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Language and youth identity in a multilingual setting: A multimodal repertoire approach

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Language and youth identity in a multilingual setting: A multimodal repertoire approach

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Abstract: This article is based on a study of a community of multilingual adolescents in Johannesburg which examines participants' linguistic repertoires and how they use their linguistic resources as a basis for identity construction, integration and performance. This kind of linguistic multiplicity lends itself to subtle and occasionally subversive positioning, as well as the creation of complex identities. Multilingual speakers call into play different aspects of their linguistic identity according to what particular circumstances dictate. For the most part, learners use their repertoires, which in some cases include non-standardised, mixed forms such as Tsotsitaal, to integrate and negotiate; and they are open to learning and accommodating other languages, with perhaps (in this data-set) one exception, namely Xitsonga. The implications of these findings are discussed with regard to language use in educational settings.

Introduction

The linguistic identities of adolescents have been a growing topic of interest in recent research in South Africa (Rudwick 2004; Makubalo 2007; Nongogo 2007). Nongogo (2007: 43) reports on an ethnographic study in a desegregated private school and found that some learners 'retain African languages and use these as a primary marker of ethnic identities and ideas of ethnic purity'. However, on closer scrutiny, it seems as if the ideas of ethnic purity are used subversively and as a means to play with and make sense of identity. Rudwick (2004: 169) also found in her ethnographic study in township schools in Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal, that 'young members in the KwaZulu-Natal Zulu-speaking community express strong linguistic allegiance to Zulu'. The current paper builds on this body of research and reports on how multilingual adolescents attending an academic enrichment programme in Johannesburg articulate their experiences of using the range of linguistic varieties they know. Most of these linguistic varieties have not been learnt in formal instruction, but have been acquired as a result of inductive learning in multilingual environments.

More specifically, the aim of this article is to demonstrate how the notion of 'repertoire', rather than that of 'language', is a useful tool for analysing how a group of adolescents use their linguistic resources to construct multiple identities in diverse environments. Despite the steadily growing body of work on youth language identities in South Africa very few have engaged with the theoretical concept of repertoire. The main contribution of the current paper is such an engagement, which we believe opens up various new ways of viewing linguistic knowledge and the construction of identity. Conceptualising linguistic knowledge as built up through active language usage and passive exposure to language makes it possible to treat such knowledge as dynamic, subject to variation and change. Additionally, a repertoire approach to the study of language and identity can assist in gaining a better understanding of the complex interplay between actual linguistic practices and dominant language ideologies. Following Busch (2012), we will argue in this paper that ideologies of language as a bounded system form just as much a part of a linguistic repertoire as actual use of linguistic varieties.

In particular, two examples will be highlighted to illustrate how the notion of 'repertoire' is more productive in investigating linguistic identity, than the notion of 'language'. One example is drawn from a discussion about Xitsonga and how language and cultural ideologies might limit the expansion of a linguistic repertoire, and subsequently influence individual and collective repertoires

and identity. The other example is from discussions of varieties such as Tsotsitaal and Izikhothane which do not fit into the commonly held idea of what a 'language' is but which nevertheless are drawn on for various functions such as establishing solidarity or performing identity. The multimodal data collection methods will be topicalised as well, to show their capacity for opening up a richer understanding of how languages are learnt and used when affective or emotional aspects of knowing various languages are recognised.

Recalibrating Repertoire

Building on Bakhtin's (1981) view of society as a heteroglossic entity that is multivoiced and multidiscursive, Busch (2011) notes that languages and varieties of languages can no longer be viewed as clear-cut, bordered units. Instead, they form clusters of communicative means shaped by specific practices and ideologies (Busch 2011: 544). In keeping with recent calls to deconstruct the very idea of what a 'language' is (Pennycook 1998; Makoni and Pennycook 2007), many researchers have returned to the ideas of Gumperz (1964) and Hymes (1996) concerning 'repertoires'. Gumperz (1964: 137) defined 'verbal repertoires' as 'the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction'. Hymes (1996: 33), writing specifically on the idea of a speech community, suggested that a speech community should not be thought of in terms of a single language but in terms of a repertoire, or 'ways of speaking'. A repertoire consists of speech styles as well as 'contexts of discourse', together with specific rules of appropriateness 'between styles and contexts' (Hymes 1996: 33).

Blommaert (2010) suggests that a better way of thinking about language is not to generalise, but rather to view it as a mobile bank of concrete resources. To understand linguistic identity, we need to analyse the actual linguistic, communicative and semiotic resources that people have, not the abstract and ideological representations of such resources (Blommaert 2010: 102). He criticises uses of 'repertoire' where the set of resources it refers to is closely associated with a particular community so that an identified group becomes the 'Other' who is known, fixed and predictable. In distancing 'repertoire' from the notion of a 'fixed community', it is possible to view the Other in late postmodern terms, namely as highly mobile and unpredictable, and therefore also as people about whom little can be assumed either culturally or linguistically (Blommaert and Backus 2011: 4). Rather than assuming the existence of fixed repertoires, Blommaert (2010) proposes we consider the diversity of resources in modern multilingual communities as 'truncated multilingualism', or as repertoires which consist of specialised but partially-developed and unevenly-developed resources. He notes: 'We never know all of a language; we always know specific bits and pieces of it' (Blommaert 2010: 23).

In such cases, multilingualism is not so much a collection of languages, but rather a collection of specific resources which include concrete accents, language varieties, registers, genres and modalities – all ways of using language in particular communicative settings (Blommaert 2010: 102). When viewed in this way, the concept of 'repertoire' can bring detail and precision to the analysis of communication processes in a world of globalised communication, where people communicate with bits and pieces of languages, genres and registers. These truncated repertoires are grounded in people's biographies (Blommaert 2010: 102).

Similar arguments are made by Busch (2012: 19), who finds that building on the notion of 'repertoire' from a poststructuralist perspective allows one to view linguistic choices as 'not only determined by the situational character of interaction and by grammatical and social rules and conventions', but as 'language practices subjected to the time-space dimensions of history and biography'. Busch (2012: 19), who uses the multimodal approach on which this paper leans, emphasises that a repertoire evolves from linguistic interaction and is experienced on both a cognitive and an emotional level. Busch (2012: 19) states that repertoire can be seen as 'a hypothetical structure', which evolves through experiences with and in language in interaction. This experiencing takes place on a cognitive and emotional level 'and is inscribed into corporal memory and embodied as linguistic habitus' and 'includes traces of hegemonic discourses'. In their expression of linguistic repertoires, participants draw on inclusive and exclusive categorisations and language ideologies, a multiplicity of views, earlier discourses, and codes. The

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linguistic repertoire 'forms a heteroglossic and contingent space of potentialities which includes imagination and desire, and to which speakers revert in specific situations'. In this paper we will follow Busch's (2012) view of repertoire, as it best captures the methodological and theoretical approach taken.

Methodology

Participants and research context

The data for this study was provided by 30 high school learners enrolled in two educational programmes in Johannesburg. One of the schools draws high numbers of non-South African learners into its programmes, some of whom also took part in the original larger research project. This article, however, focuses on the South African contingent, made up of 22 Grade 10 students, aged 15 to 16, who at the time attended a donor-funded education enrichment programme that operates on Saturdays and in school holidays[1].

According to statistics published in the 2011 Census, Gauteng, with a population of more than 12 million, is the most multilingual province in the country[2]. This can be contrasted with, for example, the Eastern Cape where Xhosa is the home language of almost 80% of people, KwaZulu-Natal where Zulu is the mother tongue of about 78%, or the Northern Cape where Afrikaans is the first language of 53% of the population (South Africa.info 2012). The regional demographic is a factor that must be taken into consideration in this study. Johannesburg is highly urbanised, the economic hub of the country, but not necessarily a microcosm of the rest of South Africa.

The participants are learners drawn from township and former whites-only schools, thus from schools with different historic and learner profiles. Selection for entry into the special programme is based on financial need and academic merit, specifically in maths and science. As the programme is donor-funded, the pressure on learners to perform well is intense, from both the donors and the teachers, thus these students are typically well-motivated, dedicated and academically competitive. The short-term goal of the programme is for their learners to achieve a 100% matric pass rate and access to university or tertiary institutions. The long-term goal is to develop a strategy that enhances their readiness for success at university.

Using an academically successful population as a research sample has been identified as problematic. DeKeyser, Alfi-Shabtay and Dravid (2010: 416) question research which relies on samples that reflect 'a much higher percentage of highly educated participants than the population at large'. While settling for easy linguistic targets will inevitably limit the generalisability of results (Magnusson and Stroud 2012: 323), conceiving of studies of multilingualism solely in terms of vulnerable migrants living in contested communities or poorly-educated rural populations could also be limiting. We therefore acknowledge the limits to the generalisability of the current study, but contend that any study using a particular selection is limited in one way or another.

All the participants in this study are proficient in a number of differently named languages.

The language of instruction in the enrichment classes is English. The participants identified seven of the South African official languages, namely Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho, Swati, Tshivenda, Xhosa, Zulu, Xitsonga and English as home languages in background questionnaires.

Data collection instruments and analytical methods

Language portraits (Busch 2010) were used as the main data collection instrument. Language portraits are produced from blank body silhouettes on a sheet of paper, which participants colour in using different coloured pens or pencils on different areas of the body to symbolise the languages, varieties and/or ways of speaking that they use, know or even aspire to. According to Busch (2010), the benefit of this approach is that it is speaker-centred and that typical, clichéd ways of talking about language can be avoided. Besides colouring the shape, participants in this study further explained their portraits with written explanatory notes. Issues around language and identity were then further discussed in semi-structured focus group interviews which were conducted by the first author of this paper. Additionally, background questionnaires and the researcher's notes and observations were used.

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Each of the data sets adds complementary information regarding the participants and their linguistic identities. A combination of theme-based multimodal discourse analysis (Pavlenko 2007) and small story analysis (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) was used to analyse the data. Using biographies to explore multilingualism makes it possible to study how linguistic identity is constructed. Placing narratives in a biographical framework illuminates both big and small stories, no matter how untidy and messy those stories may be. A multimodal approach adds another semiotic mode which can contribute to the unravelling of narratives of identity and language. Frost (2009: 13) suggests that by using different forms of narrative enquiry, the multidimensionality of narratives is captured in a 'systematic and theoretically informed approach'.

The main advantage of thematic research is its sensitivity to recurrent motifs in participants' stories and to themes that are important to them (Pavlenko 2007: 166). The weakness of the approach is that it lacks a theoretical premise to illuminate conceptual categories, or an established procedure for matching categories (Pavlenko 2007: 166). It does not isolate linguistic and socio-linguistic information from other kinds of psycho-social information. However, as our interest is in the integration of various ways of articulating identity, this is not taken as a weakness. Still, the criticisms of thematic analysis are acknowledged and addressed by supplementing this with an additional instrument: thematic analysis is used as a means of organising and highlighting important themes, while small story analysis is the analytical tool. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) define 'small stories' as the telling of on-going past, future or hypothetical events that do not always follow the typical narrative structure of chronology. Small stories often occur spontaneously and often contradict or challenge existing ideas of identity. The combination of these two modes of structuring and analysing data combines recurrent and generalisable themes with the contradictory and idiosyncratic.

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Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis will be presented in the following way: firstly, recurrent themes will be given with examples from the data, which include examples from the portraits, explanatory notes and interviews. Subsequently, small stories that exemplify, add more detail to or contradict such themes will be discussed.

Home language and emotional attachment

While it is generally accepted that English is the dominant language in post-apartheid South Africa, the first question here is how the participants in this study relate to the linguistic varieties that they speak in their homes or regard as their home languages. The data shows that they generally value and cherish what they regard as their home language/s, depicting them symbolically in their drawings positioned either at the heart (as in Figure 1), signalling emotional attachment, or at the feet as a grounding device. This is further supported by their notes:

(1) AA: I coloured Zulu where my heart is because it is my home language and I grew up speaking it …
(2) AB: Swazi and Ndebele are situated in my feet, the reason for that is that my dad is a Swati and my mom is Ndebele and I am following in their footsteps.
(3) AC: Brown colour represents my home language which is Sepedi. This symbolises who I am. It shows that I will never let my culture die and I will always remain Pedi.
(4) AD: I used pink for the heart and to represent the Tsonga language because it is close to my heart and I am a Tsonga girl. The pink represents me as a being and my life. My heart beats in Tsonga.

In spite of the above, participants also express the inevitable ambiguity of a multilingual environment, of having different kinds of allegiance. AE's explanatory notes on his language portrait are significant in this respect. His drawing is a series of meticulously-sculpted lines, which include the body's vascular system as seen in Figure 2. The languages that course through his veins, arteries

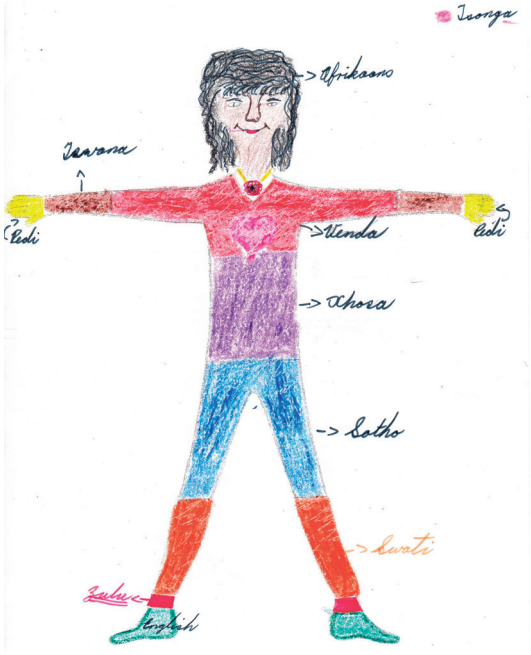

Figure 1

and heart are Sepedi and Setswana, coloured in red, although his father is Zulu. In recognition of this, he has outlined the body in blue which represents what he calls his 'Zulu shell':

(5) AE: Zulu (dark blue) represents me and forms a huge part of my image as I am perceived by society as this deep, cultured, true Zulu character, whereas it only forms my chest (pride), throat (authority) and feet which represent my culture and belonging. To society I am a true Zulu man, but in reality I'm just covered in a thick layer of blue (Zulu), and my heart, veins and arteries are all actually Pedi and Tswana.

From a distance, AE observes this 'deep, cultured, true Zulu character' which others identify him as, but then he also confesses that he does not speak Zulu very fluently, even though both his first name and surname are typically Zulu. He explains that he grew up in a non-Zulu-speaking area and regards his first language as Sepedi, considering it 'part of [his] grounding'. Beneath AE's true blue Zulu exterior beats a Pedi heart. AE is conscious of the expectations of society that someone with a Zulu name and surname should be able to speak Zulu. Rudwick (2004: 164) reports for example that the participants in her study seemed to draw a direct link between their mother tongue (Zulu) and culture. AE is, however, able to critically reflect on this dominant ideology and contradicts it with the expression of his own experiences.

Pragmatic approach to English

Parkinson and Crouch (2011) found that there was significant peer pressure among rural L1 Zulu students at a university in KwaZulu-Natal to speak Zulu rather than English in residences and on campus, and students who did not comply were stigmatised as 'coconuts' (brown on the outside, white on the inside) and 'Model Cs' (students who attended well-resourced, previously-White state schools). In contrast, participants in this survey have a thoroughly pragmatic attitude to English, which is the language of instruction. Even if they appreciate the use of English for instruction and

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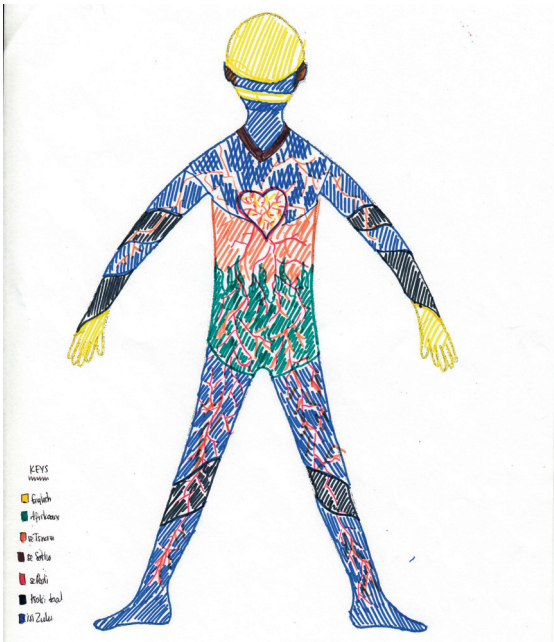

Figure 2

Figure 3

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learning, outside the classroom or in the corridors they speak the language of their choice (Bristowe 2013). While deeply attached to their home language/s, they acknowledge English as the lingua franca of the business world, education in general and tertiary education in particular as reflected in their notes below. It is the de facto gatekeeper (Otsuji and Pennycook 2011: 424) to good jobs and tertiary educational institutions and, without exception, students work hard at communicating effectively in English.

(5) AC: Green is English and I coloured my hands and belt green. Reason for this is because English holds my future and disciplines me. Without English I will not succeed. It's an international language and holds my future, shows me the way to go, also disciplines me, so that I don't fall and fail (See AC's language portrait in Figure 3).
(6) AF: When I think of English, I see it as the passport to my future. It was hard the first time I started to learn English but I came to like it and I think it's an important language because it's spoken all over the world […]
(7) AG: English is a universal language of communication in the world, which is why I decided to put English just under my heart […] where you can find the vital organs, which means I value English and think that it is vital in my life.
(8) AH: I put English in my head and arms because I am taught in English at school and I write poetry, letters and music in English. I don't use my home language because I speak English most of the time (at school) and that's where I'm always at … school!

The biographic portraits confirm participants' explanatory notes: although they use different semiotic devices and their symbolic uses of colour differ, they all signal the importance of English, associating it with progress, growth, education and innovation. One interesting example contradicting this position is that of AC, who sees English as a way of disciplining her, using a metaphor of constriction, which is not necessarily a positive metaphor. Also see AC´s language portrait in Figure 3. However, the idea that English is needed to succeed in education resonates through all the responses. Other languages and styles are valued for other qualities. One participant, for example, mentioned the need to speak Zulu in Johannesburg where 'one in every three people you meet speaks Zulu'. The portraits and notes accompanying the drawings all address some aspect of using other linguistic varieties to forge allegiances, or to show openness and diversity. The notes do not mention directly negative attitudes to any, although in one interview an unfavourable perception of Xitsonga was mentioned, which will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Beauty of Afrikaans

Many of the participants learn Afrikaans at school and, in spite of the oppressive history associated with the language, they are of a generation with no personal memory of the former dispensation. This perhaps can be used to partly explain the positive attitude toward the language. For these participants, Afrikaans is another language in their repertoires that some of them would like to speak. As 'Born Frees' (i.e. born after 1994), they find they can disregard the ideological baggage associated with the language. Explaining that he simply never got a chance to speak Afrikaans in a natural situation, AE had this to say about Afrikaans in his language portrait:

(9) AE: Afrikaans is green (dark). Greener pastures should be the picture, but it is dark (green) because it has been suppressed in me for so long that it's like milk that is turning sour. It's a flame seeking freedom, but has been compressed and suppressed by my location (area of upbringing) (see Figure 2 for his portrait).
(10) AI: Afrikaans: 'n Taal wat ek baie lief vir is (*A language I really love*).
(11) AJ: The earrings and the ring symbolise Afrikaans for I find beauty in the Afrikaans language. I find it intriguing and see it as a diamond language because my great-grandparents have been raised in it so I find it's natural and beautiful. Also see AJ's language portrait in Figure 4.
(12) AK: I've positioned Afrikaans on my leg because it helps me stand out from all my friends because they can't speak Afrikaans.

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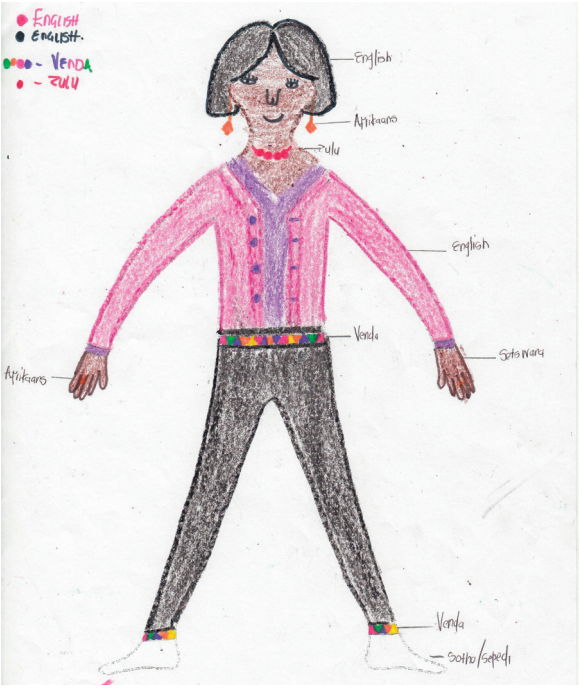

Figure 4

So contrary to initial expectations, Afrikaans is described as 'beautiful', 'a language I really love', and 'intriguing'. AD recounts a small story in the group interview about learning Afrikaans which confirms this largely positive attitude towards Afrikaans. The prompting question from the interviewer to the group was 'What was your worst or best language learning experience?' There is some whispered discussion and then AD claims the floor, signalling her story using a classical opening phrase: 'When I started Afrikaans in Grade 4 …' The group gives her the floor and sits back to listen.

The small story about learning Afrikaans, went as follows:

(13) AD: When I started Afrikaans in Grade 4 [pause] that's when I started … I used to fight with my Afrikaans teacher because I have a sister at home. She'd just passed matric… so she got a distinction in Afrikaans … so she was teaching me you know … how to pronounce the 'j' and everything. And I was so excited. I thought I knew Afrikaans, and when I used to take my book to my Afrikaans teacher … she would be like 'This is wrong' and I would say 'No, my sister said this is right and my sister knows Afrikaans'… yarra yarra yarra. And I had an Afrikaans dictionary so we used to fight a lot, but I love Afrikaans in a way. My best learning experience was Tsonga … OK … I spoke … I spoke Tsonga at home but I couldn't write it. So … ja … I visited my grandmother in Limpopo, it's a village there. I got people to contact and started speaking Tsonga on Mxit and I used to write and every sentence would make sense to me. They never corrected me. Actually … they just put it all together and replied when they had to. So I enjoyed learning how to … on Mxit …

The characters in this narrative are the ten-year-old AD, her Grade 4 Afrikaans teacher, AD's grandmother in Limpopo, AD's sister, and the people to whom she sends messages on Mxit in Xitsonga. AD constructs herself as a dedicated learner from an academically successful family, prepared to challenge her teacher, albeit unsuccessfully. What is interesting about this small story is that even though AD characterises her Afrikaans learning experience as difficult, the negative

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judgment is actually reserved for the teacher, not for the language which she admits to actually loving 'in a way'.

She goes on to contrast this with the positive experience she had when learning to write her home language, Xitsonga. In order to do so, AD recollects how she immersed herself in her grandmother's Tsonga-speaking village community in Limpopo and learned to write the language by messaging contacts on Mxit, a popular social media app among teenagers. Writing in Xitsonga becomes an interactive experience, in contrast to her Afrikaans class, with its traditional dictionaries, class exercises, homework and a teacher pointing out what is wrong with her work, apparently overlooking her young learner's passion for the language. This small story interestingly juxtaposes a prescriptive approach to teaching and learning with an informal, interactive communicative approach which works inductively in using resources and media to which young people have access and that they enjoy using.

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Desire to learn new languages

Participants are open to hearing and learning new languages, although they readily admit that they are not equally proficient in all of the languages in their respective repertoires. MS (L1 Sesotho) explained the difficulties of learning Xhosa to the interviewer: 'There are three clicks /c/, /q/ and /x/ … they are difficult and if you pronounce them in the wrong way people think you are dissing them …'.

In accordance with Kramsch's (2006: 101) view that adolescents desire to find new and different places in the mind, some participants are slowly making progress with learning new European and Asian languages, or they express an aspiration to speak European languages other than English.

(15) AL: Portuguese – I am learning this slowly because I have Portuguese family friends and they prefer to be spoken to in their language.
(16) AA: Chinese – My aunt went to China and when she came back she started teaching us the language. Also see AA's language portrait in Figure 5.
(17) AM: The other language that I sort of know and understand is a bit of Hindi as I used to watch Indian soapies and still watch Hindi movies. I started to understand the language after watching what people said in Hindi and it being translated into English. I can speak and understand enough Hindi to have a light conversation with someone who knows the language entirely.
(18) AN: French is on arms and body in bits and pieces because I don't know the language except how to greet and say goodbye. I would also like to know and speak it because I want to visit France one day.

AN's contribution here raises an important point for further theoretical consideration, namely learners' sense of time and being directed to the future. Research on the temporal aspects of youth transition into adulthood has been conducted outside of linguistics, (e.g. in human geography). Worth (2009: 1050), notes that such research seems to be 'subliminally stuck within a linear or even static understanding of time that focuses on the past'. Worth (2009: 1050) further argues that temporal aspects should not only be viewed chronologically and that the focus on research in youth transition and becoming should shift to the future and not the past. It is significant that the narratives of the young adults in this study include aspects of language learning and futurity. This is perhaps an indication that language biographical research can learn from human geography in starting to pay more attention to futurity with regard to language use and learning. This is also compatible with a repertoire approach as Busch (2012: 18) states that the linguistic repertoire 'points both backwards and forwards.' An increased focus on futurity emphasises aspiration, desire and the influence of language ideologies. Most interestingly in the data presented above is how the desire to learn new languages is associated with European or other 'foreign languages', while other African languages do not really feature. Our next discussed theme will build on this idea even more by focussing on Xitsonga, which seems to be a language that the participants in the study do not desire to learn.

Repertoire and linguistic and cultural ideologies

Xitsonga represents one of the so-called minority language groups in South Africa, and in the

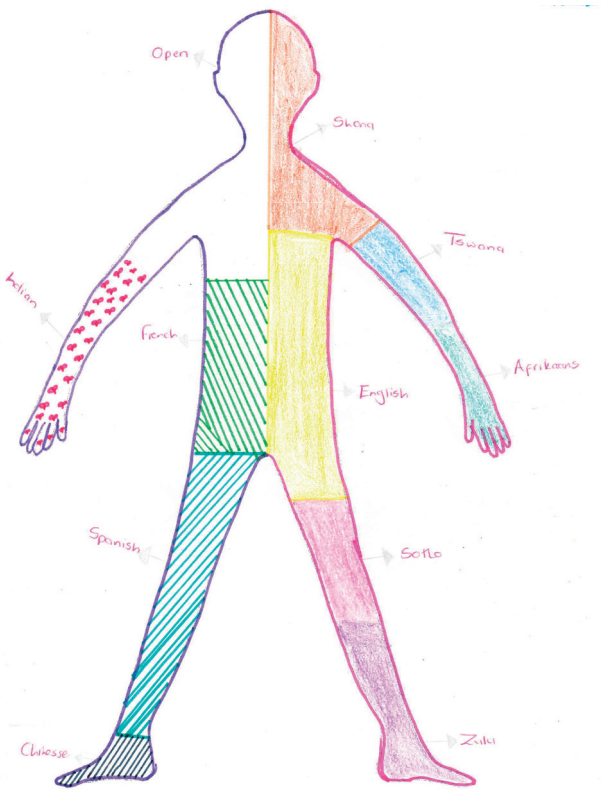

Figure 5

multi-ethnic urban context Tsonga people are often referred to as Shangaans[3]. According to the 2011 Census, there are 4.5 million Xitsonga speakers in South Africa. Two specific points in the interview will be used to discuss this point further. One is an extract from the group interviews that exemplifies stereotyping of Xitsonga, and the other is a small story that suggests a more contradictory approach towards the position of Xitsonga.

The interviewer pre-empted the discussion (by posing the question: Are there any languages you avoid speaking? A couple of participants mention Afrikaans, but then AC comes up with Shangani (the official name is 'Xitsonga'; when 'Shangani' is usually regarded as derogatory). The interviewer asks 'Why?' and AA, a Xitsonga L1 speaker, responds with one word, 'Stereotyping'. To extend the discussion, the interviewer introduced the subject of 'Jesus is a Shangaan' (2012)[4], referring to a short animated film by Mdu Ntuli of Mdu Comics, which parodies the linguistic and ethnic stereotyping of Tsonga people. The film created outrage for belittling the Tsonga people and was accused of being blasphemous. The following discussion around about this film was sparked:

(19) Interviewer: Have you seen the Mdu comic? He did a cartoon called 'Jesus is a Shangaan'
Group response: Oooooh [chorus of agreement and laughter].
AO: That's another example of how they discriminate the Tsonga people.
AC: But … but if you watch the video, he's [Jesus] actually been told he's Tsonga and he feels he is disappointed.
Interviewer: Yes and he goes and buys two pockets of oranges to wash away his Shangaan-ness.
Group response: Ahhhhhhh [Sympathetic group sigh]

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AC: He doesn't want to be Tsonga. That's another thing in his mind because in the cartoon he's Jesus. If the doctor has told him he's a Zulu … Maybe he would have said I don't have a problem being Zulu or Tswana or Pedi or Sotho but because it's Tsonga he's discriminated … he doesn't want to be Tsonga because he knows most of the Tsonga people are discriminated … so he feels like he's weak, people won't take him seriously because he's Tsonga.
Interviewer: Is that true?
AP: Yes.
Interviewer: Anyone here Tsonga-speaking or got Tsonga relatives?
AP: I've got Tsonga relatives.
AA: My stepmother is Tsonga.
Interviewer: And are they marginalised and discriminated against?
AO: You know, they think witchcraft is more common among Tsonga and Venda people. That's mostly taken for granted … I don't know … it's like there is still apartheid. Take guys for instance … They will see a beautiful girl and call her and want to talk to her but … when they find out she is Tsonga … they will just walk away.

It was unexpected to observe this kind of negative stereotyping and Othering expressed in relation to a South African language community, particularly in view of the general openness to other languages otherwise pronounced in the group. This discussion, when extended, led to the small story below. AO (L1 Sesotho, does not speak Xitsonga) challenges AC (L1 Sepedi, does not speak Xitsonga), effectively accusing him of linguistic racism. The two Xitsonga speakers in the group remain in the background, observing closely but taking no part in the debate. The discussion becomes an intense dialogue between AO and AC. At no stage does AO solicit support for her views, either directly or indirectly through (e.g.) body language, from anyone else in the group. She sits opposite AC in the circle and confronts him squarely.

AC is aware that the discussion, triggered by a single flippant remark, is a tricky one for him personally. In the face of relentless pressure from AO, he uses a small story about his friendship with a Tsonga boy in primary school to navigate away from the unpleasant implications of his comment and to present a more positive side of his social interaction.

(20) Small story: Defending a Tsonga friend
AC: I used to have a friend who was Tsonga in primary … and most of the time, most of my other friends, when I am with him, they didn't want to be around us. Just because he was Tsonga. But then they grew with him and they grew a relationship all together… but the first three months or six months, they were not like that … they were actually like 'He's Tsonga'. 'How can you do that with a Tsonga person?' They used to discriminate him even though when he was with me he never spoke Tsonga around me… we used to speak Sotho because that's what I had in common with him. So I don't know why he never actually wanted to teach me the Tsonga language. Maybe it was fear …
AO: Was there ever a time that you asked him to teach you?
AC: No.
AO: See … you knew that he was Tsonga but you didn't even bother. But then you wanted him to learn your language.
AC: I'm not Sotho, I'm Pedi. He was common with the Sotho language. So I had to compromise and speak with him.
AO: OK. Did you teach him your language?
AC: Ja.
AO: Why didn't you want to learn his?
AC: He didn't teach me?
AO: You should have asked.

The characters of this small story are AC, his Tsonga friend and other friends who do not want AC to hang out with a Tsonga boy. AC and his Tsonga friend are grouped together and, at first,

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they seem to stand in opposition to the other friends. Later these friends relent and the relationships become more inclusive.

AC's storied response is a means of mobilising the Self and resisting the suggestion that he is a linguistic bigot. In telling his story, AC repositions himself as tolerant and resistant to ethnic prejudice, someone capable of withstanding popular prejudice at a young age because the incident on which the story is based took place in primary school. Finally he emerges as the hero of the story. He concludes by saying that they compromised on language and spoke Sesotho, but AO pounces on this and maintains her accusation that AC did not try to learn Xitsonga. Once again the argument goes to and fro, with AO suggesting that AC simply did not want to learn Xitsonga. The conflict is not resolved, and at this point the group splinters into whispered conversations that release AC from AO's interrogation. This data quite clearly illustrates Busch's (2012: 17) points that language is experienced as ideological categories 'external to the subject', that ideologies such as normativity are re-inscribed in participants and that these categories cannot be simply wished away. Ideologies of what a language is, and which languages are valued, thus form as much part of a linguistic repertoire as actual varieties or styles used by participants.

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Township Originals: Tsotsitaal and the Izikhothane

The participants also reflected on experiences of using linguistic varieties that would not be traditionally classified as languages. Tsotsitaal and Skhothane culture represent forms of stylisation and performance, emphasising the flexibility, creativity, hybridity and diversity of township life and its linguistic expression, and further emphasises the need to understand language in terms of repertoires. Tsotsitaal is used by many young people living in urban townships in Johannesburg (Hurst 2009: 244). Performative in essence, it is marked by its innovative lexicon (Hurst 2009: 244). The style is linked but not limited to street gangs, and is the language of the street-smart 'clevers', used as a site of identity construction in particular township spaces (Hurst 2009: 250) where speaking English is regarded as cheaply showing off one's education (Hurst 2009: 249). Tsotsitaal was explicitly mentioned on two occasions. Firstly, in one of the language portraits, that of AE, and secondly, when prompted by the interviewer during the interviews, some participants mentioned that they could use Tsotsitaal (notably a number of female participants). Our discussion here, will however be limited to AE's reflections since he was not directly prompted about whether he used Tsotsitaal or not.

For AE, Tsotsitaal is another variety in his extensive repertoire, one he calls into play when circumstances demand a particular representation of himself. In the notes accompanying his biographic image, he writes:

(21) Tsotsitaal forms my joints and wrists as this language is what keeps me standing and in balance when lost in a haze of unfamiliar Black people. It also represents agility and efficiency as Tsotsis are quite quick, clever and sneaky. Please note that I do not admire Tsotsis, but simply their attributes and survival skills.

AE displays a performative side, as evidenced by the apparent delight he takes in calibrating his performance to the Other. In doing so, he demonstrates an excellent grasp of the social meaning of performance (Rampton 2011: 4), using Tsotsitaal to signal solidarity in social situations where cultural affiliation and status are not marked. The language is a way of finding common ground and aligning himself with people that he does not know.

The first reference to Izikhothane in this research is in graphic form, flagged in AB's self-portrait (see Figure 6), where he styles himself as a Skhothane, a fabulous, moustachioed township dandy wearing a fashionably printed designer t-shirt, tight jeans and the bright candy-coloured Italian Carvela shoes seen on eNews and much loved by groups such as the Born Agains (see below). In the group interview, AB raises the topic of Izikhothane in a discussion about the differences between township and suburban schools. As can be seen below:

(22) AB: With township schools you're not expected … like … expected to be … to excel and so that means there's no pressure on you … Because I can do it at my own pace. There are

Figure 6

different people … we got guys like Skhothane … everything.
Interviewer: What is Skhothane?
AB: Like those kids who dress up …
AD: Who brag … in the money …
AB: Inside school it's like a community, and you've got different communities in school and you've got this and this and that … and there some there that are Abazala … ePostela … Abantwane … Uyashiza … all that stuff … you can do anything in township schools … like Skhothane.

He uses this topic as a springboard to introduce the topic of Skhothane. In addition, he uses the topic to position himself as generally very informed and aware of township youth culture, something that the other participants may be missing out on.

Information on Izikhothane has had to be gathered primarily from popular media sources, as there is currently no published academic work on the phenomenon. Described by journalist Debora Patta (2012) as 'bling gone obscenely mad', competing Skhothane groups, who give themselves names like 'Over Spenders' and 'Born Agains', meet for regular face-offs in parks where they insult and 'diss' each other, accusing one another of wearing 'fong kong' gear (cheap Chinese copies of expensive designer outfits), and so on. To further impress, some Skhothane take off their expensive clothes and trample on them to show just how wealthy they are.

The Izikhothane have been widely condemned from a social and moral perspective, but in an article entitled 'Izikhothane – Two Sides to the Story', Nxedlana (2012) points out that the Izikhothane have the same interests and dreams of recognition as other young Gauteng people. He suggests that material possessions are not as important to participants as they appear to be.

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For the Izikhothane, fame is the reward: it is the 'true currency, the ultimate aspiration of Skhothane culture' (Nxedlana 2012). From another perspective, Nxedlana believes that Skhothane culture could be labelled as art, as 'participatory practice which requires collaboration from both participants and audience'. Skhothane battles are performative, involving wordplay and 'innovative dance moves'. As much as Tsotsitaal is a test of linguistic agility and in-group savvy, Izikhothane calls for similar agility by using semiotic resources such as clothing, and dancing. Izikhothane goes well beyond the linguistic, and poignantly illustrates how a number of communicative resources can be used to construct identity.

Conclusion

The participants in this study represent an elite: they are academically successful, ambitious young people who are being actively encouraged to think critically about themselves and their environments. While most, if not all, their schooling takes place in English, they not only maintain a host of other languages, but are intent on acquiring new ones. They use their languages flexibly, moving confidently from one person or group to another to reconstruct or position themselves. The participants readily admit that they are not equally proficient in all of the languages they speak, but this does not appear to be an inhibiting factor. In the absence of formal teaching, they learn from and teach one another.

Theoretically, this study has shown how the idea of 'repertoire', rather than that of 'language', can be used to understand urban multilingualism among adolescent learners and the way in which identity is entangled with multilingual repertoires. The methodology that was used has drawn attention to more multimodal ways of gathering data which can illuminate the complex interplay of different semiotic repertoires better than traditional methods of data collection such as surveys and interviews. The language portrait method has drawn attention to the often neglected emotional and bodily dimensions of language and language learning (Swain 2013). Furthermore, as Busch (2012) suggests it is clear that hegemonic discourses operate together with heteroglossia in the individual repertoires. This tension or complex interplay seems to occur not only in reflections on formal institutional contexts of language use (e.g. expression of views on English as dominant in educational settings) but also in the expression of, and reflection on, everyday encounters (e.g. forming friendships with Xitsonga speakers). Language ideologies thus seem to run through all interactions. It also shows the value of an approach in which participants are asked to reflect on linguistic repertoires. This inherent contradictory and multifaceted nature of the linguistic repertoire does not allow for any easy answers on linguistic varieties and identity, but can perhaps be utilised to re-think teaching pedagogy.

Although there have been numerous calls to integrate heteroglossic practices into the classroom (Busch 2010), practice has been very slow to follow theory. Theoretical concepts such as 'translanguaging' (Lewis, Jones and Baker 2012) and 'transidiomaticity' (Jacquemet 2005) have largely failed to be put to good use in formal teaching and learning practices in South African classrooms. Learners (especially those who are not L1 speakers of the dominant variety) are often positioned as lacking 'appropriate' skills and academic resources. It is clear from this study that many are able to access appropriate resources from their diverse linguistic repertoires to fit specific situations. This is a skill that can be built on in formal teaching settings.

From the findings presented in this paper, we see that learners not only seem to use a range of different language forms, styles and registers that make up their repertoires, but have the ability to critically reflect on this kind of linguistic agility. A pedagogy which uses heteroglossia but also requires critical reflection and the challenging of stereotypes (e.g. negative stereotypes about Xitsonga) and dominant ideologies (e.g. English is the most important language in the world) is possible. This kind of pedagogy can be linked to what Coetzee (2013: 7) calls 'accentedness', a form of teaching that encourages 'bringing local meanings to bear on interpretation'. Coetzee (2013) sees accentedness as a way of teaching that challenges prevailing ideologies and encourages conflict and diversity. The goal of an accented way of teaching is not a drive towards 'reconciliation and homogeneity', as it is intended towards embracing heteroglossia. Perhaps we owe it to our learners to make this possibility more of a reality so that their heteroglossia can become part

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of what Coetzee (2013: 14) calls a transformative practice 'which will inform itself of other accents and addresses, and which will develop sensitivity to multiple locations, intertexts and registers'. An accented view of what '*language'* refers to in multilingual repertoires is perhaps an ideal starting place for this envisioned practice.

Notes

[1] Permission and ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant authorities and informed consent requested from parents/guardians and learners.

[2] It is acknowledged that census data is based on self-reports by participants and is structured around dominant ideas and classifications of what a language is, but is nevertheless useful to sketch the multilingual context of Gauteng.

[3] Mathumba (1993) in Maluleke (2009) identifies the origin of the ethnic prejudice as historical, going back to the early nineteenth century when the Tsonga people were enslaved by invading Nguni tribesmen.

[4] The central character in the film is Jesus who, having had a DNA test, discovers he is a Shangaan. He is advised to scrub himself with oranges to get rid of his 'Shangaan-ness'. This does not work so, in despair, Jesus decides to commit suicide. He sits down to compose a lengthy suicide note which includes detailed instructions about the care of his pet lamb, Mbuzi. The film went viral after it was uploaded on YouTube in May 2012, drawing protests from church groups and from individuals.

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