Language and identity negotiations: an analysis of the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, South Africa

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Language and identity negotiations: an analysis of the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, South Africa

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This article focuses on Ndebele and Shona-speaking Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, noting how their language varieties constitute capital ('entry fees') in negotiating their constructions by others as outsiders. Theoretically, the article draws on diverse theoretical works on situated discourse, with Bourdieu's economy of social practices being the spinal anchor. In examining the role and value of language as entry fees in the situatedness of Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, I deploy a multi-sited ethnography across three neighbourhoods of Johannesburg. The central argument I make in this article is that language's value neither inheres in language itself nor is it static. Instead, the value shifts according to the specific and contextual power dynamics underlying the interface and evaluation of it as an entry fee. Consequently, this fluctuation produces a complex continuum of Otherness in which the experience of being Ndebele and Shona-speaking in Johannesburg is not homogenous, but takes on shifting meanings.

Keywords: identity; language; *amakwerekwere*; power; insiders; outsiders

Iphepha leli limayelana lezizalwane zaseZimbabwe ezikhuluma isiNdebele lesiShona njengendimi zazo, ezathuthela eJohannesburg. Licubungula indlela abantu laba abasebenzisa indimi zabo njengengeno endaweni lapho abakhangelwa khona njengabantu bokuza. Ngokwemibono ejulileyo, leli phepha likhokhelwa yimisebenzi eyahlukeneyo mayelana lobudlelwano bomumo othile lendlela abantu abaziphatha ngayo, ikakhulu imibono kaBourdieu egcizelela ukuthi imikhuba ephathelane lezenhlalo ibayinsika yendlela abantu abazaziphatha ngayo. Ekuchwayisiseni ngokusetshenziswa lokuqakatheka kolimi njengengeno lezizalwane zaseZimbabwe eJohannesburg, ngisebenzisa indlela yokuphanda ngenhlalo yabantu ngenjongo yokubazwisisa besendaweni yabo yansukuzonke, ngigxile endaweni zokuhlala ezintathu zaseJohannesburg lapho abantu laba abatholakala khona. Umcijo oyinsika engiwethulayo kuleli phepha ngothi ukuqakatheka kolimi oluthile akusiyo ngxenye yalo ngokwendalo njalo kuyaguquguquka. Ngigcizelela ukuthi ukuqakatheka kolimi oluthile kutshintshatshintsha ngomumo okhona kanye lobudlelwano obukhona lapho ulimi oluthile olusetshenziswa khona lalapho okufanele lusetshenziswe khona njengengeno. Ngenxa yalokhu, inguquko ebakhona idala umumo wokuphawulwa kwabantu lobandlululo olwenza ukuthi ukukhuluma isiNdebele lesiShona eJohannesburg lakho kungabonwa njengezenzo ezifanayo ngaso sonke isikhathi, kodwa kube lemiphumela ehlukahlukaneyo.

Introduction

The article analyses language and identity negotiations focusing on Ndebele and Shona-speaking Zimbabwean migrants in three neighbourhoods of Johannesburg. The central argument the article

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makes is that language is a form of *capital* (resource) that migrants deploy in situating themselves in the different neighbourhoods of Johannesburg. The article also argues that the value of language does not inhere in language itself but in how language as an 'entry fee'[1] is received by different interlocutors and in different domains under which specific power relations lie (Bourdieu 1991; Bucholtz and Hall 2004). It is only in specified and specific power relations that the value of language as an example of an entry fee becomes tangible, and by extension the 'enoughness' and 'authenticity' of the speakers of the languages can be evaluated (Blommaert and Varis 2011). These relations of power are what generate particular linguistic markets and indexical orders. The former specifically describes the hierarchization and structuring of different language varieties in the different neighbourhoods. Implicit as well as explicit in this hierarchization of languages is that some languages become legitimate while others receive less value, and at worst are stigmatized.[2] The latter refers to how the hierarchization of the languages feed into the indexing of particular speakers as either insiders or outsiders.

I conceptualize language as a marked and marking[3] resource that acts as a form of capital and 'entry fee'[4] for migrants in Johannesburg. I frame such an understanding of language around Bourdieu's (1991) economy of social practices, which I complement with critical work in situated discourse[5] such as Blommaert's (2005) concept of 'indexical orders'. Drawing from such a schema, language can be seen as a central aspect of identity, not only because it indexes people's identity, but also because it becomes a form of 'entry fee' that is evaluated and tested for authenticity. Language as such subsequently informs how people situate themselves in the matrices of belonging and the processes of othering.

This research emerges out of a multi-sited ethnographic study of different neighbourhoods in Johannesburg. While the article primarily focuses on the three neighbourhoods of Hillbrow, Yeoville, and Diepsloot, the broader study was conducted in five neighbourhoods. The rationality of a multi-sited study lies in the general dispersion of Zimbabwean migrants, who are described by Polzer (2008a, 4) as 'dispersed throughout the country' and located across different types of settlements such as 'townships and informal settlements'. The sampling of these areas seeks to follow a variegated socio-economic hierarchy and profile of South Africa's neighbourhoods. Hillbrow and Yeoville are part of the inner city neighbourhoods, while Diepsloot is a township. Although there have been some gestures towards a recognition of language's importance in understanding Zimbabwean migrants' experiences of/in South Africa, there has been no concerted effort to foreground language as the primary point of analysis. This article takes a step in this direction by thinking with and against some of the work in this area, primarily what I term the assimilationist approach to Zimbabwean migrants' identity negotiations in South Africa.

Language and boundary marking in South Africa: notions of *amakwerekwere*

Language has emerged in South Africa as a boundary marking resource that profiles and excludes certain categories of people. Out of this profiling and exclusion emerge notions of *amakwerekwere* in South Africa (Morris 1998; Nyamnjoh 2006; Mngxitama 2008; Matsinhe 2011). *Amakwerekwere* refers to babblers or people who speak indecipherable languages (Morris 1998; Nyamnjoh 2006). The term *amakwerekwere* imprints a lack of *enoughness*, notable in the fact that the pejorative term is itself a pointer of strange languages (speakers of strange languages). By way of *shibboleth*, various sections of South African society, from state institutions to the common person on the street, sniff out *amakwerekwere*. Language is deployed to assess the legitimacy of one's identity, and as such is an identity marking facet that distinguishes and otherizes *amakwerekwere*. In shaping the matrix of insiders and outsiders, language plays two important roles on which the other regimes of exclusion build. First, by virtue of being *inadequate* in language, *amakwerekwere* are identified as having a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman 1963); and

second, thus naming them denies *amakwerekwere* a voice and space of belonging (cf. Landau 2005; Nyamnjoh 2006; Morreira 2007; Landau 2011; Matsinhe 2011).

It is in light of this productivity of language as a marking and marked resource that I foreground this analysis of identity and the politics of exclusion in South Africa in terms of language (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). As sociolinguistics has demonstrated, language is indexical of diverse aspects of people's identities, such as ethnicity and social class, among other identity facets (Mesthrie et al. 2000). Language, we accept, is never neutral. Rather, some language resources are 'marked' while some are 'unmarked' (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Indexicality means that language gives us insight into the identities of speakers, i.e. their social class (e.g. gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, etc.) (Bourdieu 1991; Mesthrie et al. 2000; Blommaert 2005). Bourdieu argues that through diverse struggles of power and subsequent relations of power, certain languages emerge as the standard (legitimate) languages. Intricately tied to standard and legitimate languages are issues of 'unmarked' and marked social categories. The contestations of power and legitimacy also follow the hierarchization of language varieties. Speakers of marked languages are by extension marked (Bourdieu 1991; Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Deumert, Inder, and Maitra (2005) reveal how Xhosa, despite being a widely used language in Western Cape, remains diminished in value when it comes to the economic spheres of Cape Town. Vigouroux (2005) also speaks of shifts in the value of English and French in the economic activities of francophone migrants engaged in trade in Cape Town. In both cases the hierarchies and values accruing to the languages are informed by the particular relations shaping the use of the different languages. In the section that follows, I discuss what has been said by writers using the assimilationist approach. Thereafter, I present and analyse my own empirical data. I refer to this work as assimilationist in approach in light of its major argument that Zimbabwean migrants' identity negotiations are predicated on becoming (assimilating) South African. Dumba and Chirisa (2010, 16) note that this '[a]ssimilation implies that immigrants adopted the language, culture, values, and beliefs of the host society.'

Ndebele-speaking Zulus (Xhosas) and Shona Vendas? Abstract assimilationist notions of language and identity

Polzer (2008b, 20) adopts an interesting position on the role of language in Zimbabwean migrants' negotiation of the politics of identity, but does not elaborate on the practical mechanics involved, when she writes of 'linguistic and cultural affinity of Ndebele speakers, allowing many Zimbabweans to "pass" as South Africans in everyday interactions'. Writing about Zimbabwean migrants' strategies of simultaneously distancing themselves from kin obligations back home, and carving space for themselves in Johannesburg, Worby (2010) accentuates this position. He notes that, '[w]ith the advantage of being Nguni language speakers and often sharing South African surnames, Zimbabweans from Matabeleland such as Dingani and his sister have open to them an avenue of incorporation that is generally not available to speakers of ChiShona' (Worby 2010, 425). Dingani and his sister symbolize this avenue for Ndebele-speaking migrants, which Worby explicates through the *becoming* Xhosa and South African of Dingani's sister, after she finds herself 'South African parents' who assist her in securing the requisite documentation. He asserts that, '[i]n one swift bureaucratic manoeuvre, Dingani's sister had transformed herself into a South African Xhosa'[6] (Worby 2010, 425).

Three things are discernible in the above, and are the common threads that bring together the different works that I classify as assimilationist. First, although Johannesburg is a multilingual context, the language patterning in the city is simplified as coherent and clustering around Zulu to the point that the pervasive diffusion of English (Mongwe 2006; Khumalo 2010) is ignored. The second thing is that the preoccupation with cultural proximity as a route to

assimilation focuses analysis on Ndebele-speaking migrants, while the situatedness of Shona-speaking migrants is not directly addressed, regardless of their large numbers in South Africa. All scholars arguing within this persuasion present the possibility of this identity metamorphosis as an exclusive preserve for Ndebele-speaking migrants, who have linguistic and cultural affinity with South Africans (Polzer 2008, 20; Worby 2010). The third thing is that there is a straight-jacketed and straight-jacketing movement from a Zimbabwean identity to a South African one, on the basis of cultural proximity. Following such a line of thinking, Zimbabweans negotiate their deviation from the standard norm by espousing the unmarked standard, which consequently legitimizes their identity. This trend is elaborated in works by Muzondidya (2010), Ndlovu (2010), and Sibanda (2010), who also analyse the identity negotiation of Zimbabwean migrants on the basis of cultural proximity as the basis for assimilation and transcending markedness. The gist of the assimilationists' argument can be captured in Muzondidya's (2010, 46) argument that:

> Zimbabweans from the Southern district who spoke Nguni languages at home find it relatively easier to assimilate than their Shona-speaking counterparts, who have an advantage only in the Venda speaking communities of Northern Limpopo province. Some Zimbabweans have adopted South African sounding names and try to cut contact with Zimbabwean friends and relatives.

Sibanda (2010) gives a similar rendition in a study of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, and presents two-gated but linear modes of identity transformations for Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants. The situation of Shona-speaking migrants is depicted through the experiences of Charlie, a Shona-speaking male migrant. Sibanda (2010, 53) reveals that:

> Charlie said that because of his lack of local language skills he was being isolated from the community as they could not understand why he always communicated in English. He was also easily identified as a foreigner and derogatory terms such as *amakwerekwere* were used against him. He also became an easy target to the xenophobic attacks of 2008. He therefore lived in fear as he still does now and is not able to be his natural self and feels like a social misfit.

Sibanda's Ndebele-speaking migrants appear to inhabit a radically different social universe by virtue of the proximity of their language with that of South Africans. Sibanda (2010, 53) reveals that:

> The situation is however different from the migrants who speak the Ndebele language which is one of the Nguni dialects and therefore carries similarities with Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and the local Ndebele. One of the informants who speak Ndebele had a different story to tell. When she first arrived in Johannesburg, she had no language barriers since she could communicate in isiZulu. By being able to speak a local language, she had a smooth integration and limited chances of being vulnerable. She therefore assimilated into the Zulu local groups and was easily absorbed socially. Most of her friends are locals who easily relate to her, leading them to regard her as one of them. Hence she no longer carries her natural identity but is using 'borrowed' identity' (sic) which puts her at an advantage.

We see the relative ease with which assimilation and becoming Zulu can take place for Ndebele-speaking migrants, while on the flipside, the mechanisms of assimilation are on 'default shut' for Shona speakers. Ndlovu's (2010, 122) diagnostics of South African profiling indicate that during the xenophobic attacks 'the shibboleth the attackers demanded was the Zulu equivalent for "elbow" which the majority of Shona speakers and other linguistic groups would not know. Even if they did the pronunciation would give them away.' Ndlovu goes on to note that, '[t]he Ndebeles could pass the shibboleth test easily. This explains why some Ndebeles kept away from Shona people they know because *bayamakisa* (they will expose us)' (Ndlovu 2010, 122).

   This work by the assimilationist thinkers goes a long way towards exposing the entrenchment of xenophobia in South Africa, and it also raises a number of questions pertaining to the centrality of language in the mapping of the *subject* positions of Shona and Ndebele-speaking migrants. However, despite revealing how cultural products, particularly language, are salient in migrants' situatedness in South Africa, this corpus of work does not take language as an entry point into the analyses and as such the notion of language deployed is one that reduces it to something flat and

unified.[7] The variations in competence and inequalities that accompany and characterize linguistic interaction are overlooked (cf. Bourdieu 1991; Blommaert 2005). Such a language has been shown to be fiction when it comes to language as a social practice. As Bourdieu (1991, 54) posits, language is more complex and '[t]o speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups'. Furthermore, there is no attempt to problematize the relationship of the various language varieties that constitute the landscape of this multilingual context and how they feed into marking their speakers. Which languages are most highly valued? Where? Why? Which expressive style (repertoire) of Zulu do Ndebele speakers appropriate? Is Zulu a unified language? How? These are just a few of the questions that complicate notions of language and identity. How do we, for example, reconcile the synonymization of Zulu speakers and Ndebele speakers with the following lamentations in a song by an Ndebele-speaking migrant?

> *Sibalekel' omnyama, sibalekela komnyama; South Africa usihlangabeza ngenduku, basi-faka eLindela, Thabo Mbeki ngabe sikwenzeni na?* (Ndebele song meaning, 'We are running away from a repressive black government to a well-governed black one; hoping to be assisted/accepted. However on our arrival, we are sent straight into a frying pan. Thabo Mbeki, what wrong have we done?') (song by Nxumalo captured in Sisulu, Moyo, and Tshuma 2007, 562).

Although the Sisulu, Moyo, and Tshuma (2007) translation captures the substance of the lamentations, a more direct translation of Nxumalo's lamentations brings to the fore the precarious position of Ndebele migrants in South Africa. Nxumalo's song states that,

> we are escaping from a black one [government], running to another black [government] and South Africa you greet us with violence [knobkerries], and you take us and put us in Lindela, Thabo Mbeki what sin have we committed against you?

This song reveals the continuum of otherness that also embroils Ndebele speakers as *amakwerek-were* who are also othered by South Africans. This complicates the issue of language as a marked and marking resource and calls for more nuanced theorizations of language as well as innovative methodologies for capturing the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg.

In thinking *with* and *against* the assimilationist thinkers, there are a number of issues that can be raised. The major issue is the abstraction of the Ndebele-South African connection where an automatic assimilation is presented as almost guaranteed on the basis of historic ties, linguistic proximity, and shared surnames and names. Framing migrants' experiences this way reduces assimilationist work to a focus on identity as an 'analytical category' that is enmeshed in 'experience distant concepts' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4). Respondents' experiences can best be captured through 'experience near concepts' (Geertz 1974, 28) that develop from how respondents 'narrativize'[8] their situatedness (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain 1998, 44) in empirical points of contact and social relations of power. Critical in the latter endeavour are such questions: where are the migrants in South Africa? With whom do they speak? Who are the inquisitors? Where and how? What are the specific power dynamics involved in negotiating these relations? In foregrounding language as an entry fee, the question, as Fishman aptly puts it, is: 'who Speaks what language to whom and when?' (Fishman 1965, 67). In the following section I present and analyse my empirical findings, adding *why* to Fishman's question.

A 'homey' linguistic market in 'Zimbabwe's colonies'? Being the 'Other other' in Hillbrow and Yeoville:

Respondents reveal that Hillbrow and Yeoville stand as fields of practice in which foreigners are in the majority. Migrants' narratives confirm academic findings that foreigners in Johannesburg

are concentrated in the inner-city area (Landau 2010; Makina 2010). There is a visible contingent of African migrants, with Zimbabweans standing out as the largest group and with Nigerians regarded as the second largest group. Migrants note that this domination in terms of numbers feeds into the linguistic structuring of the neighbourhoods, as well as into existing relations of power. To this end, the linguistic market operational in Hillbrow and Yeoville is permissive to migrants' languages and migrants appear to have 'symbolic domination' (Bourdieu 1991), and their language varieties constitute sufficient entry fees to 'legitimate' their identity and presence (Bourdieu 1991).

Migrants' languages appear to be sufficient 'entry fees' in the linguistic markets of these two neighbourhoods, and consequently their identities are not indexed as 'spoiled' in the Goffmanian sense (Goffman 1963). Pholile, an Ndebele-speaking migrant staying in Yeoville observes that

> Yeoville is a home ground for us. It has been colonized. In fact, I can say Yeoville all the way to Berea and Hillbrow, it's a Zimbabwean colony. I have a lot of friends in Yeoville. I speak Ndebele with friends, former schoolmates and workmates. We speak as if we are at home.

Mxolisi gives an account that reveals how this *being at home* occurs in a context of sociolinguistic fragmentation that has made an overarching and hegemonic language as well as ethnolinguistic linguistic group elusive. He states:

> There is no dominant language [in Yeoville]. Nigerians are there but they are concentrated in Rockey Street. It's like in Hillbrow Nigerians are everywhere but here they are in Rockey Street. We can say its Zulu [dominant language]. Then Shona. There are a lot of Shonas [here]. I drink and I frequent bars and I find the bars are full of Shona speakers; they are full of Ndebele speakers. Zulu speakers are there but there are few (sic).

These sentiments of the two neighbourhoods as 'colonies of Zimbabwe' whose colonization is reflected in the linguistic markets and 'indexical orders' are also echoed by Shona-speaking migrants. Mtumbuka, a vendor in the Yeoville Market states that, '[t]here's no problem we speak Shona as we like. There is no-one who will say *whatwhat* (say anything against that).' These nonchalant conceptions of what it means to be Zimbabwean in Yeoville and Hillbrow are discernible in the self-representations of Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants who state that they speak their languages openly without thinking of hiding their identities.

The patterning of language in Yeoville and Hillbrow from migrants' accounts portrays two linguistic fields that I classify as *democratic* and not rigidly structured around specific 'unmarked' linguistic resources (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 372). Migrants speak Ndebele, Shona, Zulu, Xhosa (and other South African languages), and other non-South African language varieties spoken by Nigerian, Congolese, and Cameroonian nationals as part of the linguistically cosmopolitan neighbourhoods. None of these languages are 'marked'. Rather all of them constitute legitimate entry fees. Consequently, migrants' identities are not stigmatized.

Although, Ndebele, different Nigerian (dialects), and Shona languages are seen as dominant because of the large numbers of the Zimbabwean and Nigerian groups speaking these languages in these neighbourhoods, English is presented as a unifying language that is spoken by most of the residents in the neighbourhoods. In light of the different languages spoken in these areas, code-switching[9] and code-mixing are described as common practices. Migrants note that these two linguistic practices are influenced by the specific interlocutors that respondents find themselves in the presence of, as well as the domains of interaction.[10] The latter also suggests an embeddedness of English in the language patterning in these neighbourhoods. For instance, migrants reveal that amongst themselves and their networks of friends and family they speak their 'home languages' of Ndebele and Shona. However, outside of the interactional spheres specifically associated with Zimbabweans, where they interact with non-Zimbabweans such as Nigerians, Indians, Pakistanis, Congolese, and Cameroonians, respondents reveal that they use English. English is viewed by

migrants as the language that is largely 'common' to most residents of these two neighbourhoods. As one respondent puts it:

> I can say that English is the most important language here for me. I use it even when I go to Nigerian shops because they cannot speak my language and I cannot speak theirs.

English is presented by migrants as the most valuable language which breaks down barriers where residents speak diverse languages but whose paths cross in their daily practices. An interesting power relationship is notable in English's role and how the different languages are hierarchized in these two neighbourhoods. I elaborate on this issue below.

The entrenchment of English: a diglossic relationship and other language practices

What is notable is that there is a hierarchization of languages that emerges from different migrants' accounts of *where*, *how* and *why* they use different languages in Yeoville and Hillbrow. Cumulatively, these accounts reveal a diglossic[11] relationship of languages spoken in these two multilingual markets. English occupies the status of the *high* language variety, while other languages occupy the *lower* varieties, such as the widely spoken languages of Ndebele, Shona, and Nigerian dialects. Code-switching is presented as focused towards generating understanding and interface with those who may not understand the Zimbabwean languages of Ndebele and Shona, rather than as a measure of *camouflaging* their identities. English is presented as the most important language for purposes of bridging language differences.

'IsiZulu semaflethini': delineations of the Zimbabwe in the neighbourhoods?

Interestingly, Zimbabwean migrants point to a sociolect[12] they classify as 'IsiZulu semaflethini' (Zulu of the flats) as part of the languages that are in the Yeoville and Hillbrow linguistic markets. This *Zulu of the flats* is a sociolect that is indexical of its speakers as Zimbabweans living in the flats. It is different from 'South African Zulu' and does not endow its speakers with a 'Zulu identity'. Migrants reveal that they characterize it as 'isiZulu semaflethini' because although the sociolect draws some of its words from Zulu and Xhosa, it is primarily constructed out of innovations primarily based on Zimbabwean Ndebele. Migrants note that it is distinct and cannot be equated to 'South African Zulu'. As Pholani describes '[w]hat I am speaking [right now] is isiZulu but it is not isiZulu just as you can hear for yourself'.

Lindiwe supports Pholani's argument stating that we call it 'isiZulu semaflethini' because it is people from home who use it here in the flats. She states that 'If I put a South African here you can tell the difference'. 'IsiZulu semaflethini' does not serve an identity camouflaging effect in light of its glaring Zimbabweanness. Gumbuka's statement best captures the status of Zimbabwean languages in the two neighbourhoods. He thinks, 'Ah Yeoville is full of Shonas. Here we walk freely and speak freely.' In addition to these language varieties, there is some other patterning of language that stems from attempts to be heard and to reach out to as wide an audience as possible depending on one's needs. Moses, an Ndebele-speaking barber reveals how his work in a barbershop where another barber and some of the women hairstylists are Shona-speaking, sees him mostly code-switching between Shona with the in-house staff and Ndebele and English when it comes to clients. Gukwe, who is a vegetable and fruit vendor at the market place, code switches between Shona (with some of his fellow vendors in the market) and Ndebele and English when it comes to dealing with customers. These appropriations of different languages result in variations in terms of competence. Mai Chisi, an elderly Shona-speaking woman, describes her linguistic repertoire as *kujanukajanuka* (just making do), which translates as a process of piecing together communication resources from different Zulu, Xhosa, Shona, and English words to communicate with potential clients.

Shifting contours and cleavages of the Ndebele and Shona linguistic entry fees in different places in Zimbabwe's colonies

Although Yeoville and Hillbrow are both classified as 'Zimbabwean colonies', where Zimbabwean languages are part of the neighbourhoods' tapestries, migrants argue that Yeoville appears to have a more balanced population of both Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants than Hillbrow. As Luba's description of Hillbrow shows, 'Shonas are there but they are few. People think there is a lot of violence in Hillbrow and Shonas are naturally cowards so they don't want to stay in Hillbrow. Most of them are where sex is sold … like at Hillbrow Inn.' This theme of the reduced presence of Shona speakers in Hillbrow's 'public spaces' is reiterated by both Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants. Prince states that 'Hillbrow is Njube, Nkulumane, Entumbane, Mpopoma, Emakhandeni etc. In Hillbrow there's *Gukurahundi,* my man. It's not easy to stay there if you are Shona because of crime and muggings.' Using the metaphor of *Gukurahundi*, Prince argues that when you speak Shona in Hillbrow you appear to lack the street-wise edge and can easily fall victim to violence. Samson, a Shona-speaking migrant notes that in Hillbrow one's situation is very tenuous if you are Shona-speaking because it makes you an easy target of muggings he believes are carried out by people 'from home'.

A critical question emerges: why is Hillbrow problematic for the Shona-speaking migrants and not their Ndebele counterparts? If there is crime, as seems to be the case, is the insinuation that Ndebele-speaking migrants are more crime-tolerant? What role does language play as an entry fee in Hillbrow? Luba and Prince's remarks point to some deep issues that resonate with Shona-Ndebele relations and histories back home (Phimister 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). It would seem that Zimbabwe is reproducing itself in Johannesburg with its social and political distance between Shona and Ndebele speakers. It appears that there are subtle processes of *othering* within the Other other[13] sub-group, processes that are based on language. Zimbabwe's history, like *Gukurahundi*[14] to which Prince alludes, also appears to configure Ndebele-Shona relations in Hillbrow. This is also notable in Yeoville, in the construction of the right person with whom to share accommodation. An instance is the case of Vuliwe, who maintains that in their flat there are only 'Ndebele speakers and we do not stay with a Shona (speaker).' This reveals that there is othering within the 'Other other' sub-group. This subtle othering and reproduction of Zimbabwe at times along the lines of Ndebele speakers versus Shona speakers appears to be steeped in Zimbabwe's history and how its memory plays out in Johannesburg. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) note, '[r]emembered places often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people'. Prince's *Gukurahundi* metaphor, and the popular constructions of the histories of Ndebele and Shona rivalries, both imagined and real as in the instance of the ZANU PF government's massacres of the 1980s, shape relations in Johannesburg.

The way Zimbabwe reproduces itself in Johannesburg appears to stem from two parallel socialization processes. One socialization process is steeped in the histories, memories, and notions of *home*. Sikhumbuzo and Nomalanga, for instance, in their description of Johannesburg, note that the migration of Shona speakers to South Africa is recent, and that Hillbrow was a space for Ndebele speakers while it was rare to find Shona speakers there. Sikhumbuzo goes on to note that 'It's only recent that we heard of Shona speakers coming to Johannesburg, and we heard they were staying at the Methodist church[15] and we even went to see.' Added to Pride's metaphor, Sikhumbuzo and Nomalanga's comments bring to the fore the issue of the ethnicized history of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, which has in part been documented by scholars such as Sisulu, Moyo, and Tshuma (2007) and Makina (2010). Although historic accounts reveal that there was a significant presence of Shona speakers in the migratory patterns during the WNLA[16] days (Mlambo 2010), the intensity of migration from Ndebele-speaking areas in Zimbabwe has always trumped the former. However, with the deterioration of Zimbabwe's

economy in contemporary times, these ethnicized patterns of migration are significantly blurring. With increased mingling in South Africa as the Other other, these two ethnolinguistic groups are forced into another (re)socialization which is based on the reality of survival in a city that is hostile to the Other other and has little space for the self-assertion of the Other other. However, as Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 10) succinctly argue, the 'here' and 'there' become blurred in the way the cultural certainties and fixities of the metropole are upset as surely, if not in the same way, as those of the colonized 'periphery'. This blurring of *Johannesburg* and *home* sees Zimbabweans and South Africans engaged in what Dilip Menon terms 'living together separately' (Menon 2013, 259) when he speaks of the differences among inhabitants of different spaces of Johannesburg where fear is also endemic. However, in turn, Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants are also 'living together separately', with variations notable in both Yeoville and Hillbrow.

Although in my walking in the streets and public spaces of Hillbrow, and in my dialogues and conversations with migrants, I also felt the inequalities in the numbers of Shona-speaking migrants in Hillbrow, venturing into what I term 'sheltered' or 'private' interactional spheres I uncovered the reconfiguration of language in use as 'entry fees' in Hillbrow. There was a large presence of Shona-speaking migrants in the private interactional spheres of Hillbrow. Walking the streets of the neighbourhoods and entering into different places such as bars, night clubs, churches, etc., was one of the major tools I deployed. This is an innovation that draws from Certeau's 'walking the city' (De Certeau 1984). One such place was the Maximar Hotel which also serves as a brothel in Hillbrow. Maximar revealed a dense presence of Shona-speaking commercial sex workers as well as their male patrons. Although there were also Ndebele speakers in Maximar, it was interesting to note how, in contrast with the private spaces of Maximar where Ndebele speakers were dominant, Shona speakers were dominant in the public spaces. Even the music that was being played in one section of the bar was Zimbabwean Shona music – a pointer to the hegemony of the Shona presence in this space. The sustained playing of Shona music at Maximar at this point reproduced the Zimbabwean scenario: the most popularly aired music in Zimbabwe is Shona. This popularity can best be understood through Ndhlovu's (2005) discussion of the Shonalization of Zimbabwe. Having discussed the linguistic structuring of these two neighbourhoods, the next section will focus on housing and how one's language becomes a resource that shapes one's networks and access to housing.

Language as a key determinant of housing and living arrangements

In order to grasp fully the normative structures of Yeoville and Hillbrow, the situatedness of Zimbabwean migrants, as well as the general dispersion of their cultural resources, and in particular language, it is enlightening to delve into the arena of housing. We can take housing as a sub-field of the broader fields of practice of the two neighbourhoods. Housing reveals how migrants are engaged in struggles of situating themselves strategically. Discussions by Rasmussen (2007), Judin (2008), and Silverman and Zack (2008) of the highly contested terrain of housing in Johannesburg also play out in the lives of Zimbabwean migrants in Hillbrow and Yeoville. An interesting point of entry into this field is Sikhumbuzo's statement about where he stays. He states:

> These flats are run by agents. The owners no longer actively manage them. I have a contract with the agents and the place is mine for a period of time. When I first got the flat I paid over R9,600. If I want to leave I put a notice to end the contract. I stay with five Zimbabweans and one South African. It just happened but generally I would prefer Zimbabweans and South Africans so that it's easy to relate and communicate. Whether Shona, Ndebele, Kalanga but not Nigerians and Congolese.

Out of the field of housing emerge various contestants and subsequently positions, which feed into how Zimbabweans, and indeed other nationals in these neighbourhoods, discursively produce space. Those who have the material and associated symbolic resources to secure

leases occupy the dominant position in the housing field as 'landlords' while others become 'tenants'. What is interesting is that the transactions around housing, which can best be captured by the concept of *ukushera* (sharing) become part of the discursive process of migrants reproducing networks that are favourable to them. The processes of securing the 'right' landlord and 'right' tenant reveal how language informs the politics of inclusion and exclusion in these two neighbourhoods. In Yeoville, a popular spot for hunting for accommodation is a very big wall that has been turned into a notice board outside Shoprite, which is covered with notices about the availability of different flats, spaces, rooms, and other forms of residence. Around the end and beginning of the month this wall is teeming with notices about prospective landlords and tenants. Different language varieties are used to advertise accommodation on this wall, with the most commonly used being English. A few of the notes are written in French. On limited occasions I chanced upon notices written in other languages, notably Ndebele, Zulu, and Shona. Whether by design or otherwise, the various languages used on this wall commence the processes of including and excluding people in the recruitment for housing on the basis of language. In Hillbrow a similar practice of adverts written in English, French, and other languages is notable on notice boards in different shops, for example, in the area around High Point.

According to the respondents, the major resources that are necessary for one to access a lease for a flat are the 'proper papers' and 'money' to meet the demands by agents. The latter is the most important because there are many innovations around 'proper papers'. Gogo MaNgwenya, like Sikhumbuzo, had the know-how, proper papers, and the economic capital to successfully negotiate for a lease and flat. The two recruited tenants within the popular 'sharing arrangement'. What is notable is that in the processes of recruitment, Zimbabwean migrants reconstitute Yeoville and Hillbrow to Zimbabwean microcosms – what others call *Zimbabwean colonies*. In Sikhumbuzo's flat, which I managed to visit and where I conducted the interview, there were various arrangements around sharing. Sikhumbuzo and his wife (both Ndebele speakers) were the landlords and they used the sitting room and bedroom, while in other rooms there were tenants; one of these other rooms was shared by two people. The kitchen, bathroom, and toilet were communally owned. I observed and also heard of similar sharing arrangements among the different respondents to whom I spoke.

In analysing the choices of whom to share housing with, it becomes apparent that migrants prioritize recruiting tenants as well as renting from landlords with whom they have some commonalities. At the forefront of this consideration is the language one speaks. Both tenants and landlords argue that getting the right person is imperative in avoiding a lot of problems and misunderstandings. In Sikhumbuzo's case the right person could be any type of Zimbabwean as well as South Africans because these are 'people I can speak with and understand'. For Gogo MaNgwenya the 'right' people fall within the categories of any type of Zimbabwean, whether Ndebele or Shona-speaking. However it ends just there: Zimbabweans. Gogo MaNgwenya notes that,

> I stay with Zimbabweans. They are all Ndebele speaking. One young man shares one room with a woman. She has two children. Then there is another young man in the other room. I have stayed with other people before. People come and go that is the life here.

Both Sikhumbuzo and Gogo MaNgwenya do not rigidly stick to specific kinds of Zimbabwean with whom they can share accommodation. Indeed, in some instances, such as is the case with Ntando and Vuliwe, there is an exclusive definition that the right person to stay with is Ndebele-speaking. Even where the ethnolinguistic preferences are not vocalized there are clear cleavages along language that emerge in terms of some of the respondents' accommodation sharing arrangements. Ntando and Vuliwe are quite outspoken about their language-based choices of whom to stay with. Vuliwe reveals that 'I do not stay with Shonas' and goes on to allude to Shonas killing both Ndebele speakers in Zimbabwe and the economy and how they

are everywhere when they should stay in Zimbabwe. Ntando, on the other hand, notes that, 'Shonas do not like Ndebeles. No matter how much they can pretend to like you, deep down they do not.' In spite of these strong sentiments both Ntando and Vuliwe reveal that they have friends who are Shona-speaking and interact with them extensively. There appears to be a collision of worlds in the way Zimbabwe is reconstituting itself in South Africa. On the one hand, social interface among Zimbabweans is characterized by discrimination according to language and ethnolinguistic groups. This provides a window to the political and socio-cultural tensions at home. However this form of social interface is confronted by the exigencies of being in Johannesburg, generating complex relationships of simultaneous convergence and divergence.

In Hillbrow, housing is also organized around the same concept of sharing. Sandra reveals that she shares a room with another Zimbabwean and notes that 'it's just people from home throughout except one Zulu in the balcony'. These people from home turn out to be all Ndebele-speaking. In Themba's case, the sharing arrangement is also among people from home who happen to be all Ndebele-speaking.

What is most notable, however, is that there are varying levels of exclusion even among Zimbabweans themselves; exclusions that are directly linked to language. While the exclusions are subtle and not consistent and general amongst all Zimbabweans, these seem to be more rigid when it comes to other foreigners. Zimbabwean migrants appear to prefer to share accommodation with Zimbabweans rather than with other foreign groups. In situations where Zimbabweans stay with other foreign nationals the 'sharing' is that which involves sharing different rooms in a flat but not sharing a bed in a room within the flat, what can be grouped as sharing of intimate spaces. Sikhumbuzo's sentiments best capture the rationale behind particular choices involved in ordering housing. He states:

> People from Congo speak a different language and French. Nigerians also speak their own languages that I don't understand. If I stay with these people how will we communicate? It's better to stay with people with whom you can have a common understanding. So for me, people from home I can be able to speak with are a better choice.

It is notable how the fields of housing in the two neighbourhoods of Yeoville and Hillbrow are strongly driven by those 'resources' that migrants can afford to 'produce' as competitors with other people in the neighbourhood also aimed at dominating the field. Language is a common denominator shaping where and how migrants insert themselves in the housing field and the associated networks. Also quite notable is that the arena of housing fits into the broader strategies of Zimbabweans to discursively produce spaces that are favourable to them as the 'Other others' in Johannesburg.

Being the real Other other in a 'marking' linguistic market: Diepsloot

Diepsloot is radically different from Yeoville and Hillbrow. Migrants state that the languages they speak are looked down upon in a field dominated by 'local' language varieties. Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants' linguistic 'entry fees' prove not to be 'enough' in a field where the value is based on 'authentic' South African languages. In Yeoville and Hillbrow, which migrants classify as Zimbabwean colonies, English plays a unifying role. In Diepsloot, as Nomalanga and Mafana reveal, 'locals do not like to be made to speak English'. There is no similar hierarchization of diverse foreign African languages which mirrors the case of Yeoville and Hillbrow where English enjoys the status of a *high* variety, while other languages occupy the *low* variety position. Instead, Diepsloot can best be understood as a linguistic market in which South African languages are dominant and other expressive styles largely receive negative value and sanction. Respondents reveal that among themselves South Africans speak to each other, with each speaker speaking in his/ her language, but they usually understand each other's languages. For example, a Zulu

speaker speaks to a Sotho speaker in Zulu, and the Sotho speaker speaks in Sotho. This is seen by respondents as common practice and the 'normal' communication avenue among South Africans.

Migrants reveal that they are in the minority in Diepsloot and occupy the 'subordinate' node in the neighbourhood's linguistic field, and that their language varieties are marked. This subordinate position translates to migrants' identities being stigmatized. Both Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants reveal that they feel some compulsion and pressure to speak 'local' languages and to alter their self-representations. Takunda, a Shona-speaking migrant, notes that 'I speak Zulu since where I stay there are a lot of Zulus. That is the language that I use to communicate with them. I can also speak Venda and Tswana.' Takunda goes on to elaborate how he speaks local languages because for him safety is a priority in Diepsloot, a place 'where it's difficult to live if you do not speak the local language'. Although Takunda claims to speak Zulu, when I switched the interview from English to my basic Zulu he could hardly put together a coherent sentence in Zulu.

Takunda's situation mirrors that of other Shona-speaking migrants in Diepsloot. Matambanashe, for example, argues that since 'Zulu is just like Ndebele' he 'can say that [he] speaks Zulu'. However, like Takunda he can hardly speak Ndebele and quickly reverts back to Shona after stuttering a few words. Unlike in the Zimbabwean colonies, the public spaces of Diepsloot appear to be experienced as 'inhibited' spaces and migrants choose to stay at home, where they can freely speak Shona and Ndebele. Migrants also create dense networks where they stay. Matambanashe says of where he stays, 'We speak a lot of Shona where we stay. It's a lot of us, almost about five families and only two South African families. So we are dominating when it comes to speaking Shona where I stay.' Their attitude towards social interface within Diepsloot is best captured by Matambanashe's revelation that,

> If I am in Diepsloot, I don't visit very much. Instead, I visit outside Diepsloot, for example Kempton Park. My young brothers stay in Kempton Park. I can also visit Mpumalanga. I have friends there and my young brothers have friends there too.

Even among Ndebele-speaking migrants, respondents reveal that their language resources appear to be marked. In the Zimbabwean colonies Ndebele-speaking migrants freely and nonchalantly express themselves, whereas migrants in Diepsloot alter their identities. Nomalanga reveals that, although she has disclosed her Zimbabwean identity to her landlord, when she walks in the public spaces she alters her embodied practices to those of a 'Zulu' speaker and hopes that she passes for one. She notes that her disclosure was meant to deal with the need to always cover up with people in close proximity who can tell from her expressive style in drawn out interface and conversations that she is not a Khabazela. Nomalanga stays in a backroom and among some of the inhabitants of the backrooms are some Pedi and Zulu speakers. Nomalanga, like other respondents uses tone and accent as broad notions that subsume many qualitative differences that set apart Zimbabweans from South Africans in their manner of speaking. Nomalanga states that their accent is 'much deeper' than mine and they know I am just adopting 'their language but I am not Khabazela'. Depth here may refer to a more elaborate command of Zulu as well as the intonation and accent.

Other Ndebele-speaking migrants offer a narrative similar to Nomalanga's. Mafana, a male migrant, also projects a Zulu identity. In addition to Zulu, he speaks Pedi which he has learnt because Pedis appear to be the largest linguistic group in the area in which he lives. Mafana notes that he is assured of getting away with passing for a Zulu-speaking person when he speaks to non-Zulu speakers. However, he notes that he cannot achieve the same feat when he speaks to a Zulu-speaking person because his accent, tone, and deportment are different and 'these people can tell' that you are not South African. Mafana, Nomalanga, and other Ndebele-speaking migrants raise an interesting issue in terms of passing for South Africans. They do

not pass for South Africans by rigidly adopting a Zulu or Xhosa identity. Instead, being 'Zulu' is successfully constructed through a process of 'cross identification'.[17] This entails keeping a distance from those people with the requisite cultural and linguistic competence to blow one's cover, while simultaneously exploiting those points where there are non-Zulu speakers who have a less sure command and recognition of what authentic Zulu is. Being Ndebele-speaking does not engender a Zulu or Xhosa identity. A number of Ndebele-speaking migrants in Diepsloot revealed that their accents give them away as foreigners. Most of them have actually disclosed to those they interact closely with and have befriended because the way they speak their 'Zulu' raises questions.

In Diepsloot the most common housing option that is available to Zimbabwean migrants is what migrants call 'backrooms'. In Yeoville and Hillbrow migrants have the option and the leeway to become 'landlords', while in Diepsloot when respondents speak of landlords they are almost always exclusively referring to South African nationals. In Diepsloot, the power structures and relationships in the neighbourhoods preclude migrants' capacity to discursively reproduce a 'Zimbabwean microcosm', much like their counterparts in Hillbrow and Yeoville. The only extent to which they reconstruct Zimbabwe is through creating thick networks within the backrooms. However, in Diepsloot the powers of space (Munn 2003) are more explicitly felt as much of Diepsloot comprises spaces perceived by the migrants as 'taboo' and 'inhibited' (Munn 2003).

Conclusion

This article sought to analyse the role of language in the lives of Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa, a context where they are constructed as the Other other. What becomes apparent is that the language varieties of Ndebele and Shona speakers as forms of capital or 'entry fees' do not hold a constant value throughout Johannesburg. Instead, their value shifts depending on the power relations and the general structure of the places they find themselves in. In Hillbrow and Yeoville the marked presence of the Other others structures the linguistic market in a democratic and more permissible manner. The language capital of the Zimbabwean migrants is therefore unmarked in a context where English (a compromise language) is in a diglossic relationship with other languages occupying the status of lower varieties. This is radically different from Diepsloot where the linguistic market is dominated by local languages, with the effect of marking and devaluing the language capitals of both Ndebele and Shona-speaking migrants.

The narratives that are presented in this article destabilize and complicate our conceptualization of language and its impact on the matrices of belonging in South Africa for Zimbabwean migrants. They point to a more complex notion of language as experienced in practical situations, and also the maze-like landscape in Johannesburg where the value of language as an identity authentication resource is always shifting. It is also apparent that popular constructions of Zimbabwe's relationships between the Ndebele and Shona ethnolinguistic groups filter into their discursive practices in Johannesburg. This also occurs in ways that are diverse and incoherent. They impact on how migrants grapple with the exigencies of being in the circumscribed spaces. As the article has shown, language proficiency in itself is far from being an unproblematic entry fee into different parts of Johannesburg. There is a complex process of navigation and breaking down of barriers through various usable linguistic entry fees whose use value is in constant flux according to the indexical orders.

Notes

1. Entry fees can be seen as a synonym for capital in the Bourdieuian sense. However the notion of entry fees graphically speaks to the valuing and devaluing of the linguistic capital in specific relations that migrants engage in.

2. Goffman (1963) in his work on stigma and spoiled identity notes that identities are seen as spoiled and stigmatized in relation to what is seen as normal, i.e., there are socially accepted norms feeding into these classifications.

3. This stems from the linguistic anthropological concept of markedness, where certain languages are unmarked while others are marked. The former are categories that are normalized as standards while the latter are seen as deviating from the norm.

4. Language is the foremost form of capital and entry fee among a bundle of capitals that index people. Others which are closely related are dress-code, deportment, and other embodied practices such style of walking. In this article I specifically focus on language.

5. There is a lot of work across the fields of sociology, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology that has deeply sharpened our understanding of language as part and parcel of power-infused social practices and social interaction.

6. While this is an interesting description of possible avenues of identity negotiation, there are complications as to the value an identity document has as a signifier of a South African identity. It is interesting to note that focus in exposing *amakwerekwere* is on language and not on documents signifying South Africanness. Language is seen as a sure method because its indexical value goes beyond documentary signification.

7. By flat and unified I refer to the abstraction of language from its practical use qualities where it is fragmentary even within the same variety due to repertoires as shown in works by Hymes (1966) and Gumperz (1966).

8. Narrativization refers to what people say they are and the identities that they ascribe to. In the work by assimilationists, for instance, the researchers reveal that they had no problem identifying Zimbabwean migrants with whom they communicated in English and Shona. However, they concretize the transformation to South Africanness without necessarily revealing the fraught cleavages that emerge out of empirical social contact such as the process of research on the one hand, and South African interlocutors on the other.

9. Code-switching is the switching between two or more language varieties. For example a speaker may use Zulu to communicate with one person and then switch to English in his communication with another person. Code-mixing on the other hand is the mixing of two or more language varieties in the same utterance. Mesthrie et al. (2000) provide a useful explanation of code-switching and associated issues of language choice.

10. In order to trace code-switching and code-mixing I inquired about the various languages the migrants speak and what influences their choices of language use.

11. This draws and extends Fishman's innovative use of diglossia which is different from Ferguson's. In this regard, in the two neighbourhoods English occupies the H variety status because of its use across the neighbourhoods and beyond the home and group networks where the other varieties, such as Ndebele and Shona, seem to have currency.

12. According to the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary* a sociolect 'is a variety of a language that members of a particular social class or social group speak'.

13. I draw this term from Sarah Willen's (2010) work on the maltreatment of foreign migrants in Israel whom she terms the 'Other Other', which is related to the institutionalized denial of 'citizenship to Palestinians who are the real Others of Israel'. In South Africa however the language indexes foreigners as the Other other who are on the last rung of the hierarchization of different social categories in South Africa. I capitalize the first *Other* and use a small letter for the second *other* to articulate these delineations.

14. *Gukurahundi* is a Shona word that means the early rains that wash away the chaff. Between 'early 1983 and late 1986' (Phimister 2008), the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean National Army engaged in massacres of civilians in the Matabeleland regions of the country that claimed an estimated 20,000 lives. Although couched within discourses of state security amid concern about subversive activities of dissident activities in the areas, research clearly reveals a more programmatic and deliberate targeting of Ndebele-speaking civilians (Phimister 2008).

15. The Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg became a centre of refuge for Zimbabwean migrants who were coming into Johannesburg and had nowhere else to go. The Methodist Church became a synonym for Zimbabwean migrants particularly when there were heightened movements from Zimbabwe.

16. WNLA means Witwatersrand Native Labour Association and is often used as a reference to migration during the 1900s when the gold mines were the major attraction for African labour coming to South Africa.

17. This is a term I coined to describe these identity negotiation strategies that seemed to be quite general in the narratives of respondents. Although I do not delve into this theoretical concept in this article it suffices to note that it's based on migrants' rationalizations of who the most qualified inquisitors to expose their passing are.

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