daily income. As taken from the website of FSD Kenya, a tuk-tuk owner earns an average of Ksh 1,200 per day (≈12 Euro), while the salary for a driver ranges between Ksh 500 to 600.<sup>2</sup>

Tuk-tuks are mostly preferred in estates with narrow streets such as those found in the small villages of Likoni, e.g. Ujamaa, Majengo Mapya or Jamvi La Wageni. Because of the

few number of passengers (usually between 3 to 4 people), tuk-tuks provide a rapid and steady movement of people from one location to another. Indeed, the movement of people from Likoni to the south coastal towns of Kombani, Diani and Ukunda has been made easier because of the availability of many tuk-tuks.

With many tourist attraction sites such as Fort Jesus, Kaya<sup>3</sup> and its white sand beaches, Mombasa, Kombani, Diani and Ukunda towns are cosmopolitan and many European tourists are found in these towns who enjoy taking tuk-tuk rides, seeing it as an adventure even for long-distance travels, as a frustrated taxi driver told us. The price for a tuk-tuk ride is often charged based on the social status or the skin color of the customer. The price charged for tourists can be ten times as high as for the locals, yet it is not impossible for tourists to enter and exit a tuk-tuk, leaving the regular local price with the driver. However, it is advisable to know the exact fare before boarding the tuk-tuk, as some clever drivers can trick you into their vehicles only to charge you an exorbitant price at your destination<sup>4</sup>.

Tuk-tuks are privately owned, and are known worldwide under various terms and designs, sometimes having four wheels and more space for passengers. The tuk-tuks in Mombasa and in South Coast all have the same shape and construction. However, some tuk-tuk operators have modified their vehicles with creative slogans, stickers, entertainment speakers, flashing neon and graffiti just to bring some uniqueness and maybe attract more

<sup>1</sup> See [<http://www.ebru.co.ke/new-upgraded-tuk-tuks-launched-in-mombasa/>] (last accessed 2 April 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See [<http://fsdkenya.org/focus-note/finance-fortune-4/>] (last accessed 2 April 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Sacred forests of the local Mijikenda people.

<sup>4</sup> See [<https://zurukenya.com/2017/03/18/what-the-tuk-tuk-mombasas-love-hate-relationship-with-the-little-three-wheeled-hardy-vehicle/>] (last accessed 2 April 2018).

customers<sup>5</sup>. Although they are quite small, the back bench of most tuk-tuks can carry three passengers and the front chair, which is reserved for the driver, can take one more passenger where necessary or possible, while the back is fitted with some space for carrying the luggage of the passengers.

The slogans, stickers and writings on commercial vehicles have a long tradition in Kenya but tourists are left out of this communication. This holds true especially for matatus, the mini-buses, for which more literature is available with respect to Kenya (Kayi 2016), Ghana (Geest n.d.) or Liberia (Guseh 2008), than can be found on tuk-tuks. According to Geest (n.d.), the slogans used in Ghana refer to a proverb, a prayer, a modern saying and also for sports or political events. Furthermore, they often tell personal stories about the car owner or the driver.

Kayi (2016) in his research on matatu slogans in Kenya identified seven themes of slogans, of which the “[m]ajority (43%) of the slogans and mottos fell in the religious messages category [...]. Messages relating to entrepreneurial or business practices accounted for 17% while music, artistic and personality accounted for 14%. Work and morality-related inscriptions accounted for 11% and 10% respectively” (Kayi 2016: 54). The slogans painted on transport vehicles,

such as matatus, tuk-tuks or lorries are often interpreted and analyzed as a style or register of the youth (e.g. Kayi 2016). It seems likely not that the slogans depict a certain youth register but rather that they are identified by others as forming a part of youth culture by their mostly young drivers.

The slogans that are written on many of the tuk-tuks are a means of communication which is only understood by members of the Swahili or Kenyan society; even more so in certain sections of Mombasa or of the coastal society. This becomes clear in the following example:

Fig. 1. *Huwezi chama wewe. Sisi ndio kusema*



Frank, the owner and driver gave the information: “No one works or operates the way I do. I am a very hard-working guy, and this is meant to be read by other tuk-tuk

<sup>5</sup> See [<https://zurukenya.com/2017/03/18/what-the-tuk-tuk-mombasas-love-hate-relationship-with-the-little-three-wheeled-hardy-vehicle/>] (last accessed 2 April 2018).

operators.” Trying to translate the slogan into proper English, the German-speaking author of this text failed to manage and asked for assistance. A Kenyan, who was at the time on a bus in Tanzania kindly offered his help and the following WhatsApp conversation took place:



Fig. 2–3. WhatsApp conversation

In both conversations with different dialogue partners, the first, who is Tanzanian, recommended asking a Kenyan Swahili speaker, and the second, who is Kenyan, argued that he did not understand as well and that it was probably a Mombasa register. It thus seems as if Frank chose the slogan in order to show off his belonging to Mombasa, something he is as proud of as of his hard-working attitude. It is possible also that most of the sayings may be meaningless or show different meaning to the viewer and that unless you ask the owner, you may not get the true meaning.

This article provides insight into the explanation of the selection of the saying by

the owners or the drivers. As we asked the drivers about the background of the slogan, we changed the perspective of the analysis and preferred not to interpret them ourselves. One of the results we experienced is that the drivers, even if they are not the owners of the

cars, know about the backgrounds of the slogans. The slogan was never just a word, painted on the tuk-tuk, but was always a very personal story, labeled by the owners or the tuk-tuk drivers. Labeling is driven by a feeling of wanting to be motivated, of expressing the tuk-tuk's ability, or of mocking.

In our sample of 31 tuk-tuk slogans, we found four main fields according to which the owners use the slogan in order to transmit a message: their religious identity, their

private identity, the ability that they give their vehicle and the message that they want to deliver as a working-partnership, when more than one owner exists. Different from other kinds of slogans, such as proverbs or advice, it is not promptly (or even not at all) comprehensible what the message is meant to deliver.

A descriptive research design, in particular that of the qualitative approach, was applied during this field study to collect information about the slogans on the tuk-tuks (Kayi 2016). Drivers were asked to explain the meanings of the sayings on their tuk-tuks. Data was collected from 31 tuk-tuks operating on the streets of Mombasa, Kombani, Diani and Ukunda in

Kenya. The tuk-tuks were randomly selected based on their willingness to participate. Ethical considerations were followed during the entire fieldwork, like seeking consent before taking pictures (Berez 2001: 186).

## 2. Motifs of slogans

### 2.1 Religious identity

Similar to Kayi's (2016) findings, the religious slogans formed the majority in our research on tuk-tuks in Mombasa and in the south coastal towns of Kombani, Diani and Ukunda. These slogans were in English, Kiswahili, Arabic or any other local languages such as Kamba. While some slogans clearly predicted the religious denomination, others were ambiguous, revealing religious affiliations only after talking to the owner or drivers of

Fig. 4. *Jehovah is the final say*

Fig. 5. *Nevermix, trust God alone*



the vehicle. Interestingly, all these saying revealed the existence of only two dominant religions in the coastal towns of Mombasa and on the south coast i.e. Christianity and Islam. The strong attachment to religion can be speculated to influence most tuk-tuk owners or drivers in Kenya to write their religious motto on their vehicles in order to communicate their beliefs.

Further, corroborating with Kayi's (2016: 54) findings, the slogans on the tuk-tuk portrayed God to be superior, caring and protective. For instance, while reporting on the choice of these slogans, the owners or drivers often had different narratives about their past lives or social status and how they had succeeded in life, all attributed to God. For instance, the Christian slogan *Jehovah is the final say* is supposed to communicate that the owner of this tuk-tuk is a Christian, coming from a very humble background. He had been condemned to poverty and went through trying situations

throughout his school life. This affected his studies and made him perform poorly, hindering his chances of getting a decent job. Fortunately, God blessed him with some money to buy the tuk-tuk. To him, God has a solution to every problem and can determine the destiny of a person. He attests that truly God has the final word, translated in Christianity to mean *Jehovah is the final say* (Fig. 4). Another slogan *Nevermix, trust God alone* indicating that the owner of the tuk-tuk is a staunch

Christian who believes in Jesus as the only provider. He attests that God provides everything for him, the customers and money, thus for him it is God alone (Fig. 5).

The slogan *God is great* is meant to show that the owner of the tuk-tuk had undergone unspeakable challenges in life and believes that it was through God that he managed to overcome those challenges (Fig. 6). *No Ngai* 'it is only God' is a Kamba slogan, meaning that it is only God who provides everything. God is the one who can make someone succeed in life

and that there is no business that can succeed without God. The owner of this tuk-tuk further says that God is the one who provides customers and money for the business (Fig. 7).

Another slogan *God's favor* indicates that the owner of the tuk-tuk is a Christian who believed that it was through God's favor that he managed to get enough money to buy the vehicle. He still believes that God continues to favor him by providing customers and money to maintain the business (Fig. 8). Yet another slogan *Jemedari*, a Swahili word meaning

Fig. 6. *God is Great*

Fig. 7. *No Ngai*

Fig. 8. *God's favor*

Fig. 9. *Jemedari*



Fig. 10. *Pepo haijai*

Fig. 11. *Hasbinallah wanemal wakil*



an army commander was on Odhiambo's tuk-tuk. Odhiambo believes that Jesus is the commander who controls everything in his business: the customers and the money he gets every day. He believes that his Christian faith has made him succeed in life (Fig. 9).

The slogan *Pepo haijai* is an Islamic slogan meaning that 'in heaven, there is a place for everyone' (Fig. 10). *Hasbinallah wanemal wakil* (in Arabic script) is another Islamic saying which can be translated in Swahili as *Utukufu wote uko kwa Mungu* or 'all glory and honor belongs to God' for an English translation (Fig. 11).

A study in Liberia has shown that more than 45% of slogans and mottos on commercial vehicles had religious connections, suggesting that most people in the country believe in God or in the Supreme Being (Guseh 2008). Ghanaians also use religious slogans to seek God's protection while travelling (reported in Kayi 2016: 53). The high number of religious slogans on Kenyan tuk-tuks also shows that Kenyans believe in God, although in different denominations. Christians form the majority, followed by Muslims and other religions. The United States Department of States (2012) as reported by Kayi (2016: 54), informs us that there are about 80% Christians and 10% Muslims in Kenya, while the remainder are other religions.

## 2.2 Attributes of tuk-tuks

These slogans are meant to describe the ability of the vehicle in order to show the customers that it is powerful and can transport them anywhere at any time. They may offer some form of marketing and to some extent may show the entrepreneurial or business practices which are common on Kenyan matatus or commercial vehicles (Kayi 2016: 55). Introduced

twelve years ago, tuk-tuks may not be very popular or even preferred by some customers. While running on diesel engines, these tuk-tuks make strong vibrations, producing a noisy sound. To overcome these challenges, tuk-tuk drivers and owners have come up with slogans and sayings to attract customers to ride their vehicles. For instance, George used the slogan *New Born* (Fig. 12) on his tuk-tuk to attract customers, while Msyoka used the word *Caterpillar* to symbolize a tuk-tuk that is very strong to carry passengers anywhere, just like a strong caterpillar tractor (Fig. 13).

Festus, a resident from Kwale, but operating a tuk-tuk in Mombasa, says that the slogan *Mkurunzinza* (Fig. 14) comes from the Swahili word *kurunzi* 'torch'. He says, "I am ready to look after my customers 24/7, from morning to morning. The tuk-tuk provides light in my life, it gives me my daily bread."

In Kenya, the public transport sector is transforming very fast. Creativity is greatly required in order to compete and to survive. For instance, matatus are fitted with powerful sound systems and LCD screens. Some tuk-tuks are also fitted with powerful sound systems and with attractive graffiti. Drivers also ensure that their tuk-tuks are clean, in order to draw customers.

### 2.3 Owner identity

A large percentage of the 31 slogans could be referred back to the owner and his very personal likes (*Bruce Lee; Del-Vincente*) and characteristics (*Mambo mengi; Mboko; Mtoto wa mama; First-born; Valid dreams and Lazima iwe*). The driver of the tuk-tuk named *Del-Vincente* told us that the owner used to be a football player of a club in Mombasa by the name of

Fig. 12. *New Born*  
Fig. 13. *Caterpillar*  
Fig. 14. *Mkurunzinza*





Fig. 15. *Del-Vicente*

Fig. 16. *Mboko*

Fig. 17. *Bruce Lee*

Fig. 18. *Mambo mengi*



Del-Vicente. His love for this club made him name his tuk-tuk *Del-Vicente* and this is his identity (Fig. 15). Mwendwa, another tuk-tuk owner, uses the slogan *Mboko* which is a word from the Kamba language. It means a straw used to take *mnazi* 'alcohol'. Mwendwa says he used to prepare this kind of brew to sell it. He managed to buy his tuk-tuk from the money he got from this business and uses the name as his identity (Fig. 16).

Yet another driver, Galoki Kassim for *Bruce Lee*, told us that the word comes from the famous actor in action movies. He proceeded to explain that the owner of the tuk-tuk was very poor but worked very hard to acquire money that he used to buy the tuk-tuk (Fig. 17). Kassim kept repeating the words "my boss is a 'fighter' just like Bruce Lee. He never gave up irrespective of the challenges." The driver of the tuk-tuk named *Mambo mengi* says that his boss is very talkative and is a social person. He is known to talk nicely to his clients and has been nicknamed *mzee wa mambo mengi*, 'a very talkative old man' (Fig. 18).

The slogan *First born* was used to indicate that the vehicle was the first for the owner. To ensure that the tuk-tuk works properly, the owner maintained it very well, as well as towards a first born (Fig. 19). Another owner identifies his tuk-tuk by the name of *Mtoto wa mama* 'mama's child or baby'. The vehicle was held so dearly, it was neat and well-maintained. The driver said that customers are treated as well as mothers toward their children. Moreover, the passengers are loved and respected (Fig. 20).

*Valid dreams* was yet another slogan on a tuk-tuk. After an inquiry, the driver said that the owner of the vehicle had the inspiration or was dreaming to own a tuk-tuk one day. He worked so hard to make sure that this dream came true and when he got the opportunity to buy one he wrote the slogan *Valid dreams* to show his colleagues that he was not just dreaming but indeed had very valid dreams that came to pass (Fig. 21). *Lazima iwe* (Fig. 22) is to symbolize a person who was from a poor background

Fig. 19. *First born*  
Fig. 20. *Mtoto wa mama*  
Fig. 21. *Valid dreams*  
Fig. 22. *Lazima iwe*

but who succeeded in life. He had a very large family or many responsibilities. The tuk-tuk had to operate to generate income to sustain the needs of the many dependents, hence the slogan *Lazima iwe* ‘it must operate’.

#### 2.4 Team identity

Vehicles that are owned by a group are often labelled as such by using a team name. Joint ownerships show the struggle of generating income in the Kenyan society, as the purchase of a tuk-tuk is sometimes an unmanageable task for one person. The label ‘team’ shows that the group understands themselves as a team and not only as a partnership of convenience, which is then displayed in the slogans. For instance, we met Mng’aro, a driver of a tuk-tuk labeled *Team focus/wacha weve hata yeye*. Mng’aro informed us that the tuk-tuk belonged to a group of men who do small-scale business. They contributed capital that enabled them to buy the tuk-tuk. The group is focused, which is why they labeled the tuk-tuk *Team focus/wacha weve hata yeye* ‘leave us! Even your friend cannot beat me in this game’ (Fig. 23). The Swahili phrase is meant as mockery and means that the group is hardworking and cannot be compared with anyone. Mraja Aiphosisi informed us that the tuk-tuk with the slogan *Team Jua Kali* “belongs to a group of men who work in Jua Kali industries<sup>6</sup>. It is a difficult job, but they came together as a group to buy this tuk-tuk”. The phrase is used as a team identity, whoever reads the records, knows that the tuk-tuk is a product of this group. The driver says he treats it with a lot of respect and the phrase always reminds him of what the owners have gone through (Fig. 24).

<sup>6</sup> There is a booming informal sector in Kenya of small-scale traders, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs in Kenya known as the Jua Kali sector.



Fig. 23. *Team focus/wacha wewe hata yeye*

Fig. 24. *Team Jua Kali*

Fig. 25. *True love*

Fig. 26. *Double N company*



Mutuku, the driver of the tuk-tuk *True love* said that the owners of the vehicle love each other. It belongs to a man and his wife. They work together and trust each other (Fig. 25). *Double N company* tuk-tuk belongs to a group of five people working in a small company in Mombasa. They gave the slogan *Double N company* as their identity (Fig. 26).

### 2.5. Messages on the working style

Some of the slogans relate to the way in which the drivers work when are on duty. These slogans are meant to attract the customers by offering them a fast vehicle (*Flying dudu*), travel without police checks (*Colleague*) and others. *Wafisadi hawana likizo* was translated as ‘businessmen don’t have vacation’. Although the driver gave this kind of translation, there was not any connection between the interpretation and the phrase. *Wafisadi hawana likizo* could be translated as the corrupt people do not have vacation. For further inquiry, Joshua says that “it is a corruption and a no-go zone.” As he cannot offer bribes, he always tries to work within the traffic laws. Another vehicle, *Flying dudu*, was translated as ‘flying parasite’, Ludwig Munene says that “it runs very fast. Meant to attract customers” (Fig. 27 and 28).

The owner of the tuk-tuk with the phrase *Kaa mbali* takes very good care of the vehicle, which is clean and well-maintained with good entertainment devices. The saying is meant to convey a message that you cannot compare his tuk-tuk with any other. We enquired about the uniqueness of the vehicle and the owner told us that it is fitted with powerful speakers to entertain his customers (Fig. 29). Kassim, a driver of the vehicle *Waambie waje* translated the

slogan as ‘tell them to come’. He says: “I am not afraid of any competition. Those who want to compete with me in this business should come and try. I am ready for anything” (Fig. 30).

“I am very serious with my business”, said Kassim, who is the driver of *Kaa chonjo* tuk-tuk. He keeps time and takes very good care of the customers’ needs (Fig. 31). *Kaza mwendo* is a Swahili saying, meaning ‘moving very fast’. The driver of this tuk-tuk says that he moves very fast and that he is quick in his business. This trait allows him to earn good money from the business (Fig. 32).

*I Will Remain Top*; the owner of this tuk-tuk says that he is doing everything to ensure that he remains on top of his business. He knows how to talk to the customers and he never fails to earn money (Fig. 33). Katana, a driver of the tuk-tuk *Colleague* says, “this is a word used by the police. It is a form of identity. I like the word but more so I am using it to create an impression that I am like the police so that I can create friendship with the traffic police officers” (Fig. 34). The owner of this tuk-tuk probably knew that friendship with the traffic police would make his business hurdle-free resulting in huge success.

### 3. Conclusion

Tuk-tuk slogans are not just words painted on vehicles. Rather, they all tell stories of their purchase, the expectations and the hope that their owners connect with them. Often, tuk-tuk owners spell out their lives, loves or the troubles they go through before or after acquiring their vehicle. We analyzed 31 slogans on Kenyan tuk-tuks and identified five main themes, namely their religious identity, their private identity, the ability that they give

Fig. 27. *Wafisadi hawana likizo*

Fig. 28. *Flying dudu*

Fig. 29. *Kaa mbali*

Fig. 30. *Wambie waje*





Fig. 31. *Kaa chonjo*



Fig. 32. *Kaza mwendo*



Fig. 33. *I will Remain Top*



Fig. 34. *Colleague*

to their vehicle, the message that they want to deliver as a working-partnership when more than one owner exists, as well as their working style.

The use of slogans and phrases on tuk-tuks is related to a name. Tuk-tuk drivers usually provide explanations such as *Jina la tuk-tuk yangu ni kama kitambulisho changu. Watu hunitambulisha kwa jina hili* 'the name of my tuk-tuk is my identity and I am usually referred to by this name'. This statement by one of the drivers showed that the phrases contain a deeper meaning which can only be understood by a few people. Based on the previous WhatsApp communication (Fig. 2 and 3), this confirms the argument on language being deeply understood in its local context and everyday communication (Storch submitted). The local way of choosing words, phrases and interpretation attached to them has to be considered. The coastal Kenyan tuk-tuk slogans are based on the way of interpretation by the local population, the drivers and the owners.

In their chapter on language and identity, Ferris et al. (2014: 409) introduce their work with the following statement: "How would you describe yourself? Which categories would you use for this description? How we describe ourselves and others is integral to our sense of self belonging". The kind of identities and descriptions given in our study were based on the way drivers viewed themselves, understood their personal lives or their bosses and the root cause behind the slogans. According to Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004), imposed,

assumed and negotiable identity are the three kinds of identities used in the description of one's self.

In our study, it became clear that most tuk-tuk owners either had an imposed or a negotiable identity. They were once labeled as poor by the society (imposed identity). They saw themselves as poor but did not assume this kind of identity. They had to contest it by working hard in order to earn enough money that could enable them to buy a tuk-tuk and thereby change their status (negotiable identity). Hard work led to the change from an imposed identity that was once ascribed to them, to their present status.

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# 08

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Language, European football fandom  
and social identification among the  
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# 08

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## Language, European football fandom and social identification among the youth in Eldoret, Kenya

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### **1. Introduction**

European football fandom is arguably one of the most recent additions to the repertoire of popular culture in Eldoret. It is a trend that has also been witnessed in many parts of Africa. In a sense, this could be seen in the wider context of advances in satellite media technology on the continent and the increasing influence of global sport television and the commercial aspects involved. Significantly these aspects have been at the core of some of the studies on this sociocultural phenomenon and in the developing discourse; the concept

of European football fandom has emerged as a cultural concept worth academic investigation. These include Grant (2002), Taylor (2014), Omotosho (2012), Komakoma (2005), Olaoluwa & Adejayan (2010), Akindes (2010), Siundu (2010), Vokes (2010), Fletcher (2011), Onyebueke (2015), Adebayo et. al. (2017), and Waliaula (2015a, 2015b, 2017b, 2017a). The studies could be considered as representative of Africa since they cover the western, eastern and southern regions of the continent.

The studies do not necessarily develop a working definition of the concept 'European football fandom' but in different ways emp-

hasize the role of global sport television in the process of constructing communities of spectators. In this chapter, I use the term in reference to all the sociocultural practices that take place as contexts and consequences of television spectatorship of European football in Eldoret and my focal point is language. I use language in reference to the various ways in which the youth respond to, interpret and adapt their fandom experience to their immediate sociocultural context. But more important, I consider the football fandom experience as a template upon which to examine the social processes that inform the youth and their language use in Eldoret. My understanding of the youth category referred to in the study is a fairly wide category that includes males between the ages of 18 to 35 but in my actual fieldwork experience I encountered and worked with some much older individuals that were part of the social processes of football fandom. I restricted my research focus on males because, among other reasons, the social identification with European football in our part of the world has mainly involved men, as has been observed by, among others, Victor Onyebueke (2015: 8–9).

I have studied the language of fandom in the context of what I consider as ‘related sociocultural appropriations’. Arguably, the most visible of these are related to the accommodation of sport media technology within local socioeconomic constraints, as has been explored by, among others, Adebayo et. al. (2017), Onyebueke (2015), Omotosho (2012), Vokes (2010) and Olaoluwa & Adejayan (2010). In different ways and with different points of emphasis, the studies are connected by their perspective on the improvisation of physical spaces for shared access to sport television, which in one sense is a continuation of the

concept of the local video halls. This is a leisure culture that consisted in the adaptation of the cinema experience to the local socioeconomic conditions. Local entrepreneurs constructed film consumption spaces where audiences could be charged a small fee to enjoy a local cinema experience. Significantly, new trends of popular culture developed in the process as cinema spectatorship was appropriated in the immediate sociocultural context. In East Africa, this included the translation of the films to local languages and the development of a performance culture around spectatorship. In this sense, these local video halls transcended the standard cinema spectatorship experience. Figure 1 below shows spectators watching a European football match in typical social hall at the Road Block neighbourhood to the east of Eldoret town:

In a way, these halls could be understood



Fig. 1. An audience watching European football in a viewing hall at Road Block, Eldoret

in the same light as the standard spots bars, but this will be something of a misnomer because of the unique social contexts that they are produced in and which they also help to produce.

The discourse on these social spaces of football consumption has been varied. Whereas Vokes' study of the rural western Uganda experience locates these spaces within what he terms as a continuation of the traditional African communal sense of media consumption, Adebayor et al. (2017) see these spaces as disruptive of the traditional African social order, particularly in the sense that the spaces congregate different and at times conflicting social categories. Significantly, the study identifies the social challenges that emanate from the mixing of youth and the aged in the same spaces and establishes that important cultural values of respect and etiquettes that regulate the social relations between the two social categories, are strained in these spaces. In my view, this study makes two key assumptions that this chapter engages with.

Firstly, it seems to me that the study isolates the youth category as 'socially problematic' and significantly identifies their language of fandom as the most frequent source of conflict in social interaction. This chapter examines language as one of the elements that construct the unique social interaction order of football fandom. Secondly, the study makes the assumption that the 'youth' and 'aged' as categories of social identification remain rigidly distinct and 'untouched' in the fandom identification process. In this sense, it fails to recognise the fandom space as a site for potential transformation of social identities and how language is deployed in the process. I seek to show that the meanings of some words and phrases in fandom language are context-specific and in most cases part of the process of the adaptation of European football to the immediate sociocultural context. I also seek to show how this context-specific use of language is useful in exploring patterns of idiomatic extension from English to formal

Kiswahili and even further 'translations and extensions'. Ultimately, I explore how the youth use language not just for fandom identification purposes but also to negotiate their social identities.

In this sense, this chapter invokes Onyebueke (2015) and Omotosho's (2012) studies that focus on the youth category of European football fandom in Nigeria; particularly significant is Onyebueke's concept of 'urban tribes'. He defines this to be a 'social product' of "how a spectator becomes habituated to the setting, fellow spectators, the television set, and consequently, become open to television-mediated interactions and associated rituals" (2015: 14). In this chapter, I adapt Onyebueke's concept of 'urban tribes' in the immediate social contexts of the Eldoret youths and their experience of European football fandom. My use of this concept is informed by two assumptions. Firstly, in Kenya, tribe is almost synonymous with, and most effectively identified by, a specific language. But the urban spaces such as Eldoret comprise of many such languages and the most popular *lingua franca* has been Kiswahili. Nevertheless, the youth in Kenya have further modified Kiswahili in their everyday social interaction and come up with an informal variety called Sheng, closely modelled on Kiswahili in terms of grammar but which as has been discussed by Githiora (2002) innovatively as including many other languages. Significantly though, the language of football fandom is not necessarily Sheng. I argue that the football fandom social context presents the youth with a set of resources with which to develop a distinct language associated with football.

This is partly an ethnographic study but also a reflection on personal experience as a member of this fandom community in Eldoret,

having been actively involved in this fandom community from 1999 to date. Sampling was informed by lived experience of over fifteen years in Eldoret. But I should add that most of my observation spans a long period of time. I have divided the fandom experience into the live and extended spectatorship. I select five representative fandom sessions, two live sessions at three extended sessions, all at three sites; an informal market downtown in Eldoret, Shauri Yako and Kipkarren slums. The two live sessions include the play-by-play and half-time interval sessions. The extended sessions include a round before a set of weekend matches and another after. I audio-recorded the social interaction and also took mental notes on significant nonverbal aspects. The analysis of these recorded experiences is in part a personal critical reflection and also relevant aspects of discourse theory, popular culture and cultural theory.

## 2. Pundits, fandom and social identification

In this section, I describe some patterns of social interaction in two fandom sessions, focusing on how language is used to construct social identities in the course of verbal exchange between fans of European football both in real time and extended spectatorship. Participants in one of the sessions are market vendors and their customers that engage in a fairly well-regulated discussion on English Premier League that takes about 40 minutes – this is part of a study (2018) that I did on the market vendors’ ritualised talk of European football. Figure 2 shows the vendors talking about football in one of the stalls:

They talk about the results of the matches played the previous weekend and also make



Fig. 2.  
Youth talking about European football in a market stall in Eldoret, downtown

predictions about those that will be played on the coming weekend. The other session is set in a viewing space behind a pub and captures the participants’ experience from the half time interval to the end of the second half of an English Premier League match between Chelsea and Aston Villa. In both cases, I focus on how language is used not only to communicate but also to accomplish other sociocultural purposes. In this study, I argue that language is used to perform social myth and identification and as a consequence, the point of focus is not on the literal meanings of what is said but their sociocultural signification. I also focus on the aesthetic beauty of some of the expressions. Let us consider the following sequences from the market vendors’ talk, drawn from the conversation.

*Sijasema huyu kocha ni mbaya, lakini yeye ako na kasumba kuwa yeye ni kocha wa timu ndogo.*

‘I have not said that this coach is poor, but he has this attitude that he is a coach of a small team.’

*Na hawa Leicester City watayumba tu. Ngoja wapate majeraha. Hii ligi ni ngumu, yumba mechi mbili uone.*

'This Leicester City **will wobble**. Wait until they start getting injuries. This is a tough league, lose two matches and you will see.' (My emphasis)

*Leicester itabaki top 4 ama itatoka? Kwanza watatoboa na Swansea kweli?*

'Will Leicester remain in the top 4 or they will fall behind? Will they even beat Swansea?'

*Leicester inashindwa game ambayo wenyewe wameanza kufunga, lakini anza kuwafunga! Kama Man U wangetangulia kufunga wangeona cha mtema kuni ... Leicester itapiga haka katimu kuua (...) Arsenal watalimwa (...) kameungua.*

'Leicester loses a match in which they have scored first, but just dare score first against them! If Manchester United could have scored first, they **could have been severely punished** (...) Leicester will thrash that small team (...) Arsenal will be beaten. The League is red hot.' (my emphasis)

This sequence is drawn from the speech of two participants that, over time, I have noted to be very dominant. They posture as experts on European football. Within the group, they are recognised as authorities on the English Premier League and are given more time to talk. From a conversation analysis perspective, they seem to operate outside the formal structure of turn-taking. Many times, they overlap other speakers without causing any observable sense of dissension in the group. Their privileged position is not because they have any formal training or exposure to European football beyond what they watch on television with other fans. In my observation, it has more to do with personal interest in the European football and effort to gather information

from the mainstream media, social media, rumour and hearsay so that they project the 'pundit identity' that in this case helps them secure good social standing. More so, it is also because they seem to be fluent and eloquent in their language use. As a result, while everyone in the group is capable of speaking about European football, they are held as the most qualified to speak.

Conscious of this privileged position in social interaction, these 'speakers' take more time to mythologise some of the spectatorship experiences. They make connections within and across football matches and make inferences out of what could just be coincidental occurrences. For instance, there are two narratives in the sequence above quoted. First, that a 'small team', such as Leicester City, cannot sustain good results for long because when the few good players get injured, they begin to lose matches. Secondly, that Leicester City could not lose a match in which they conceded the first goal. These narratives are sometimes also shared in the mainstream global sport media, which in the contemporary age of new media is easily shared across many other social channels. In my long-term observation, it has been evident that only a handful of the fans have the capacity to use language to reconstruct spectatorship experiences in ways that appeal to other fans that share similar experiences but are not able to narrate them in captivating ways. Let us consider the following sequence from half-time interval conversation outside a viewing space in Kipkarren Slums. The football match in question was between Arsenal and Norwich City:

*J: Falcao ni jina, ameisha. Hata Fabregas, mpira unaenda ukimkataa, imebaki jina tu. Unaona vile*

*Mikel anacheza? Mpira umewatoka. Miaka imesonga. Wamezeeka. Mpira unawalemea.*

'Falcao is a name, he is finished. Even Fabregas, he is gradually going down, only his name remains. Do you see how Mikel plays? Their football is gone. They have aged. They are overwhelmed.'

T: *Chelsea huko St. James Park hawashindangi. Inakuwanga tu Cisse kila mwaka.*

'Chelsea never wins at St. James Park. It is always Cisse every year.'

J: *Msimu uliopita tulienda, tulienda, tukienda. Ile timu ilichukua kikombe ni ile iliongoza kwa muda mfupi kabisa. Ile timu iliongoza sana ilikua namba inne.*

'Last season we went and went and went. The team that won the trophy is the one that led for the shortest time. The team that led for the longest time finished 4<sup>th</sup>.'

We could pick out a number of narrative strategies here. In the first place, the narrator goes back to the past at two levels; he talks about a match that was played the previous weekend between Chelsea and Everton and also moves further back to the previous season. By focusing on the past, he foregrounds the role of reconstruction through memory. Secondly, he means to make the point that Chelsea lost because they played poorly but frames it in two 'apologist' plotlines; the aging of key players and the Chelsea jinx at St. James Park. Thirdly, he makes reference to what we could define as 'folk-wisdom'; that the team that looks likely to win the trophy at the end of the season is not necessarily the one that does. In this session

were many other narratives by other fans, but this particular narrator was dominant. It seemed to me that he had an amazing ability to use language to blend aspects of what actually happened with his own opinion in ways that made it look very persuasive. Consider this sequence:

J: *Mourinho angechuja hawa watu aweke Willian. Hata huko Everton Willian ndiye alileta shida, alikuwa juu'*

'Mourinho should have dropped these people and played Willian. Actually at Everton, Willian is the one that was causing Everton problems. He was in good form.'

T: *Halafu wanaumisha Remmy bench sana. Diego Costa sio mtu wa kutegemewa. Mara anafanya vitu vingine vinafanya ukule red card.*

'And they keep Remmy on the substitutes bench for too long. Diego Costa is not dependable. Sometimes he does things on the pitch that makes him to be red-carded.'

J: *Mimi Ivanovich ndiye amenisinya, akipewa ball mpaka arudi. Hakuna moja anaweza panda.*

'I particularly detest Ivanovich. When the ball is passed to him he must pass it backwards. He never overlaps.'

One could draw a narrative pattern of cause and effect from the sequence. He starts by making value judgement, proceeds to give evidence – part of which is exaggerated and, arguably, falsified – and finally reiterates his opinion. His view is that the coach does not field competent and/or reliable players, and

this causes Chelsea to lose matches. He also blames one player, Diego Costa, for lacking discipline on the pitch and being vulnerable to red cards. But the truth is that this player never got red carded. As a Chelsea player, he merely had a reputation of being fiery and combative on the pitch. Nevertheless, in my observation, this narrator and others like him managed to gain and hold the attention of others.

### **3. Localised metaphor and the carnivalesque in fandom**

So far, we have argued that there are some fans that gain social prestige from posturing as experts of European football and they signify this in how they talk about it. We have similarly argued that there are fans that attract and sustain the attention of other fans on the basis of their ability to narrate the reception experiences of televised European football. It is thus also arguable that what underlies the two patterns of fandom is that there is a preferred and/or popular way of talking about European football in this part of the world. It is a sort of discourse that connects the youth, through football, to local rhythms of their language and at the same time transcends them. Apparently, it all depends on the immediate social contexts of speaking. Formally, we explore how the fans tap on and also inflect the local idiom in fandom conversations that are located in the open social space. On another level, we also examine how the fandom experience becomes a medium in which the carnivalesque speech patterns are projected, particularly in socially bounded spaces.

Firstly, we consider the purely formal aspects of – Kiswahili – language and their

aesthetic appeal in the earlier quoted sequence from the market vendors' conversation. I pick out the metaphor *kuyumba* and lexical phrase *wangeona cha mtema kuni* for closer analysis. *Kuyumba* is a verb drawn from the maritime semantic field and refers a rocking ship, as for instance in a storm. It is also used in lay conversations in reference to 'swaying' or being unsteady. But it is a word that is not frequently used in ordinary conversation. *Wangeona cha mtema kuni* is a Kiswahili lexical phrase whose accurate English translation I could not find. *Kutema kuni* translates to 'splitting firewood'. *Cha mtema kuni* translates to 'that which belongs to the one that splits firewood' and is a muted reference to an axe. In ordinary conversation, the lexical phrase is used as a warning of a 'violent and painful experience'. This mode of linguistic expression not only adds colour to football fandom but, in my view, also brings to life what would be otherwise remote conversations based on an activity that takes place far away from the local context of the speakers.

This process also involves what one could term as an idiomatic extension that starts from relatively 'faithful translation' of a received concept from the European football world to local language but which is then gradually made to flow in a wider stream or related idioms and culminates into a sort of renaming and/or rephrasing. It is a gradual relexification process of sorts in which Kiswahili words and phrases are made to carry meanings drawn from the world of football in a way that is at first connected to their normal meanings but that also extends to related concepts. Let us consider the following examples drawn from long term observation:

It is significant that, unlike common perceptions of mainstream Sheng, these new

<b>Initial Kiswahili translation</b>	<b>English word/ phrase</b>	<b>Extension 1</b>	<b>Extension 2</b>	<b>Extension 3</b>
<i>funga bao</i> 'close a goal'	'score a goal'	<i>kufunika</i> 'to seal, cover'	<i>kutia ndani</i> 'to put inside'	<i>kutoa ndani</i> 'remove from inside'
<i>kupoteza mechi</i> or <i>kupigwa</i> (direct translations)	'to lose a match/ get beaten'	<i>kulazwa</i> 'to be made to lie down' <i>kuumwa</i> 'to be bitten', an insertion of another form of physical assault.	<i>kuolewa</i> 'to be married', particularly a woman getting married to a man	<i>kutiwa</i> 'to be sexually penetrated'
<i>kuwa chini</i> 'being down'	'a player that performs poorly'	<i>kiwete</i> 'cripple', <i>hajiwezi</i> 'disabled'	<i>maembe</i> 'useless' (a metaphor; <i>maembe</i> 'mangoes')	<i>bonoko</i> 'fake' (Sheng; popularized by pop song <i>Bonoko</i> )
<i>ako juu</i> 'he is up'	'a good player/ player in good form'	<i>kiboko yao</i> 'the cane that beats them' (metaphor related to a Kenyan politician)	<i>baba yao</i> 'their father' (metaphor drawn from local politics; a popular Kenyan politician has used this as his moniker)	<i>moto wa kuotea mbali</i> 'hot fire that warms you from a distance' (metaphor)

Table 1. Idiomatic extensions of football terminology

words and phrases are neither randomly coined and/or lifted from local Kenyan languages nor as transitory and context specific as Sheng tends to be. One can see a logical process of extension and appropriation. Secondly, unlike Sheng, that tends to be associated with youthful defiance to authority through the use of a 'secret code', this language of football fandom is not necessarily coded to conceal meanings. It is a confluence of words, phrases and images rooted in formal Kiswahili reinforced by popular culture, local pop music, and politics.

Fig. 3. A mixed group of youth and adults watching European football in a pub at Shauri Yako slums in Eldoret



Sheng is also used but not in the sense that it manifests in its ordinary application. Indeed, in my long-term experience, I have observed that the Sheng words that are used in fandom language tend to acquire some relative stability in meaning and are also used widely, even among those not categorized as youth and in mainstream media, mainly in play-by-play radio commentary.

Nevertheless, I have also noted that the language of football fandom tends to be flexible and varies in relation to social context. For instance, the relatively stable stock vocabulary and phrases are deployed by spectators of a live match in a way that corresponds with their immediate context. Furthermore, sometimes different individuals in the same fandom will prefer to use language in certain ways. Let us consider the following sequence drawn from a conversation in the earlier mentioned session in a viewing room behind a pub shown in Figure 3:

H: *Tunaomba Chelsea ikaliwe ndani kwa hii game ... Lakini tunaomba Chelsea ishinde kwa Champions League ili ikutane na Real Madrid ...*

'We pray that Chelsea **is beaten** in this match ... but we pray that Chelsea wins – its next match – in the Champions League so that it plays against Real Madrid – at the next level ...'

K: *Usipeleke aibu yako huko mbele ... tunataka watwangwe leo.*

'Do not postpone your embarrassment ... we want them to **be beaten** today.'

H: *Drogba alisema Stanford Bridge ni kwao, hata akifunga macho atafunga bao.*

'Drogba said Stamford Bridge is home, **he can score a goal even if he is blindfolded.**'

D: *Hiyo ni kawaida ya player, lazima uongee. Hata ndondi kila mtu huwa anajidai vile anajua, lakini mkishaingia kwa ring, unaguswa, utazungushwa kuzungushwa siku hiyo.*

'That is normal for players, you have to talk. Even in boxing every boxer will brag about his prowess, but once you enter the ring, you will be **hit**, you will be taken round and round that day.' (my emphasis)

This is a sequence that involves three speakers. It is at the half time interval of the match and there is a sustained conversation that is a sort of informal review of the first half. I paid attention to the contours of imagery used. Speakers H and K have been drinking alcohol. They are in their mid-thirties and the oldest in this group. Speaker D is much younger, in his early twenties. Significantly, it is the older speakers that choose to use the carnivalesque language; *Chelsea ikaliwe ndani* here is a sexualised image that projects losing a football match to being sexually penetrated, since one of the local phrases for sexual penetration is *kukaa ndani* 'getting inside/being inside'. Losing a match has also been described here as *kutwangwa*, a word popularly used in reference to 'getting hit or thrashed' but whose literal meaning is related to the activity of using the African tradition hand mill also known as mortar and pestle to grind cereals such as sorghum and millet. It connotes the 'repeated hitting to crash and make finer'. In this context, the concept invokes battering, violence and pain, which are words not socially approved in daily conversations.

I consider it significant that it is the 'least youthful' members of the group that elect to use language echoing sexuality and violence, which ordinarily is associated with the 'typical youth' social category. Indeed, in the quoted section, and my wider experience with the fandom in Eldoret, it has been evident that in situations where the youth are converged to watch and talk about European football, there are finer dynamics of sociolinguistics at play. The younger fans tend to use polite and relatively formal language while the older ones tend to draw more deeply and more freely on the carnivalesque forms. It is very common to hear such statements as *tutawafanya* 'we will do you', *tutawazalisha* 'we will impregnate you' and *tutawafira* 'we will sodomise you'. I have understood this as mere 'borrowing' of concepts without invoking all its connotations; because homosexual orientation is in this part of the world socially unacceptable.

In this sense, it is arguable that the language of football fandom is also part of a wider process of identification and that it is subject to other sociocultural forces involved in the process. The youth express their views and feelings about European football in a language that is sensitive to other factors of social identification. For instance, the market vendors use what could be described as decent language arguably because their immediate social context is more of a heterogeneous and open space that accommodates everyone. They talk about football without engaging the carnivalesque because this talk is adapted to the larger socioeconomic experience at the market. In contrast, the youth in the viewing room behind the pub are in a physically and socioculturally bounded space. They relate to each other in a relatively confidential sense, at

this point in time temporary in seclusion from open society. It is a context that does not have those members of society in whose company the youth are socially expected to use polite language; in these parts of the world, older people, women and children. But within this apparently homogenous social category are further distinctions and negotiation of social identity that are evident in how the group carries out their verbal interaction. One could argue that this interaction is complex and involves finer negotiation of social identities that use language as a medium and which I explore in the next section.

#### 4. Contesting masculinities and the combative language of football fandom

There is a language that has developed in the context of – mainly male – communal spectatorship of European football in Eldoret. Significantly, it is constituted in the face of, but not limited to, the football match events. In my long-term observation, I have noted that one of the popular social referents is masculinity. It seems to me that communal football fandom is sometimes appropriated by male youth that use language as a medium of talking about contesting and negotiating their perceptions of masculinity. I have selected one of such sessions to not only illustrate this argument but also reinforce our developing idea that the language of the youth in Eldoret is constructed in a set of complex context-specific social realities.

The specific social experience I describe is a communal spectatorship session of football match in a local viewing hall at Kipkarren, a low-income neighbourhood in Eldoret. The viewing space is ensconced between mini shopping stores on the left side of the main

road from Eldoret to Kipkarren and just a few metres away from Kipkarren main bus stop as shown in Figure 4 below:

The kiosk is run by *Oria*, a pseudonym that relates to his Somali ethnicity. It is made of timber and covered by a low and flat roof.



Fig. 4. A popular makeshift viewing hall in Kipkarren slums, Eldoret

The interior is about 15 feet by 30 feet, and it is packed from wall to wall with wooden benches. The benches are cushioned, and the walls padded in flowery colours. There is a narrow aisle dividing the room into sections. Two large television screens are set at the front,

each positioned directly in front of a section. It is a simulation of a stadium. Normally, two matches are shown simultaneously, and participants choose where to sit depending on which match they want to watch. But in real practice, they tend to switch attention from one match to the other, and significantly too, away from the matches and to their own performance. On this date, only one match was on, between Tottenham Hotspurs and Chelsea. The room was about half full. Everyone seemed to be glued to the TV sets in front and I sat in an available space at the back.

Inside it was typically dark and the only light in the room came from the TV screens in front. It was also very hot inside. The entrepreneur in this space walked to me from somewhere on the left side. He shook my hand and very politely addressed me thus,

*Rafiki, songa mbele kidogo, hapa utasumbuliwa na watu wakiingia na kutoka.*

‘**My friend**, move to a seat near the front, here you are bound to be disturbed by fans walking in and out.’ (my emphasis)

It was my first time here and I was struck by his polite and respectful language. I obliged and moved, in the process also asked him how much it cost one to watch a match here, upon which he replied,

*Hakuna haraka, tulia kwa kiti kwanza, utalipa baadaye*

‘There is no hurry, settle in your seat first, you will pay later.’

Once he considered me served, he walked away. He moved randomly from one end to

another in the room and apparently seemed to know who had paid and who had not. The audience reception experience was a distinctively heightened social encounter. It seemed to me that the television screen in front was not even the focal point of attention. It was a cacophonous session that consisted in competing voices. There were the voices of the play-by-play television commentators coming through the loudspeakers. And it seemed to me too that almost everyone was talking. Most significant, the language of social interaction here was defined by self-praise, insult, mockery, and was generally carnivalesque.

On this day, it was apparent that the ‘master of ceremonies’ was the entrepreneur himself. He moved around, sustaining a continuous engagement with the audience. Apparently, he knew his customers by their names and addressed his comments, curses, jibes and threats directly to individuals. He constantly engaged in verbal duels. At the 65<sup>th</sup> minute of the match, there was a power black-out. This is a normal occurrence in Eldoret. But some participants ferociously cursed and swore at the proprietor. The most repeated phrase was *rudisha pesa tuende* ‘refund our money so that we leave’. His response was rough, *Malaya nyinyi. Kwani mimi ni Kenya power?* ‘You prostitutes. Am I Kenya Power?’. But he left the room announcing, *acha nipigie hizo mbwa za Kenya Power, nitawapiga msomo*, ‘let me call those dogs at Kenya Power. I will give them a tongue-lashing.’

A few minutes later, power was back, and he rushed in, triumphantly shouting, *Mnaona? Mnaona? Sicheki na hao watu.* ‘You see, you see, I do not joke with those people.’ Nobody could tell whether or not power had come back because he had called Kenya Power, or even if

he had made the call in the first place. But there was general laughter.

During that lapse of time when the satellite television system was loading, there was more lively banter. Someone shouted from behind: *Oria, chungu Chelsea wasifungwe bao kama stima haijarudi. Nitakukata hio makende yako ndogo.* 'Oria, make sure Chelsea does not concede a goal during the black-out, I will cast-rate you.' He responded, *kwanza zitaingia mbili. Wewe, Mourinho na wachezaji wote wa Chelsea ni washerati* – 'in fact, I hope they have conceded twice. You, Mourinho and all his players are dirty adulterers.' Someone in front shouted, *Oria, tunajua mambo yako na mabibi za watu, lakini bahati nzuri hauna nguvu, wanakula pesa yako tu.* 'Oria, we know your ways with other people's wives, luckily you are too weak, they just eat your money.'

It went on this way, with the audience engaged in a host of verbal duels, curses and swearing. Even when the comments and reactions were made on the ongoing match, the language used was characteristically violent and ribald. For instance, dribbling and goal scoring were described in sexualised undertones. Most of the time, the audience seemed to be a lot more actively engaged in their own performance than they were with the ongoing football match.

This was not just an audience reception. It was an oral performance that mainly consisted in the display of verbal art revolving around jokes. Considering that joking is a dominant element of this performance, this experience could be seen as an engagement with the tensions and anxieties of masculinity. The play of gender identities in the context of football fandom has also been explored by Chiweshe (2015), albeit in a different context. Whereas his

focus is on the stadium experience, he importantly points out that football fandom pans out in the phallogentric and masculine space that has been constructed around football as a sociocultural form (2015: 2011-2012).

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on a long-term ethnographic study of televised European football spectatorship in Eldoret. Focus has been on how the youth use language in the process of performing fandom identification. The chapter has brought together the youth, football fandom and language into one analytical frame and in doing so I have made the assumption that the three are bound up and expressed in wider processes of social identification. I used evidence from selected data presented in the chapter and recollection of long term personal experience, both as ethnographer and member of the social group in question, to describe the said processes. It is important to note that a study of youth and language in an urban space such as Eldoret will bring Sheng to mind, and in particular evokes Chege Githiora's (2016) view that Sheng is as an urban youth vernacular in Kenya. However, preliminary findings of my study have shown that the language used in the context of football fandom is not limited to Sheng. It is a complex, socioculturally and geographically situated variety of language that involves but is not limited to the so-called Sheng as peer language.

I have described three patterns that I consider significant in the construction and use of this language and each of them involves but also goes beyond the youth in its constitution and use. Firstly, I have observed that in Eldoret, and in specific contexts of public

interaction, talking about European football in a competent and fluent manner is perceived as mark of social prestige. As a result, the youth use language to invest in public display of knowledge in and eloquence on European football. This normally takes place in everyday spaces of social interaction and the language used here is also the everyday lingua franca, Kiswahili. Such Kiswahili is not necessarily the pure variety, also known as *Kiswahili sanifu*. It accommodates codemixing, codeswitching and other informal structures. In this case, it is the capacity for effective communication that counts and this in turn is to mark social identity. In this case the youth do not use a 'subversive language' to mark their identity but just aim at signifying their place among peers through the use of language to communicate valued knowledge on European football.

The second pattern marks the youth as part of a wider process of relexification and metaphoric extension of language. I have shown how, gradually, what was initially 'formal translation' from English to what one could describe as formal Kiswahili is subjected to further 'translations'. I have argued that this language dynamism has been facilitated in the wider processes of the production of popular culture. It is thus possible to argue that, in this scenario, the youth participate in a cultural process in which language is subjected to and continually 'reworked'. But perhaps they are more visible in this process because they tend to be at the forefront in the social stream of life.

The third pattern locates the youth and their language use in the context of gender identification. I have argued that characteristically carnivalesque trend of social interaction

that is evident in local video halls such as the one described in this study foregrounds the role of language in the process of negotiating identities. The youth use language to construct and perform mock contests of power among themselves. These contests are defined by the local experience of life and may not be directly applicable even to another neighbourhood of Eldoret. In this sense, one could argue for a critical perspective when talking about the youth and language use. In some contexts, what seems to be the use of language to revolt against order and authority of the formal world of social experience is actually a transitory process of confronting, making fun of and ultimately reconciling with immediate social conditions of life.

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# 09

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Youth languages and the dynamics  
of language change: The story  
of *aguu* and the Acholi youth  
language Leb pa Bwulu

# 09

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## Youth languages and the dynamics of language change: The story of *aguu* and the Acholi youth language Leb pa Bwulu

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, studying “youth languages” has become a special focus in research concerned with the impact of social dynamics on the shape and use of language. Concepts like the often-cited “anti-language”, the linguistic representation of a group in opposition to the dominant society (Halliday 1978), underline this idea that these linguistic practices are expressions of special social constructs in specific relations to other forms of social formation

and organization. They are distinct from other linguistic practices like jargons or argots as they are based on the extent of the manipulations of their respective base language and the expansions of contexts they are used in (Kießling & Mous 2004). This shows that they are considered to be somewhat exceptional. Their theoretical creativity as the driver for linguistic change is a key part of the language ideologies and the identities they help to construct (Kießling & Mous 2004; Storch 2011; Nassenstein & Hollington 2015). Inevitably, inventing new

words and finding different and innovative techniques to manipulate the language carries its own worth and prestige among speakers of these variants, as it is more than just a tool for communication and, as Blommaert (2005: 72) notes, subsequently becomes a form of a “cultural commodity”.

This characterization of linguistic practices which possess a strong value for constructions of identities that arise from highly dynamic social environments lead to the question as to which extent current concepts are actually capable of capturing underlying social dynamics and whether the term “youth language” is an appropriate label for these linguistic practices. To address these questions, this article describes the emergence and evolution of *Leb pa Bwulu*, based on qualitative field research done between 2014 and 2016.

## **2. Youth language practice in Gulu**

*Leb pa Bwulu* is the name of an Acholi-based linguistic practice spoken in Gulu, the largest city of Northern Uganda. The number of speakers is yet unknown as it is still in the process of expansion. It presumably came into existence during or directly following the end of the civil war in the region in 2008 among young men and boys that were either abandoned by their families or voluntarily left their villages to come to Gulu. Over the past few years this linguistic practice was also picked up by musicians, dancers and comedians, leading to its spread throughout the town’s young population. Like the name, which translates as ‘language of the youth’, indicates, *Leb pa Bwulu* can be classified as a youth language, similar to linguistic practices documented for many other cities in Africa. Speakers of this linguistic practice come

from various social backgrounds and include both genders, as it seems that their ethnic background as Acholi is the main common denominator. This perception of Acholi as a youth language misses many of the typical characteristics regarding the social backgrounds of its speakers, and its socio-pragmatic context is however not a sign of local social cohesion or a lack of discriminatory social patterns, but an expression of social change, developing urban identities, national and local power relations as well as linguistic appropriation.

## **3. Origins of *Leb pa Bwulu***

The genesis of *Leb pa Bwulu* as a linguistic practice is most likely connected to the decades of lasting conflict between armed rebel groups from the Acholi region and the central government in Kampala. The conflict finally ended in 2008 following the (unsuccessful) peace talks in Juba, after which the last remnants of the Lord’s Resistance Army led by the Joseph R. Kony, fled towards the rainforests of the northern Congo and the Central African Republic. Previously, life in the region was dictated by the presence of the Ugandan military and nightly raids by members of rebel groups. During that time the town grew massively in size as people were forced to flee their villages to seek shelter. During that period, the population increased from 40,000 to currently over 150,000 people. Among the newcomers were many children and teenagers without family or social ties in Gulu. At the same time, it became a hotspot for international aid agencies. After the war had ended, the town retained its status as a center of international aid and development workers and many who had fled their villages from the LRA decided to stay (Branch 2008). These

social conditions became the breeding ground for Leb pa Bwulu. Among the refugees that had remained in town were many young men, often without access to education, work or local social support.

Parts of the vocabulary of Leb pa Bwulu is reflective of their life, trying to survive in this difficult environment not only during or directly following the insurgency, but also in the present time. It includes terminology about drugs, crime and alcohol – elements of which are often connected to the social reality of people in socially marginalized positions, as for instance Seddon (2006) noted. Several terms for chewing mirra or khat (like *sagga* or *gomba*) exist, a plant with amphetamine-like effects that is in Gulu mostly used by young men of low social status. It also includes words connected to criminal activities, like the terms *vunga* for ‘stealing’ or *dom* for ‘jail’.

Besides the many words dealing with living on the street and drug use they also coined the term *aguu* as a name they gave to themselves. Roughly translating as ‘hustler’, it denoted someone who would do anything to get by. The term functioned as a symbol for their self-identification as outsiders and socially isolated, not only within Gulu, but also from the complex social relations of the Acholi family structures. In these, every ethnic Acholi is part of a hierarchical system in which the elders, the male heads of each family tree, have power, but also responsibility for each member of their extended family. Due to the conflict, this system was severely disrupted and incapable of providing needed support. These young men therefore positioned themselves outside these traditional structures and created their identity with their own language as its emblematic marker and representation

of their life style. This community of practice not only included the young ethnic Acholi, but also members of other ethnic groups who had found their way to Gulu, as their identity was based less on their ethnic affiliations than their social positions as young men outside the general social norms and structures. Nonetheless, due to most of them being Acholi and often also monolingual, the local language of this region has remained its base language and the source for most manipulations.

#### **4. Social change, urban growth and re-branding**

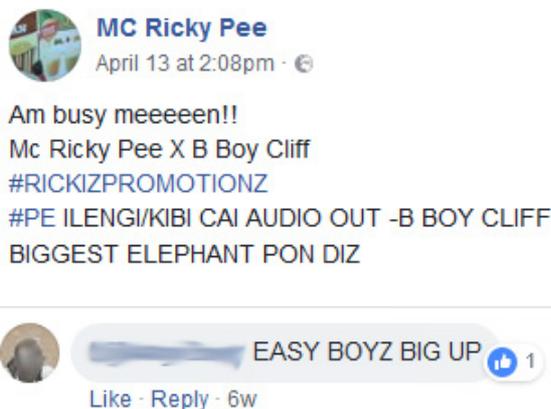
Following the end of the conflict, international development agencies and NGOs established local support networks which were dedicated to victims of the insurgence. For many of the young people living in the streets this meant access to housing and education through aid programs. At the same time, traditional family networks managed to recover to the point that social support was again available to the previously isolated. This not only led to the core group of Leb pa Bwulu speakers shrinking in numbers, but also to the language entering the circles of education and higher prestige as former members of this marginalized group gained access to other networks.

The former street kids retained their linguistic practices, leading to the language spreading into other social circles and the expansion of its vocabulary. Instead of representing the social reality of living on the streets, it became a signifier of urban youth culture in general. This new, expanded group of speakers also included musicians and other artists, who made use of the creative potential of Leb pa Bwulu. Hip-Hop artist Judas was

one of the front runners of this development. A former street child himself, he created rap songs which heavily featured the use of youth language vocabulary, capturing their identities and attitudes.

The creative nature of Leb pa Bwulu also inspired competition among musicians on who could introduce new words into the language. For musicians like Judas or Small Pin Charger, this was a central motive when writing lyrics and also during their performances, as they tried to increase their prestige within the community. This overall development also shows in the vocabulary of many Leb pa Bwulu speakers who are not living in the street and have access to education and other linguistic resources. The vocabulary shows strong influences from English and other globally recognized languages such as Jamaican Patois, as the process of linguistic innovation differs from the process initially employed by the first speakers. Thus, terms like *wagwan*, meaning 'how are you doing' or 'what is going on?', *big up* as an expression of support, or *pon* for 'on' find their place within linguistic practices under the label of Leb pa Bwulu.

Fig. 1. Facebook post by musician MC Ricky Pee and a reply from one of his followers



Global media, including music and TV have left clear marks in the linguistic practices of many young people and also left imprints on local youth language practices. These changes of who the speakers of Leb pa Bwulu are, how the vocabulary is constructed and in which ways it is used also came with changes in expressed identities and ideologies. Previously, ethnic elements were not of major importance, but they now became a central part for many of the speakers. As a reflection of the conflict between the Acholi and other ethnic groups from central and southwestern Uganda, Leb pa Bwulu was put in opposition to Luganda and Luyaaye, the Luganda-based youth language variety spoken in Kampala. By expressing a sense of "northernness," it functions as an "anti-language" towards the perceived political and cultural dominance of the capital. It has also largely reduced its male dominance, as girls and young women are just as likely as boys and men to make use of this linguistic practice. Words that denote criminal activities such as the aforementioned *dom* for 'jail' or *vunga* for 'stealing' are usually not part of the speakers' repertoires in this case. Another word, however has found new prominence and meaning among this new, larger group of speakers; the term *aguu*. Instead of using it to identify someone who is street smart and knows how to survive, it now means 'thief' or 'prostitute'. It is used as a derogatory term denoting those that don't belong and would do things outside the general norms for money.

## 5. The left-behind

Despite the efforts of social workers and the re-establishment of traditional social networks, the number of young men and women

living on the streets has not dropped to zero. There are still many people, mostly young men in Gulu, that are either homeless or living under precarious conditions without local support networks. They perform unskilled work in low paying jobs such as construction work, car-washing, delivery boys or are engaged in illegal activities such as theft, dealing drugs or prostitution. This group is still isolated from traditional networks, as they are either out-cast due to their criminal history or their drug addictions, or they prefer living on the streets in Gulu to the living conditions in their home villages. Some of them were part of an education program for some time or had returned to their villages, but inevitably ended up back on the streets. Others joined them later, attracted by the growing and developing urban center, trying to leave the monotone life in the rural areas that not only meant a lack of entertainment and strict hierarchical structures, but also the absence of economic opportunity combined with wide-spread alcoholism. For this group, Leb pa Bwulu has retained its meaning as a multiethnic code representing the life and struggles of living on the streets. Instead of it being just an auxiliary part of a larger linguistic repertoire, speaking this youth language also remains an integral and regular part of their everyday communication. As demonstrated by the change in meaning of *aguu*, they have, however, lost ownership over the language that originated in this community and whose own word has become an insult directed towards them. Their construction of identity, of which Leb pa Bwulu remains an important form of expression, is still that of outsiders within their own wider community and an opposition towards other ethnic groups is not a part of it. Their voice is barely noticeable in the general

discourse regarding language ideologies and identities expressed by Leb pa Bwulu as other more powerful social groups claim authority over that part of this linguistic practice. Nonetheless, they are still actors within the creative process and an integral part of the Leb pa Bwulu speaking community. The creation of new words and the development of language carries great value within their group as they remain some of the most creative innovators. In this role they are however also used by others, such as the musicians mentioned previously who are looking to promote their own image as innovators and leaders in the wider community. Invited to sit-ins or visited in the back alleys, they share their newest creations and discuss current innovation techniques in exchange for participation, attention, alcohol and cigarettes, as their creative process and its products become valuable commodities for others.

## **6. Systemic power and the spread of linguistic innovation**

The social dynamics involved in the process of linguistic innovation observed among the speakers of Leb pa Bwulu puts into question the usefulness of general models and theories regarding the dynamics of linguistic innovation and change for youth language practices. For instance, Aitchinson (2001), proposes a model, which differentiates between four steps which lead to widespread acceptance of new linguistic elements. In the first two steps, a group of speakers creates innovation to differentiate themselves from another social group, which is in turn then adopted by others out of admiration. In this case however, the steps of innovation and the adoption by another

social group are mediated through a third step, in which individual influencers, who are simultaneous members of both social groups are responsible for the dispersion of linguistic innovation. In this function, they tie together the different networks of people that are in some from part of the same community of speakers (or identify themselves as speakers) without being part of the same social group. They create the link between innovation made in one group and the demand for innovation in the other social group, shifting the admiration from the innovators to themselves. Instead of street kids gaining positive attitudes for products of their creative process, it is the musicians who benefit not only intangibly, but also in material form, as they leverage their gained popularity into bigger audiences at their concerts. To alternatively call these influencers 'early adopters' would fail in recognizing their specific role and the power relations involved in this process as they take on the persona of an innovator once they engage with other networks. Instead, they appear as 'brokers' who in the sense of Eckert and Wenger (2005: 587) are "not simply [...] purveyors of linguistic goods, but [...] personality types who are likely to have heightened styles"; a matching description for the musicians in this case. Unlike Eckert and Wenger however, who struggle to identify the immediate and material benefit for the 'brokers' in their examples of linguistic innovation, the tangible advantage for these musicians is visible and calculated. Some of the street kids were very aware of these unbalanced and exploitive relationships, as they expressed anger over the fact that others were using their linguistic innovations for their own gain and presented them as original creations. Due to the conditions of their social

situation and the lack of access to facilities and relevant networks, they were however unable to change the situation. The different positions within the various social networks were thus key elements in the power relations between the 'brokers' and the innovators, enabling the 'brokers' to act as innovators themselves. Regarding the four steps of innovation proposed by Aitchinson (2001) this leads to the question on how to incorporate the role that these 'brokers' have in the process of linguistic innovation. They take on multiple functions at once, being early adopters within one network and innovators within another one, using the lack of access by members of the first network and a gap in knowledge among members of the second one. As such, they stand between step (1) and step (2) in this process. Granted, this example of linguistic innovation and spread of language change differs from processes described in many other studies and models. In those particular cases, the lack of knowledge is not tied to membership in specific networks and the access to means of publication is not as restricted, making the commodified linguistic object less valuable.

However, it is also possible that the value is in other cases just more obscure, not as emblematic and tangible as in this case and thus the role of the 'broker' less important or attractive; possibly even to the point of non-existence. Alternatively, however, it might also be possible that these 'brokers' are simply less visible because they don't appear as people with "heightened styles". They might not even be identifiable as individual people, but come in the form of institutions, media or linguistic landscapes, and questions of access, membership and power have to be located and studied within these shapes and forms.

The element most difficult to identify and describe is that of power, as demonstrated by the reluctance of many researchers to include it as part of a model of linguistic change (Milroy & Milroy 1985; Eckert & Wenger 2005). In this case, the power relations are not only made visible, but they also show that they must be considered when trying to capture the systematics of innovation and language change in the context of youth languages spreading across social groups. The 'brokers' decide which linguistic elements are spread beyond this 'core' group of speakers into the larger community and what meanings they have, for instance by presenting these words in specific contexts within their music. The changed meaning of *aguu*, from a positive term for people surviving in difficult conditions into a derogatory insult meaning 'thief' or 'prostitute' is only possible through the elimination of the original context and juxtaposing the word into a new context where the innovators of the term have no control and their perspective is unknown or not considered important. The position of the 'broker' facilitates this transposition by acting as the innovators themselves, giving authenticity and authority to the new meaning. As "youth languages" are in parts defined by their tendency to transcend social groups and restrictedness to very limited contexts, the process described here for Leb pa Bwulu is usually not atypical for the spread of youth languages in general. Thus, it seems also questionable whether the concept of 'community of practice' and the way that power is integrated there, is capable of providing the model for their dynamics of language change. Eckert and Wenger (2005) argue that power relations are implied in their concept of 'community of practice', because "practice always involves

the maintenance of the community – and therefore of its power structure" (p. 83), but as this example demonstrates, is it rather difficult to characterize the youth language speakers in a way that fits this ideal. The community of speakers is too heterogenous to identify them as a single, homogenous community, as it is much rather a collection of closely or loosely connected 'communities of practice' with various socio-economic backgrounds and different ideas about the meaning of this language. They are nonetheless connected as the speakers use the same words, often also with the same or similar meanings, they also share some demographic characteristics, usually being adolescents or young adults, sometimes gender, and they are generally from the same place as these linguistic practices are often bound to specific areas, like a city, or a part of a city. The commonalities within demographics are significant. They are also in some way linked through networks, whether they are through social contact, or through some forms of media; both connection types present in the example of Leb pa Bwulu.

Since this simultaneity of heterogeneity and connectedness cannot be addressed with the 'community of practice' model, it is necessary to employ a different theoretical approach to these processes, similar to the proposal by Davies (2005) in her critique to the application of Wenger's (1998) concept on language change. Instead it seems necessary to incorporate ideas of power in language as they were stated by Bourdieu, who placed the evaluation of linguistic signs and their "symbolic capital" into a specific "market" where the values are negotiated at (Bourdieu 1991: 68–89). Blommaert's work (2005), which identifies the complex ideas surrounding language as "the locus and

instrument of power, of inequality, of permanent struggles between those who control it and those who (believe they) need it" in his work on language and discourse (Blommaert 2005: 186) can also be applied. Getting back to the critique of Davies (2005) on 'community of practice', it might also be necessary to incorporate principles from network theory, in order to properly address the power relations arising from differences in access, authority and legitimacy, which are tied to the way people are connected across the various social networks within the community of speakers. In a similar sense, the notion of networks was also a part of the critique towards the 'community of practice' concept by Tusting (2005). This includes Fairclough's (2003) argument that recognizing the connectedness of social practices through 'orders of discourse' is crucial to understanding the production of meaning within social groups. It also points towards the failure of the 'community of practice' model to connect social practices in these smaller social groups to larger social constructs. However, whereas Tusting (2005) uses the term 'network' mainly to refer to discursive elements that are tied to the production of meaning, the case of Leb pa Bwulu shows that it also carries value as a concept of social structure. Since these two approaches to networks are certainly not exclusive to each other, a model that tries to capture the dynamics of these linguistic practices subsumed under the term "youth language" should be capable of including them both. Regardless how such a model would look like in the end, the issue of power will have to be an explicit part of it and a sense for the complexity and heterogeneity of the people involved with them must be incorporated.

Furthermore, it seems that the term youth language is misleading under these described conditions, with regards to the people who make use of these linguistic practices. The underlying social conditions in the rise and following popularity of Leb pa Bwulu do not indicate age as a key factor in the formation of common identities or in the usage of this linguistic practice in general. Other factors took clear precedent, for example, the experience of real or perceived social marginalization; firstly, by the assumed creators of this linguistic practice within their own local community and their traditional social structure; and subsequently by the larger community of Leb pa Bwulu speakers in relation to their perceived status in national political and social discourses. Thus, it seems necessary to explore whether this observation can be extended to other prominent examples of supposed African 'youth languages' like Sheng, Tsootsitaal or Nouchi and determine if these linguistic practices should be re-labeled.

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Youth language attitudes and  
secrecy in West Cameroon

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## Youth language attitudes and secrecy in West Cameroon

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### 1. Introduction: A dialogue

Persons: Calvin and Joan, his aunt.

Scene: at a neighborhood in mile three Nkwen, Bamenda Cameroon, 22 December 2017.

**Joan:** Calvin, could you please get my shoes cleaned when you finish with your laundry?

**Calvin:** Yes, auntie, I will.

**Joan:** I wonder if this rumor about school reopening on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January is actually true.

**Calvin:** Hmm, auntie, I am not sure; this has been going on for long now but no actual resumption has ever taken place. Heeee – and auntie we don't have a house bad (Heee and auntie we have stayed in the house for so long now).

**Joan:** Hmm teeh? One will not stop hearing new words.

**Calvin:** Hahahaha.

**Joan:** We hope things do not get worst. By the way, where is Lum? She was supposed to boil some rice so we can eat for lunch.

**Calvin:** Lum don vanish, nowhere around here.

**Joan:** What is vanish, what language are you speaking?

**Calvin:** Hahahaha, auntie, what I meant is, Lum has gone, she is nowhere around the house now.

**Joan:** Where do you people learn these new ways of speaking with very strange words?

**Calvin:** it comes up automatically as we discuss with friends, nobody teaches us and as we speak, many of our friends after hearing for a long time start speaking like us.

**Joan:** Hmmm, okay ooo...

Despite the fact that languages are being taught, are standardized or developed, every language starts with just a single person, two persons or a few people. Humans are always moved with the desire to communicate in a language that is best understood by them and a few people in their cycles, and they sometimes use this language(s) so often that it becomes a common knowledge to many and in many cases, gradually becomes a standard way of speaking ranging from a small group of people to larger groups. Hence, as people evolve and communities change, languages equally evolve and new languages pop up depending on those involved. These languages may include youth language, secret language, religious language, language according to the different professions and gender-specific language, among many others.

Youth language has been existing for a long time; it has gained a lot of attention from scholars in European contexts, as compared to the African context where most scholars just

recently developed an interest in it. This interest evolved due to many reasons. It is worth noting that youth language has faced a lot of challenges including the fact that many people find it difficult to accept the fact that youth language or languages are not only made up of bad words, slangs or for resistance purposes. Contrary to that, there are a number of reasons why youths do create new languages and in many cases it has little or nothing to do with bad words or being resistant – studies such as the ones mentioned below have shown that there are varieties of youth languages that will depend on the group or groups to which one belongs. In the case of Nigeria for example, we have groups such as the ‘whatzup boys’ (westernized and often economically well-heeled fellows) and ‘yahoo-yahoo boys’ (entrepreneurial youngsters sometimes associated with illegal local and international dealings). There is also the motor park language widely spoken by uneducated drivers and ‘area boys’ (school-dropouts, social miscreants) (see Hurst-Harosh & Erastus 2018: 184). Associating these different groups with violence goes a long way to support the ideology that youth language frequently originates in the so-called criminal milieu (Halliday 1978, cited in Hurst-Harosh & Erastus 2018: 184).

This paper investigates youth culture as a whole package (dressing, language, dancing styles, hair styles, articulation and many more). It focuses on youth culture in West Cameroon looking into their language which is highly characterized by multilingualism with traces of many colonial and African languages and like many other youth languages, it is highly influenced by cultures such as hip hop music, dressing and walking styles among others. The intention of this paper is to add to other voices that youth have got a mind of their own to create

new cultures for their own satisfaction and not necessarily resisting others who are out of their cycles.

## **2. Paper aim**

Despite the popular idea that youth languages are mostly slangs, bad words or mostly a matter of resistance (law, home rules, societal norms etc.), there has been a growing interest in youth language lately. Youth language in Cameroon is not an exception to this interest as we have a number of scholars writing on these languages. But in my opinion, there is still so much to be talked about as youths develop new languages and culture more often than one can imagine. This paper aims at looking at existing knowledge on youth language, questioning its generalization where necessary while adding new ideas to show that youth language and culture in West Cameroon must not be seen from a negative point of view but that different ideologies are the rationale behind their different life styles.

## **3. General overview**

According to McCarty & Wyman (2009), many indigenous youths in rapidly shifting communities are not simply abandoning their heritage (such as language) but rather expressing powerful yearnings to become confident heritage language speakers. They further explain that youth may value and actively attempt to maintain their heritage languages with one another even as their own changing peer practices of language shift and are endangered. The authors claim that in order to understand how youth, families and communities move along trajectories of language endangerment

in such settings, we must have a deeper look on how language learning and beliefs about languages change over time within complex linguistic ecologies (see McCarty & Wyman 2009: 279-290).

According to Nassenstein & Hollington (2015: 1), “despite the fact that each youth language in Africa and beyond has its own flavors and features and has to be regarded in its own particular cultural, (multi)lingual, social and local contexts, youth languages in Africa share certain properties, especially with regard to their function as markers of identity and in terms of the strategies of linguistic manipulation employed”. They cite Kießling & Mous (2004), saying domains such as music, clothing, political attitudes, movies, hair style, street knowledge, way of life, dancing styles, ways of working among many others come together with language in terms of creating and expressing the shared group identity of the members of the community of practice. This should be taken into consideration in order to draw a more coherent and holistic picture of the linguistic practice in its social and cultural context.

When words are manipulated, language is deliberately changed, giving different levels of meaning, expressing distance and group boundaries, as Storch (2011: 11) argues. Storch also went further to say that “in being equated to the sacred and magnified reality, manipulated language is surely also an essentialization of shared ideas and concepts of truth among a certain community of speakers.”

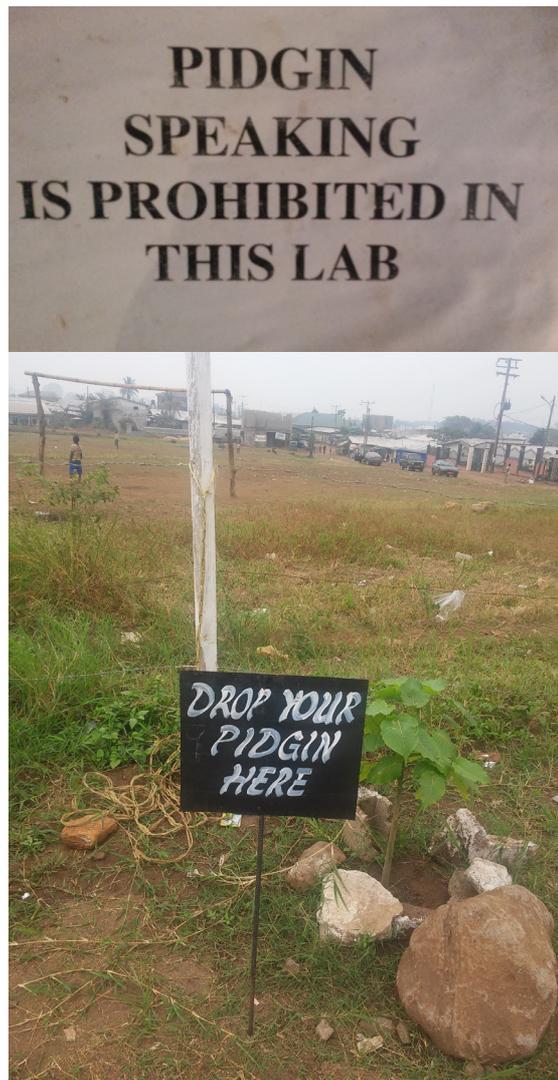
There are claims that youth languages in nature are short-lived and change rapidly based on the assumption that others cannot or should not understand them. These languages generally originate with lexical borrowing

from other languages or slang varieties not leaving out the terminologies of crime and delinquency and they have a feature of high variation. It is important to know that after these languages have been established as youth languages and their speakers grow older, they might be adopted by the general society as vernaculars themselves countering the claims that they are short-lived (an example of these is Sheng in Nairobi; see McLaughlin 2009: 9). There is therefore a need to sometimes disassociate the history of origin of a language from its present usage. In this regard, a language that originated from a 'deviant group' and has developed to a widely spoken language should be judged from its present state. Nouchi is a language spoken in Abidjan, Ivory Coast and the term originally applied to a social group of street gangs 'juvenile delinquents' (Ploog 2008: 253). This language was developed in the 1980s as a secret language which youths could use to prevent the police from understanding them. According to Ploog (2008: 253) and Kube-Barth (2009: 105), it is based on *Français Populaire* – a variety of French – and borrowing from English, German, Spanish, Baoule, Dioula and Bete.

Cameroon Pidgin is one of those languages that despite the fact that it is widely spoken, it has not been fully accepted as a language worth using and still faces a lot of resistance as people are sometimes seen as being inferior when they use it. It is often considered the language of the illiterate masses and described as bad, bush English or broken English (Dibussi Tande 2006). The disdain for Pidgin is even glaring on school and university campuses where one can get anti-Pidgin signboards as follows:

- "Drop your Pidgin here"*
- "Succeed at the university by avoiding Pidgin"*
- "Pidgin is like AIDS shun it"*
- "Pidgin is your linguistic enemy"*
- "English is the password not Pidgin"*
- "Commonwealth speak English not Pidgin"*

Fig. 1 & Fig. 2. Prohibitions



The fate of youth language is like other languages such as pidgins and creoles which have been devalued of prestige in the same way their speakers have been devalued (see Morga Dalphinis 1985, cited in Dibussi Tande 2006 :2). The urge to create an identity is a characteristic of youth language where through speaking a particular language, they feel a sense of possession and belonging. Storch (2011: 14) explains how languages of rituals, secret languages and those restricted to a particular group including youth languages not only express but are used to create social identities where group boundaries are constructed and maintained. The issue of creating an identity to me trashes the assumption that youth languages are mostly slangs or for resistance purposes. It is common practice for individuals to want to belong or be identified with what they find interesting. Hence, language is just one of those strategies used by youth or any special group to make these differentiations and should not be assumed of being delinquent.

Camfranglais for example is a language spoken by youths in the francophone part of the country. It originated as a language of criminals so many years back and even goes by several different names like *Pidgin French*, *Franglais*, *Langage de Bandits de Douala*, or *Camspeak*, but is now widely spoken amongst youths (Schröder 2007: 282). An example is:

- (1) *Man, lep je go where avec une djim-djim so?*  
 ‘Man, where will I go with a fat lady like this?’

According to Schröder, Camfranglais is used as a “secret in-group language” and therefore concludes that what these codes represent is the urge of young people in this societies to impregnate the dominant standard and the colonial languages with a local flavor and add local color to a global language (Schröder 2007: 293–297).

#### 4. Other aspects of youth languages

Looking at some of the examples of these youth language such as Camfranglais, Mboko, “Nigger Talk” (see below), among others, one can see that in many of the contexts, the discussion is usually more about the speakers themselves than against others. Let us take a look at a popular interpretation of the situation:

Fig. 3. Cartoon – Boy, I was wondering, where do you live? – Man, never mind, it is in a place where I can't tell you<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> See [<http://www.cameroonpostline.com/in-praise-of-camfranglais-and-other-africanisms/>].

With the above example among many other examples, it is worth saying that their communication might not have been understood by people around them, but it doesn't make it a secret as many will assume. It can therefore be safe to say they simply want to flow in a language they deem suitable for a certain situation or at a particular time.

Music by the popular musician in Cameroon, Lapiro de Mbanga (of late) who was known for his unique style of singing is another good example. Lapiro was also known as the father and author of Mboko Talk, as it could be heard in most of his music. The particular clip illustrated below was very popular in the early 2000s and was highly loved, sung and danced to by youths who enjoyed the language used and the manner in which he portrayed the daily activities and language of a typical Cameroonian youth. The language in his music is so intense that till today, many youths might not be able to translate every part of his music if asked to – just made of English, French, Pidgin and some indigenous languages.

It is worth noting that despite the long time Mboko has been spoken in Cameroon, especially in the Anglophone part of the country, many people still distance themselves from it because of the negative connotations given to it such as: a language to resist criminal and other laws of a community, household rules and other societal regulations, a language for thieves, school drop-outs and irresponsible youths. On the other hand, many young and uprising musicians in Cameroon now use and identify themselves with this language and other similar languages, which gives them a



Fig. 4. Screenshots from Lapiro's music clips<sup>2</sup>

sense of pride so that people are now accused of claiming ownership of the language.

Looking at the above examples, one could add that apart from being resistant or secretive with language, youths have a sense of pride when using a particular language that is not widely spoken. In addition to that, what they say might not necessarily be a secret as many people around them may understand what is being said. All they want is to make a difference and at times, show off their ability to switch codes, mix different languages and make a known language sound completely different. Below is a typical situation of my home when growing up as a teenager and you can be assured the aim was never to say anything

<sup>2</sup> See [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzBbHqhLQi0>].

secret; it's a style that was adopted by many youths and even still in use today despite a strong denial from some parents.

Day one

**Me:** *Abeg bring me that kong make I tsuhte this finion dey, then no forget dat kehke too let me remove this fufu because e don over stay for fire.*

'Please bring that stick so I can pound this garden egg and don't forget to also bring a saucer so I can remove this fufu, it has been on fire for too long.'

**Mother:** *What? What language are you speaking? This should be the last time I am getting that nonsense in this house, its either you speak English, pidgin or the dialect. Stop mixing up languages like a confused cockroach.*

Day 2

**Jane:** *So wona be di over mbene for dat party because wona want show all man say you can dance very well? Then waiti I be see for ya kehvu like shark so or don't tell me you don start shark da kind?*

'Where you guys dancing a lot at that party because you wanted to show to everyone that you can dance? And by the way what did I see in your hands like a beer, don't tell me you have started drinking beer?'

**Me:** *Abeg leave me, waiti be ya own for deh, make man no mbene say I di soir who? Nobe the party was organized for people for mbene?*

'Let me be please, what is your business in it who am I afraid of that I shouldn't dance and was the party not organized for people to dance?'

**Megi:** *But you nova still answer about that shark weh you be haah.*

'But you haven't said anything about the beer you were holding.'

**Me:** *Which shark nor? What exactly you be see?*

'Which beer, what exactly did you see?'

**Jane:** *I say you be hold shark di nehe ya body you ask me say waiti I be see?*

'I said you had a bottle of beer and was shaking your body (dancing) and you are asking me what exactly I saw?'

**Megi:** *Hahahaha and na so deh bottle be large.*

'Hahahaha and the bottle was really big.'

**Me:** *What? Wona no serious at all, next time wona boteh wona eye look fine. I nobe get any shark because I nodi first shark, na juice I be hold wona come di claim overdone for here. Wona must first di shout sodat make mami or papa hear di feel say wie don di shark weh a no get any idea?*

'What? You guys are not serious at all, next time please open your eyes and look well. I had no beer because I don't drink beer in the first place, it was a bottle of juice I had and you guys are claiming to be so informed. By the way must you people shout for mama or papa to hear and think I have started drinking beer when I have no idea?'

**Mother:** *Waiti wona di talk for here? I don warn wona for always di stick to one language noh (attempting to slap the closest person to her). Make I hear that*

*confused talk for this house again. Na so wona go go di mix am for wona exam paper dem.*

‘What are you people saying here? Haven’t I warned you guys to always stick to one language? Let me hear that confused language here again, that is exactly how you will go and mix up languages during an exam.’

Following the dialogues, one can deduce that the initial aim of the choice of language wasn’t meant to resist the parents or say something secretive, it just gives them a sense of pride to use language in an artistic way and still be able to flow in their chat. Even the mother could understand what was being said but will not want to use the same language because she identifies it with the youth and does not find it appropriate. Apart from this, there are so many different reasons why youths use languages that are meant to be spoken only by those in their cycle. While some people said they have a feeling of belonging and pride while speaking these languages, others said their professions make them form languages that are limited to their cycles, or they just want to be out of the ordinary in their choice of language. Awa Prosper, a midwife in Cameroon, said they will use a medical language in the hospital to convey information that will be understood only by medical practitioners. It could be an information that could put a patient or his/her family member in a shock. Hence, they will prefer to pass it on just among themselves. For example, if the patient is HIV positive they

use the word *IT* or if a patient is dead, they say *the patient is alga 0*.<sup>3</sup>

Vuchase Godwill, a youth in Bamenda uses special language(s) in his day-to-day conversation with friends and even adds some special codes to his speech, for instance when he says *clean* for ‘yes’ and *night* for ‘no’. In her opinion, Sandra (another youth) says that these languages are used among themselves to enjoy the discussion and also to say something they think is sacred to their group, e.g. when they say *bra* for ‘menses’. It’s not necessarily something secretive but simply used because they won’t want an immature person or the guys to understand they are talking about their menstrual period.<sup>4</sup>

To another person, some of the words added to the youth language may come about as a result of a mistake, or a particular event. One person makes a mistake and it becomes the norm to refer to that word or person. For example, Peter falls in the presence of his friends, then the next time Samuel almost falls and the friends use words like *please don’t peter here*. It could also be associated with an object (food, music, plants, dressing among others). In this case, someone might be so connected to a particular object or person in a way that the friends use the object to refer to that person or the people around him.<sup>5</sup>

According to Elma, some of these new languages or codes come up because of the urge to shorten the words and reduce stress in communication. Some examples of these words are *shi* ‘100 frs’ and *nkolo* ‘1000 frs’. It is worth mentioning that this has also extended to writing

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s archive.

<sup>4</sup> Author’s archive.

<sup>5</sup> Author’s archive.

where youths in particular use very limited letters to spell words in their text messages. It is common seeing expressions like *hawa you* 'how are you', *8* 'great', *nyt* 'night', *btw* 'by the way' and *lol* 'laugh out loud' among many others.<sup>6</sup>

Youths are not only considered being resistant from their language. Their hairstyle, walking style, dancing, music choices and even dressing styles are in some cases considered as being resistant or being deviant. According to Rumeana Jahangir at BBC News (31 May 2015), in early African civilization, hairstyles could indicate a person's family background, tribe and social status. Hair was considered to tell a lot about someone's identity which is one of the reasons why a woman in mourning will either not do her hair or will choose a subdued hairstyle for that period. This ideology, as I can say, has not completely been forgotten, as it is very common to get people laying emphasis on what hairstyle is suitable for a responsible person.

Dialogue between Marie and the father in a neighborhood in Ntambessi, Bamenda Cameroon on 5 January 2018:

**Marie:** Good evening Papa!

**Father:** Yes, good evening. Where are you coming from?

**Marie:** From the salon.

**Father:** Hmm, are you by any means trying to say this is what you went and paid money to do?

**Marie:** But papa, what is wrong with the hair? This is what many people do these days.

**Father:** Good enough, you are not many people. First thing tomorrow morning, I want you to take off that nonsense from your head.

**Marie:** Hmm.

**Father:** Don't even argue with me, I wonder who told you could do anything on your head and bring to this house. Is this how you were brought up? Just take off that thing because it does not represent this family at all.

**Marie:** Papa, I spent so much money to do this hair.

**Father:** I will give you money to make a new one.

Looking at the above dialogue, one can see that Marie's father has associated the hairstyle already with being deviant. He is so concerned about his family name and how the society will think he did not bring up his daughter well by allowing her to do that particular hairstyle. There is a popular belief that youths have deviated from the standard or 'morally right' way of doing things, including hairstyles, to an 'immoral and uncultured' way. It is therefore common to get parents making statements like "What is this nonsense you people wear these days? Just take a look at my pictures in the past and see how decently dressed we were!". Dreadlocks is one hairstyle that is associated with 'irresponsible' youths, especially boys, in Cameroon. According to Carin Kometa in

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<sup>6</sup> Author's archive.

the Postnewsline.com<sup>7</sup>, it is something that was common with Reggae musicians like Bob Marley and Lucky Dube who used their music as a weapon for change. As most of them were revolutionists, they were seen as radicals and a violent group of people. As a result, people seen with dreadlocks are considered to be radical. This has not stopped the Cameroonian youths from adopting it, as it is fast becoming a hairstyle for many Cameroonian youths today.



Fig. 5. Dreadlocks becoming an ideal hairstyle for many youths

Fig. 6, 7 & 8. Ideal hairstyle around the 1980s



The pictures (6–8) are typical examples of what was done especially in the 80s and what some parents will consider ideal for a decent lady. At the same time, the present generation will consider any young person with that hairstyle as being ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilized’. The photo on the left is a recent photo of a youth who had this ‘old’ hairstyle commonly known in Cameroon as *follow me*. Before leaving the house, she had a cap on and did not expose this hairstyle, as would have been done in the past. Talking to her, she mentioned she might not have been so comfortable moving around with the hair because people might consider it to be old-fashioned or not tidy. I also remember having this hairstyle some eleven years ago but never exposed it when I was out of the house. I would always wear a cap when getting out of the house because I felt it was archaic and I had it on for different reasons other than for beauty. Worthy of note is the fact that recently, I have observed some youths are gradually getting into this hairstyle and even showing it off on social media. This gives me the impression that like many other styles practiced by our parents many years ago, such as dressing style, among others, and adopted by youths these days, this hairstyle might in some few years to come find its way back to life.

Music is not being left out of the culture, as it is also believed that youths in Cameroon have changed the pattern of music, and it is common practice these days to hear complains such as, “young people’s music is full of meaningless words and slangs”. Mr. Albert, a lecturer in one of the private universities in Bamenda, in an interview on 28 December 2017, said:

<sup>7</sup> See [<http://allafrica.com/stories/200810171138.html>].



Fig. 9. Screenshots of music in the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>9</sup>

Music these days actually make no sense, I can't waste my time going to a club because I wonder what I will be dancing or listening to. We no longer have good music, I think the youth have turned the music industry to something completely out of place, even listening to the lyrics, I weep for the youth because it seems they can't control what they say. Even the scenes are very indecent.



Below are two YouTube links. The first one is a mix of what the older generation will consider 'ideal', with the 'desired' scenes while the second is the modern mix mostly loved by the youth and considered to be 'meaningless' and 'immoral' by the older generation. This music also goes with a complete different style of dancing compared to what the older generation will even want to be associated with. An example of some of these changes can be seen with *Wamarde*, the pastoral *Mbororo* Fulani of Cameroon youth dance. There is a strong opposition from different quarters that it has gone through a lot of modernization and consequently changing the *Wamarde* tradition.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that the audience does not want to look at the changes brought about by the youth from a positive point of view but are more interested in what has always been a tradition. Hence, anything that moves from the 'original form' is negative and threatening.



In an interview I conducted with him, Shetih Elkanah, a young musician with the artist name Obeytheking, on 8 January 2018, stated:



I flow with what is in fashion, what the masses will want to hear. Yes, I use the word *nigger* and I know many people, especially the older generation will not want to hear the word because to them, it is an insulting word to the blacks but many hip hop musicians use it now because we are proud of our identity and do not give a damn to the names people call us. We rather use the word *nigger* to our own advantage, so we can call ourselves *nigger* and why not add it to our music.



<sup>8</sup> See [<http://www.ascleiden.nl/news/seminar-they-will-destroy-our-wamarde-mbororo-youth-dance-transition-cameroon>].

<sup>9</sup> See [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0ixYILpRbUJ>].

Fig. 10. Screenshots of typical 'youth<sup>10</sup> music

## 5. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the above analysis, I will start by saying that times have changed drastically and keep changing. People move with the trend, and some people, especially the youths, are usually very open to change: they go with the change in taste and fashion. Language in general changes with a rapid speed due to reasons like migration, fashion and language contact which can lead to borrowing words from another language, just to name a few. It is sometimes unavoidable as most of us will testify to have been influenced by or have influence on others with a new language. Therefore, apart from these natural changes, the Cameroonian youths due to some reasons given above, such as prestige, secrecy, among others, intentionally create new languages or codes from the existing ones. It is true that some of these languages came about as a result of the urge by youths to get away with some unwanted practices such as the case of Mboko spoken in Cameroon, but most if not all of these languages are later on developed and spoken by many. As a result, it might be of great help to see the language from its present use rather than judge the speakers according to the origin of the language. Every group of people wants to differentiate themselves through their culture, activities, lifestyle and even language, hence the appellation "group". The youth are not an exception to this demand or desire; their culture must not be what every other person wants it to be. They are full of so much energy that changes brought by them will hardly go unnoticed. Ndinga Joel, a student from the University of Bamenda on 8 January 2018 told me:

<sup>10</sup> See [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA4i9\\_vyQas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA4i9_vyQas)].

<sup>11</sup> See [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlRni7d6qso>].

Fig. 11. Screenshots of typical 'youth music'



We all know in most societies, change is introduced by youth and considering the fact that most people are usually not comfortable with change until when it is being forced down their throats, the youth are always considered rebellious when they come up with strategies to effect this change. It does not only end with our culture, it extends even to political and economic change, whenever we complain and try to ask for a change, we are being termed terrorists. As a result of this, anything new introduced by us the youth whether it is for the benefit of all, we are being bullied and sometimes treated with so much scorn and even inflicted with pain. At times, when we end up succeeding, you see others benefiting, this also includes our language, lifestyle, walking style, hairstyle etc. Whenever we change these things, we get resistance from the community but trust me – in a long run you get people speaking that language, doing same hairstyle they had termed irresponsible. I have seen mothers being called *remey ngah* meaning ‘young mother’ because they try to copy all what is being done by the youth especially in their language and dressing.

In my opinion, all these are assumptions and not the reality. Maybe trying to know why a group of young people uses a particular ‘unpopular’ language might be better than assuming they are planning something bad or resisting something. I keep asking myself if not through research, how would I have known that young nurses in Anglophone Cameroon have created new codes to pass out information in the presence of a patient without necessarily demoralizing the patient or putting their family members in shock? I will rather love to use the phrase “patient is IT” next time instead of “patient is HIV positive” in order to avoid putting anybody in a demoralizing mode.

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA4i9\\_vyQas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA4i9_vyQas)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIR-ni7d6qso>

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#### **Weblinks** (all accessed May 2018)

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-31438273>

<http://www.cameroonpostline.com/in-praise-of-camfranglais-and-other-africanisms/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzBbHqhLQi0>

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<http://allafrica.com/stories/200810171138.html>,  
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More than youth language: the multiple meanings of Yabacrâne in Goma (DR Congo)



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# More than youth language: the multiple meanings of Yabacrâne in Goma (DR Congo)

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper focuses on the polysemy of the term *Yabacrâne*, which is usually seen as a Kiswahili-based youth language practice. It is used by youths in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Goma) (Nassenstein 2016) by offering a different perspective based on another concept of youth and their language.

Researching youth language practices such as *Yabacrâne*<sup>1</sup> led me to the question whether researchers' formal ways of analyzing and structuring youth language should solely remain as the discussion of a "linguistic product", or whether the speakers' perspectives should also be taken more seriously into consideration? In my paper I claim that, unlike other documented practices, *Yabacrâne* is more than

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I would like to thank Adolph Bisimwa Mushunju for his generous help in connecting me with different *Yabacrâne* speakers. Special thanks go to Nico Nassenstein for his guidance and help. I am grateful to the reviewers' comments. Otherwise, the common disclaimers apply. I thank Kieran Taylor for proofreading the text.

just a youth language practice. Its meaning stretches far beyond this aspect and it can refer to a general way of acting or reacting towards a situation.

African youth languages have often been described as being mostly games or slangs, restricted to deviating linguistic features such as those summarized in Rudd (2017). Basic analysis of Yabacrâne has shown that it has specific features; some of which do coincide with other youth language practices in Africa and some of which do not (cf. for instance Nassenstein 2016). At first glance, Yabacrâne is a youth language practice in Goma, just as Sheng is in Nairobi. Ogechi (2005) states that Sheng is a language variety that has been in use, especially among the urban youth in Kenya, for over three decades now. However, Yabacrâne, apart from being a new urban youth language practice as stated before, has many aspects which have not yet been included in published research.

- (1) *Mitembeleyo yabacrane ile yenye iko nayo.*  
'the way of walking of Yabacrâne speakers'

The sentence in example (1) literally means 'the way of walking of Yabacrâne speakers'; which simply aims to express that the attitude someone has is suggestive of an experienced person. I would like to question the research that has been carried out for Swahili youth languages by showing that the focus has to be shifted from a researcher's view to a speaker's or artist's view, or in other terms, from an etic view to an emic view. My contribution is based on qualitative interviews with artists/musicians in 2018 in Goma and also on the analysis of some song texts and videos clips where Yabacrâne is used.

## 2. The city of Goma, Swahili and youth

Goma is a tourist town located between Lake Kivu and Nyiragongo volcano, in eastern DR Congo. It lies across the border from Gisenyi in Rwanda. Currently, Goma is a lake trading post with Bukavu on the other side of Lake Kivu. Around 1954 the popular Birere-Mapendo quarter (a slum of Goma where many hip hop artists are based) was built around warehouses, offices and settlers' homes. Close to Nyiragongo Volcano and Virunga National Park, this city is today home to more than one million people. Swahili came into eastern DR Congo (former Zaire) through Arab traders and missionaries from neighboring Tanzania. From the time this language entered the country, it has been exposed to several changes in morphosyntax and pragmatics due to language contact, socio-ethnic diversity and its continuous diffusion through vast parts of the country.

One factor to consider is that Kivu Swahili, a dialect of Kiswahili spoken in the eastern part of the DR Congo by more than eight million people, has not yet been extensively documented by linguists and only few studies are available, see Bose & Nassenstein (2016), Nassenstein & Bose (2016), Goyvaerts (2007), Goyvaerts & Zembele (1992), Kaji (1982, 1985, 2002). Kivu Swahili is characterized by many different styles and ways of speaking, with a broad range of ethnic and social registers (Bose & Nassenstein 2017). This gives the language a kind of "free style" of use and facilitates the creation of many new words deriving from mostly local languages and some from vehicular languages, such as French.

Despite the fact that Yabacrâne is mostly understood as a new urban youth language

practice, it can also be seen as an evolution of the *Kinyume* language game (mainly spoken by small kids), since most speakers of Yabacrâne were also speakers of Kinyume. Around 2000, *Kinyume* came into existence in the Birere, Office and Virunga quarters as a youth language practice based on reversing the syllables of Kivu Swahili words. Rules of *Kinyume* may differ according to the nature of the word (as follows). These rules show that, even if one might see this language practice only as slang shared among marginalized adolescents, there is a sort of linguistic expertise and specific knowledge there.

1<sup>st</sup> rule: In the case that there is a single word, not in a sentence, this follows the main rule, i.e.

*nyumba* becomes *mbanyu* 'house'  
*masomo* becomes *mosoma* 'school'  
*mbuzi* becomes *zimbu* 'goat'  
*giza* becomes *zagi* 'darkness'

2<sup>nd</sup> rule: For verbs the prefix *ku-* is not affected but the rest of the word is reversed,<sup>2</sup> i.e.

*kuuza* becomes *kuzau* 'to buy'  
*kuenda* becomes *kundae* 'to go'  
*kunawa* becomes *kuwana* 'to bathe'  
*kuiba* becomes *kubai* 'to robe'

3<sup>rd</sup> rule: For sentences, the subject prefix on the verb does not change and the reverse is applied to the remaining elements, but according to their preceding order, i.e.

*inafanana mbuzi* become *inananafa zimbu* 'it looks like a goat'

*mu giza* becomes *mu zagi* 'in darkness'  
*ni nyumba* becomes *ni mbanyu* 'it is a house'  
*sitarudiya kesho* becomes *sitayadiru shoke* 'I will not come back tomorrow'  
*Est-ce que atauzisha samaki?* becomes *Est-ce que atashaziu kimasa?* 'Will (s)he sell fish?'

### 3. Hip hop artists' voices on Yabacrâne

Hip hop artists have a different perspective on youth language practices, compared to researchers who are mainly focused on analysis, phonology and grammatical structures. By interviewing some of the youth of Birere, Ndosho and Himbi (quarters of Goma where Yabacrâne has an alleged high number of speakers) on this matter, we gathered some explanations on what they feel Yabacrâne represents.

According to Jackson Mushekuru, who is a member of the group *B13*, their name was taken from the French movie *Banlieue 13*, a popular movie that inspired them. *B13* is a predominantly male group founded by two brothers, Aubin and Hubert, in 2010 in the Katoyi quarter. It was originally a weightlifting and training center for barmen, security guards and others who liked to exercise and is currently based in the Ndosho quarter. Yabacrâne has two meanings; it relates either to a positive aspect or a negative one. Yabacrâne speakers are often known as *crâne* or *kankala*, the terms used for one individual, and/or *bacrâne* or *bakankala* for a group. The positive aspect of being called a *crâne* (lit. 'skull') is that it means the person has some local knowledge on a given situation even though (s)he might not know nor speak the language (Yabacrâne).

<sup>2</sup> This also exists in Chibende, a Zimbabwean play language (see Hollington, this volume).

For example, a foreigner who goes to a shop without being assisted by a local person and manages to get items at normal 'local' prices, practices in this case Yabacrâne, not as a youth language practice, but as a style. Here, Yabacrâne is more of a style of being fearless and brave to do and/or go to a new place without being assisted and manage not to be cheated. The negative aspect to be recognized as *crâne* is that it can be related to a tough "street image" and specific violent behavior. The positive aspect belongs to an in-group perspective, while the out-group perspective is negative; a prestige that youths conceptualize differently from others. In order to differentiate this second (negative) aspect with the first (positive) one, the *crânes* are further referred to as *djogos* 'violent crâne/thief'. A *mayibobo* or *mike* (term used for 'street kids' in Goma) may be used, for example, to talk to his buddies about their secret or illegal deals.

Nelb Bonheur, a local hip hop musician and rapper says Yabacrâne is "the way of living without fear, a strategy to express your feelings despite the political impact that it can create" (in an interview from 2018). In his song *Tumetchoka*, which is like an open letter to the leading government and in particular to the current President, he is advocating against many injustices and desires a swift response from his fellow citizens.

- (2) tunaitaji haki, aahhh  
 'we need justice
- you must go (4x)
- hatuna democratia  
 we do not have democracy

kuchinjwa kama nyama  
 being killed liked animals

madaraka shindwa acha  
 you have failed to rule please step out

lengo yake utunyanyasa (2x)  
 your objective is to destroy us

acha masikiyo wazi  
 to watch this situation

na waze wapi tunaelekeya  
 and you will know where we are heading

apa ni viliyo ana vita tuianze  
 more often we are mourning

tuna wengine batapoteya  
 there is war and many are dying

shida zinaongezeka kama ...  
 and our situations is worsening ...'

This song represents what the artist calls Yabacrâne. These political statements can be found in socially-critical music in large parts of the world, also in Africa and the African diaspora (hip hop, reggae/dancehall, etc.). Fiston Oleko, a local and member of the *B13* group, mentions that since Yabacrâne is the most commonly known youth language practice, some other youth language practices are also mistaken to be Yabacrâne and this brings the confusion that almost all youth language practices in that area are called Yabacrâne. From this perspective, the *djogos* mainly use what they call *Kinyume* (a ludling that consists of reversing the syllables of a word, see Section 2) as their Yabacrâne and sometimes also appro-

appropriate usual Yabacrâne words to very different contexts and meanings; a practice commonly presented as “youth language”. An example of this is that a *djogo* will either use the word *mbee* or *ngabu* (a metathesis of *bunga* ‘flour’) to stand for ‘money’ in their own kind of Yabacrâne (in Standard Swahili this does not exist). The confusion arises as most people confuse the *djogo* language to be Yabacrâne; hence the *djogo* language, which is not the common Yabacrâne (Nassenstein 2016), is actually also labeled Yabacrâne. The term *djogo* is mainly utilized for robbers, rastas and anyone who uses drugs (or who is associated with drug abuse). Most Yabacrâne speakers fall into dialect categories which are ‘positively viewed’ (in-group perspective) as this is one of the ways to be safe from *badjogo* ‘robbers’, because, when someone uses Yabacrâne the hard way, (s)he can be attacked by *djogos*. This can be seen as one of a multitude of reasons why the number of Yabacrâne speakers is gradually increasing.

Figure 1 represents the characteristics of what some interviewees called the Yabacrâne

aspect or ‘Yabacrâne look’. It shows that Yabacrâne is not only a language, but also mutual solidarity and much more.

Self-representation in pictures serves as a photographic form of solidarity, local knowledge and art. This picture was taken in around November 2017, after the *B13* group (mentioned above) was returning from a weightlifting competition in town, against different groups. They also participate in community work, to show that they are not a band of gangsters but rather a helpful group to society. There are many advantages to their group solidarity, including; in the case that any of their members has a party, they are the ones to be in charge of the security; or if one of the members loses a relative, they take charge of digging the grave and other necessary preparations, and specifically, all free of charge.

#### 4. Further outlook

This paper has sought to express the multiple meanings of Yabacrâne as a name and as a practice; which had previously merely been described as the new urban youth language in Goma (DR Congo) (Nassenstein 2016). It also criticizes the fact that other youth language practices are mainly viewed with a very simple, negative approach that refers largely to gangsters and



Fig. 1. “Yabacrâne aspect” and the *B13* group (P.B.B. 2017)

violence.<sup>3</sup> The word Yabacrâne has gone far beyond the label of a youth language practice to being considered as a sort of general behavior and/or style that people have, regardless of their social group. Yabacrâne can now be used to mean much more than simply its novel grammatical structure; as with other youth language practices. Yabacrâne has therefore also entered everyday speech and older speakers may also use expressions such as *ile idée ni Yabacrâne* ('that is a very good idea'). Considering that forthcoming research is still needed to bring to light more detailed insights, especially from an artistic perspective, this brief overview has stressed that Yabacrâne refers to much more than just youth language, as usually described by linguists.

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<sup>3</sup> More recent (and critical) contributions (see this volume, among others), see youth language in more diverse ways.



12

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Blurred lines

# 12

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## Blurred lines

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Art is a broadly defined concept. Ultimately anything could be considered as art, and the inducement for creating artistry may differ just as much as the various artists that create pieces of art. For some people art is a way to express themselves, to deal with their past or to denounce political or social injustice. For others it is just a way to make money or, on the other hand, a rather cost intensive way to get rid of the same. And art is, as we know, a matter of taste of course. What is also important to be mentioned: art is always embedded into a context. Just like every human that creates art is influenced by the environment around him or her, so everybody's art is as well.

Most – if not all – kinds of art have the potential to influence others, especially if it is public art that is accessible to everybody. The following pictures, which were taken in Swa-

kopmund/Namibia in the year 2014 during a joyous stroll, surely intent to reach out to the spectator. Each of these pictures carries its own message. They are covering the wall of a facility that appears to be a school and the children that are taught here are most likely the creators of those expressional artworks. However, since every school is run by teachers, it is not unlikely that they also had their say concerning the choice of motifs and messages that are adorning the wall. And since every school knows the distress of trying to get along with some notoriously dedicated parents, it could be that they also may have made their voices heard; of course in order to make sure that instead of Vybz Kartel, a very popular yet controversial Jamaican Dancehall artist who is well known all over Africa (not least for his explicit videos and manner of expression), or Yemi Alade, pro-



Fig. 1.  
Mahatma Gandhi – Be the change

bably one of the most successful and admired African female musicians of our days, the face of Mahatma Gandhi would gain the last free space in this fine compilation of colorful art (see Fig. 1).

Nevertheless, the final result is truly an eye-catcher for everybody who passes by this site of the Namibian coastal town and surely inspires thoughts of all kind. Whether the wall should be understood as an “unadulterated” expression of the local youth culture may be as debatable as the definition of the term “youth culture” itself. Undebatable though is the fact that whosoever walks here for the first time will most definitely stop and stare when recognizing the paintings portraying renowned people like South Africa’s first black president Nelson Mandela with his Xhosa name “Madiba” attached (see Fig. 4) or Bob Marley, who’s face found a place next to a

painting of the Namibian national flag (see Fig. 6). The wall may trigger different connotations and the spectators may agree or disagree with messages like “Say no to Alcohol & Drugs” (see Fig. 8). But just as art is a matter of taste, so are the messages that are transported by it.

When we think of youth language and youth culture as a subject to scholarly debate and analysis, sometimes it is just a great gain to leave academic attitudes, concepts and methods aside for a while and merely appreciate the beauty that comes with the creativity of young people – even if it is at times allegedly corrupted by the influence of adult people. But at what point do we stop to be young after all? And when are we truly grown up? The lines between youth and adulthood are blurred. How easily we forget that the elderly people of today were the youth of yesterday ...



Fig. 2.  
Peace, unity and justice



Fig. 3  
The joy of playing the drum

Fig. 4.  
'Madiba' Nelson Mandela



Fig. 5.  
Prayer is for everybody

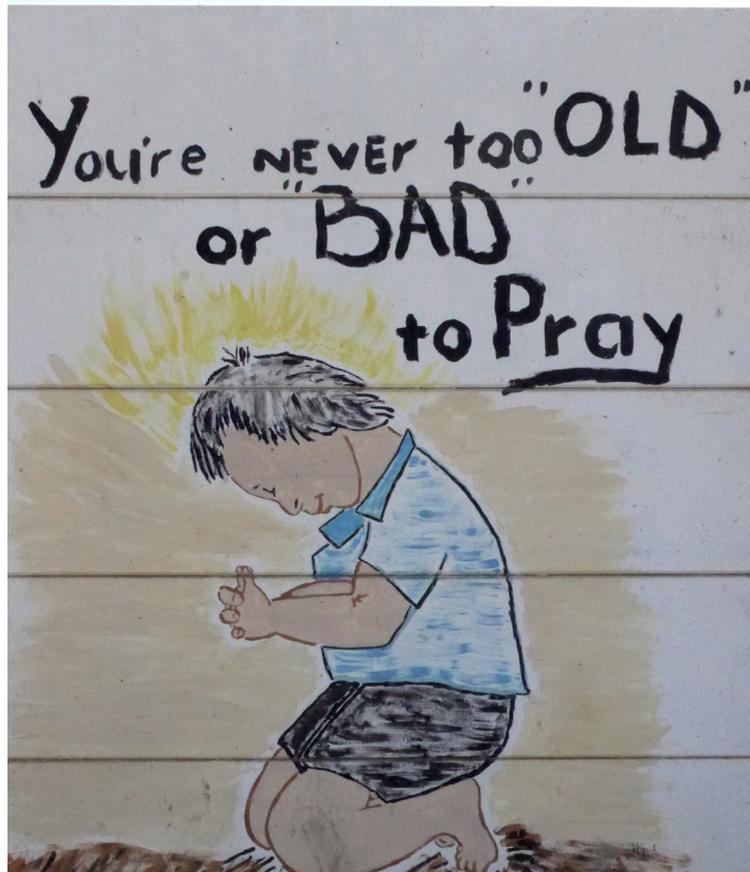


Fig. 6.  
One Love – Bob Marley and the Namibian flag



Fig. 7.  
2gether we can





Fig.9.  
Make love, not war

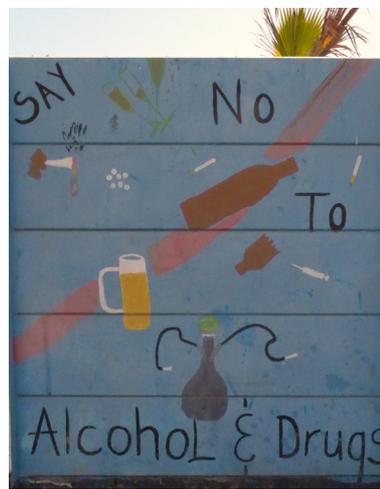


Fig. 8  
No to alcohol & drugs



Fig. 10.  
A wall with many faces





Fig. 11.  
From Argentina to Bolivia to Namibia –  
Che Guevara

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