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Artefacts, modernity and identity — global connections in the language and interactions of African youth

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Ellen Hurst-Harosh

Introduction

Large cities in Africa can be characterized as multilingual cities, in common with cities globally, perhaps even more so due to speakers' broad repertoires. In Africa urban citizens are also commonly highly multilingual, speaking official languages – often colonial European languages such as English, French and Portuguese; alongside African languages, both heritage and lingua francas. African national borders encompass many language communities, which meet in the cities through internal and regional migrations. As an example, South Africa has 11 official languages including the colonial languages English and Afrikaans, regional official African languages (Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu), minority languages such as Khoekhoegowab, and immigrant languages such as Ndebele and Shona from neighbouring Zimbabwe.

Urban citizens will often know English, some Afrikaans and two or more African lan-

guages, some of which are mutually intelligible. A similar picture emerges elsewhere in the continent, in the large urban centres of highly multilingual countries such as Nairobi in Kenya, Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lagos in Nigeria and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Into this mix we can also add the linguistic effects of increasing penetration and accessibility of technologies. Across Africa there has been a huge uptake in mobile technology and smart phones, not just low tech but increasingly allowing access to the internet from people's homes and hands (Deumert 2014). We should also take into consideration the importance of the youth demographic in Africa — almost 60% of Africa's population is under the age of 25, making Africa the world's youngest continent. The political context meanwhile involves a relatively recent history of colonialism and rapid social changes following independence in many African countries – a process which has not always been easy, and colonialism and its aftereffects (including neocolonialism) have left a legacy of high inequality, poverty, social unrest and various manifestations of violence.

The resulting new African 'modernisms' in urban centres are cultural configurations very different from historical representations of Africa. The concept of modernity must also be problematised – decolonial theorists (e.g. Mignolo 2011) argue that modernity is a Western/European construct, and that other parts of the world are judged against European modernity; Coloniality is their term for the institutionalisation and universalisation of European modernity, while there are actually multiple modernities in play. The Eurocentric conception of modernity that arose from the enlightenment is of a 'teleological' (purposeful) transition from the traditional to the modern, from the local to the global and from the rural to the urban, but this path of so-called development is not inevitable and it invokes a very particular European epistemology.

Language practices in African cities, and particularly amongst youth, are manifesting in ways that are reflective both of local contexts and modernities, dynamics and realities, and international/global forces and modernities. This article considers some of the practices happening in urban spaces in South Africa amongst youthful multilingual peer groups. It describes the ways that the global interfaces with the local and shapes the ways that youth express African modernities through group and individual identity, linguistic, para- and extra-linguistic practices. It furthermore considers some extra-linguistic aspects of peer group interaction – the use of cultural artefacts and objects, namely brands, cell phones and music — as pragmatic features in communication.

Framing the research

African youth language has become an important field of research over the past years as a result of some of the factors described above, for example rapidly changing language practices in urban centres, the large youth population in the continent and the influence of technological change. Youthful language practices from Africa are described in volumes such as Nassenstein and Hollington (2015), Hurst-Harosh and Kanana (2018), Schmied and Oloruntoba-Oju (2019) and Mesthrie, Hurst-Harosh and Brookes (2021), reflecting the development of a field of studies commonly referred to as African Youth Language studies. The field is broad, covering a wide geographical and theoretical/ empirical range, from formal linguistic

studies of morphosyntax to anthropological descriptions of speaker communities. Recently, Hurst-Harosh and Nassenstein (2022) have argued that pragmatic approaches to youth language research would be productive in a variety of ways, enabling deeper understanding of the contexts of the language practices of youth in African languages as well as adding to pragmatics theory itself by testing and refining existing approaches against African multilingual contexts.

Some common threads have emerged within the youth language field both in Africa and in studies of youth language globally. One such thread is that researchers looking at the language practices of youth often point to their connections to identity – that youth use language to express individual and shared identity. Some studies from Africa looking at identity include Brookes' (2014, 2021) work which looked at social levels (classifying speakers in terms of social identities) in Vosloorus, Johannesburg, while Bembe (2013) looked at social identities and style categorisations in Kwathema, Johannesburg. In both cases, they describe social classifications within (youth) communities such as *amajimbos*, *abomrapper* 'rappers', *pexers*, *pantsulas*, *softies*, and *clevas*. These types of classifications must be seen as stereotypes – in real life divisions aren't so neat and people shift (and style-shift linguistically) between categories depending on who they are with, where they are, the topic of conversation and so on. Agha (1998: 151) argues "Our idea that the people we meet have typifiable social identities, that they are members of certain 'social kinds,' is a very leaky notion. Everyone potentially has many identities, and most people seem able to move readily among them." It is also unlikely that people would categorise themselves under one of the more negative social identities, such as a *softie* or *cheese boy* (Brookes 2014), although they may be classified as such by some of the wider community.

Brookes applied an "indexical theory of style" (Brookes 2021: 66) to explain the relation between social category and language, namely "where linguistic choices index attitudes, stances and identities in the service of social distinction in local social situations" (Brookes 2021: 68). Indexicality is the phenomenon of a *sign* pointing to (or *indexing*) some object in the context in which it occurs. Signs can be referential or nonreferential. Linguistic signs may derive nonreferential meaning from indexicality (Silverstein 2003), for example when features of a speaker's register indexically signal their social class. Ultimately, specific linguistic forms can become associated with particular social types.

Agha (1998) argues that language and style are pragmatic phenomena that can index "Metapragmatic stereotypes":

> Our ideas about the identities of others tend to emerge when particular phenomena are objects of reflection, e.g., what people wear, what they do, and what they do with speech. Phenomena such as these – namely, characteristics of actors and their actions – are quintessentially pragmatic phenomena. Since our ideas about the identities of others are ideas about pragmatic phenomena, they are in principle metapragmatic constructs. In particular, such ideas are metapragmatic stereotypes about pragmatic phenomena. (Agha 1998: 151)

In the large urban spaces that are the subject of this article, there are various 'township lyf' iconographies, behaviours and styles which are

employed by young people to index identities and affiliations such as the rappers, *pantsulas*, and *cleva/clevers* — meaning 'streetwise guy' — described by the researchers above (see also Hurst-Harosh & Kanana 2022). Metapragmatic stereotypes are held by people about these identities, and assumptions (positive and/or negative) may be made about people whose style or speech indexes these kinds of streetwise identities.

In an understanding of identity (or perhaps identification as a better working concept) we must also accommodate agency or individual/personal identity – identity is both socially framed or structured, and individually negotiated. Individual identity involves agency, the youthful constructions / negotiations / identifications of the self. Meanwhile social identity involves structure, class, race, nationalisms, local and global cultural and social styles. While the latter constrains the former, there are ambiguities and challenges to social identities in the practices of individuals.

Cultural artefacts and objects such as those referred to in the analysis for this chapter – including material technologies, music, clothes etc. – are part of the iconography which may simultaneously reference social identity, global and social styles, but also personal agency and identifications.

Theoretical framing

In terms of theoretical framing, I emphasise in the analysis below the pragmatics of cultural artefacts and material objects in youth language. Pragmatics can be understood to refer to how non-linguistic features of language use contribute to the communication of meaning (Dant 2007: 16). According to Dant

> [People communicate with artefacts] through sight, touch and sometimes other senses, using their whole body to both make sense of and to make use of the things around them. This is not achieved through instinctual behaviour or even simple learnt behaviour but through the complex cultural acquisition of the meanings of objects that is characteristic of a particular formation of material civilization. (Dant 2007: 15)

He furthermore suggests that "The communication process between humans and objects is 'pragmatic' in the sense that meaning is contingent on the current situation that continually unfolds in the course of the interaction with the object" (Dant 2007: 15). In the analysis below, the interaction with cultural artefacts and objects is therefore seen as part of a communicative practice within peer groups, part of a consensual practice amongst youth wherein familiar, culturally and socially relevant artefacts are part of the ways that youth relate to one another and build community.

I focus on both brands and music as cultural artefacts, and mobile phones as objects, and I analyse the way youth interact with them in the data. Brands can be seen as cultural artefacts — often arising from or linked to particular global or local social identities. Cell phones are material artefacts that have received a great deal of research interest across a wide range of fields in terms of the way we as human beings interact with them, including in our pragmatic choices (see for example the *Handbook of Pragmatics of CMC* edited by Herring, Stein and Virtanen 2013).

In terms of music, I describe it here as a cultural artefact. This description seeks to recognize it both as an artefact produced by people (Miani 2015), and as a cultural practice.

In the analysis I focus on the ways that brands, music and cell phones were communicated and interacted with by the participants through body language, touch, sight, hearing and how they featured or reflected in talk. While there is a large body of work on extra - and para-linguistic features of language, few analyses have considered the pragmatics of artefacts or objects in everyday talk. In terms of mobile phones, the emphasis has been on the pragmatics of the communication modes employed through social media, messaging etc., rather than on the cell phone itself as a pragmatic object in communicative contexts.

Regarding the pragmatics of cultural artefacts, one study by Shankar (2004) investigated how songs and dialogue from Bollywood films were incorporated into everyday speech in diasporic South Asian-American communities in the USA. Shankar highlighted the ways that these practices impacted on negotiations of style and identity by providing "narrative frameworks, prescripted dialogue and socially recognizable registers and varieties of affect through which [the participants] enact their own dynamics of humor, flirting, conflict, and other types of talk" (Shankar 2004: 317). Similarly, Spitulnik (1997) shows how Zambians incorporate verbal styles from radio shows into their speech practices. There are some crossovers in what follows with the idea of "engaging with songs and lyrics [to] create a media-based community" (Shankar 2004: 332).

Data collection & self-reflexivity

Empirical examples ('naturalistic' recordings) of how youth use language in local contexts in South Africa come from a database of video recordings of youth language practices. The data was collected as part of two projects – 'Tsotsitaal: the national picture'; and 'African Youth Languages – a comparative analysis'. The projects both emphasized video recordings in order to gather interaction data that was reproducible and also included gesture, body language, clothes and other features of extra- and para-linguistic practices associated with stylects.

The transcripts below come from Gugulethu in Cape Town, and KwaMashu in Durban. In Gugulethu the peer group consisted of three close friends including the Research Assistant, and then a larger group of township[1] residents at locations they visited during the recording – notably a local corner shop (*spaza* shop). The group in KwaMashu consisted of 4 to 5 close friends, and a fluctuating group of local residents who could be heard in the background and sometimes joined in the interactions. The data was collected by research assistants — young African men who were students, but also part of the community of practice, or peripheral to it. The research assistants were an undergraduate from the University of Cape Town and an Honours student from University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, both in their 20s at the time of data collection.

My status as a white middle-aged English woman meant that my presence during recordings or trying to capture such recordings would have changed the performance, and the intention was to gather naturalistic data where possible in order to describe youth language in context. It is worth noting that this makes my status in relation to the data am-

[1] The term township is commonly used to refer to underdeveloped urban and peri-urban residential areas that during apartheid were reserved as separate areas for people classified as black.

biguous as I have only observed it through the recordings, which are audio and visual documents of earlier interactions. The status of the research assistants and participants is also ambiguous, as they were present and/or produced the data but were (usually) not involved in the analysis. One exception is that I have co-published elsewhere on the data with the RA from UKZN (Hurst and Buthelezi 2013). All the participants willingly shared their linguistic practices in accordance with ethics requirements. I have tried to fairly and positively reflect on and advocate for youth linguistic practices in my publications based on this and other data but acknowledge my limitations in interpreting in-group communication and dynamics. I have included the RAs in the acknowledgements for this article, I have attributed elsewhere to the speakers, and I further discuss methodological issues relating to youth language data collection in a separate publication (Hurst-Harosh and Mensah 2021).

Analysis: Brands, global style

The first part of the analysis set demonstrates the context and shows how global styles and metapragmatic stereotypes are drawn on in individual style and identity. Figure 1 and the video it was taken from was recorded by a University of Cape Town student who stayed in one of the big townships outside Cape Town – Gugulethu on the Cape Flats – when he was out and about in the township with his group of friends, who like hip hop and write and perform rap themselves.

Note the Converse cap and Adidas t-shirt in the image – international brands have status in this context, some more than others. Adidas for example is presently well regarded amongst the youth constituency in South Africa to the extent that it has been relexicalized in the local

Figure 1. Video still from Cape Town database, Gugulethu 2014, copyright with the author

youth language because of its popularity – it is commonly referred to as *ndida* which is a 'xhosa-lised' version of Adidas.

The group identify as rappers – some of the gestures are also international and linked to hip hop and rap performances in the USA. In figure 2, the gesturer appears to be recalling a classic east coast hip hop hand gesture with index finger and little finger extended and middle fingers crossed.

The group perform lyrics in both English and *vernac* – the township vernacular, a mix of isiXhosa and township slang which includes resources from the youth stylect commonly referred to as Tsotsitaal, involving relexicalization, metaphor, gesture and other extra-and para-linguistic resources (Mesthrie, Hurst-Harosh & Brookes 2021). Vernac is used in the music genre Spaza, a South African style of hip-hop music that originated in Gugulethu around the turn of the century. The style is named after spaza shops, the informal corner stores on the Cape flats, which often become hotspots for street-based socialisation practices such as gambling, gossiping and street rap performances.

The group demonstrate some of their rap in the recording, with lyrics and language which are English-influenced, reflecting a strong affect from hip hop from the USA.

Figure 2. Video still from Cape Town database, Gugulethu 2014, copyright with the author

Example 1

P2: *Nazo ezase kas'lam zingena nges'gezo xa kukho ezo i**screen** sam koqeq'amageza qha senditsho. **Music's in my head**, zindicingisa xa kubekwa inkuni phamb'ukwam zindibasela phezikwe**beat** madala ndikiller zonke eziMc zi**weak with all my dual proverbs, freestyling with this now***

'And those from my hood come in easily, there are those on my screen that are crazy. Music's in my head, I think when wood is placed in front of me, I'll burn the old beat on it and kill all the weak MCs with all my dual proverbs, freestyling with this now.'

In this passage (which is broadly rather than accurately translated due to the metaphors and poetic content which makes translation difficult) the rapper switches to English in several places, as well as referring to 'MC's, 'freestyling' and 'beats', all terminology present in international rap.

We can see in these images and texts the ways that international metapragmatic stereotypes are indexed and drawn on in local contexts. They are blended with local linguistic and musical practice via language and gesture, along with some cultural artefacts/brands that are indexically meaningful in this context of use.

Analysis: Interaction with cell phones

The second part of the analysis focuses on the presence and manipulation of, and interaction with, objects in peer group interactions

amongst a group of young men in KwaMashu, a township near Durban. This group were recorded taking part in small peer group gatherings, and were a group of friends who shared common interests and enjoyed hanging out together in the evenings, often whilst smoking and drinking, chatting about their acquaintances and relating stories about things that had happened to them and people they knew. The group regularly interacted with various physical material objects and artefacts, and often played music during their gatherings. The gatherings took place in various locations, including at their houses, at an outdoor gym, and in a sports field at night.

The group interacted with cell phones regularly during the recordings. They used their cell phones for various purposes – playing music, using the phone torch to see, sending messages, and sometimes taking calls (see figures 3 and 4).

One of the transcripts from this group featured one of the participants trying to fix an issue with his phone. It was slightly difficult from the transcripts to tell what the issue was, but it seemed that he was trying to change his profile picture on a local chat app called mxit. This led into an extended interaction with the rest of the group, and with one friend in particular who was trying to help him with the issue. Throughout the transcript they are using a stylect sometimes referred to as isiTsotsi, an isiZulu-based Tsotsitaal style used in the region.

Example 2

P3: *Zithini? Letha ng'fojele.*

'What's wrong? Bring it let me see.'

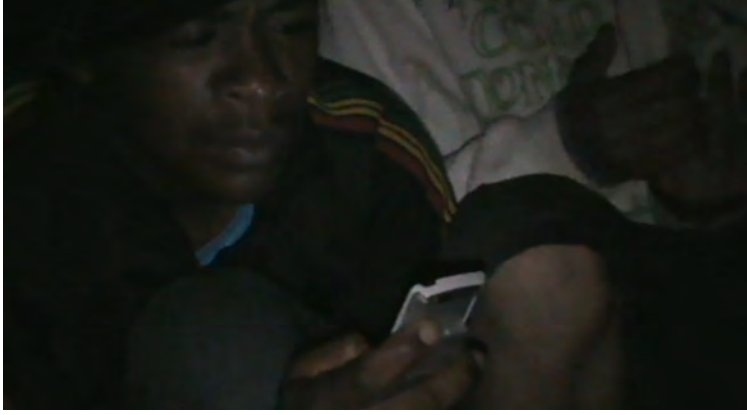


Figure 3: P4 holding his phone with his friend P2 behind him. Video still from Durban database, Kwamashu 2012, copyright with the author.

P4: *Yima ke vele vele le shamkain ilokhunjile? Iyafana na le enye? Oh hawu manje z'thini yavele ya phuma kanjalo.*

'Wait, wait so has this thing thingied? It's the same as the other one? Oh now what's wrong it just exited.'

P3: *Shayisisa ngfojele*

'Bring it lemme see.'

P4: *Isivele yaphuma kanjalo kade siy – siy dwadile. Angazi zishaphi.*

'It just exited like that. We did it, now I don't know what's happening.'

P2: *Uneskhwankhwalala*

'You have bad luck.'

P1: *Yizo lezo ndoda.*

'That's right man.'

P2: *Yingakho ngingas'shayi ngok'dwadla, uneskhwankhwalala*

'That's why I don't like doing this, you have bad luck.'

P4: *Iskhwankhwalala. Heh my man.*

'Bad luck hey my man.'

P2: *Umfana waseButterworth…*

'The guy from Butterworth…'

P4: *Hai listen here you sny, lalela la you sny*

'No listen here you idiot, listen here you idiot.'

Here P4 is struggling to change something on his phone, which it seems is the profile picture on social media app mxit. He says 'it just exited' meaning it closed without confirming that the settings were changed, which confuses him – 'we did it, now I don't know what's happening'. Also in this excerpt the other friends who are not directly involved in using the phone or trying to change the app settings, begin to make humorous comments about the interaction – they say that the phone owner P4 has 'bad luck', presumably with technology, and then imply that it's because he is from Butterworth – a rural town in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, in contrast to the urban township in Kwa-Zulu Natal where they stay. P3 then takes over the phone and tries to assist his friend as seen in figure 4.

In figure 4, P3 is holding P4's phone, and has his own phone balanced on his shoe, which he's using as a light as he rolls a cigarette. He thinks he has got to the root of the issue, but he doesn't solve the problem and the phone owner P4 retrieves it and continues battling with it.

Figure 4: P3 phone use. Video still from Durban database, Kwamashu 2012, copyright with the author.

Example 3

P4: *Kanti zishaphi ngalshamkayn? Ang'safundeli ke naying'duzula, Hai ke inthloso yam aksi u-chattel bhekha manje seng'phendulana nabantu la*

'But like what is wrong with this thing. I don't know what's happening, it's confusing me. My desire is not to chat, look now I have to be answering people.'

At this point in the discussion speaker P4 finds himself drawn into chats with people on the app, presumably because they can see he is online on the app and they are contacting him. So he's getting drawn into the function of the app as social media, while he is trying to achieve something else regarding setting the app up. At the same time he refers to the phone or app as an actor – 'it's confusing me' – in a sense giving the technology agency to act upon him. Meanwhile, P3 is checking his own phone – perhaps he's received a message or is checking his own settings to try to assist his friend. A couple of minutes later, P4 asks his friend P3 what to do again, and his friend tells him he'll do it for him as seen in Example 4. Then in Example 5 they start to work together on the different aspects of the tech that they are each more familiar with.

Example 4

P4: *Ngigeythe la kanjani, ngenzeni ngiphume kumxit straight?*

'How must I exit here, should I exit mxit straight?'

P3: *Aw'geytha ngiyakmarshisela nje ndoda.*

'Exit and I'll do it for you man.'

Example 5

P3: Ndoda ngishayisana nakho nge**filing system** yakho ndoda ewumfethu.

'Man I'm running into your filing system man bro.'

P4: *Eh my man ngik'tshelile nje ukuth'uydala kanjani? Ngena lapho ku**memory card** uyabona leyonto.*

'My man, should I just tell you how you do it? Just enter into the memory card, you see that thing.'

P3: *Ngikangakho.*

'I'm there.'

P4: *Sewukangakho? Marshela ku **camera folder**, haibo, ku **camera**. Kubhaliwe lapho kuleyo **file** leyo ye **memory card**. Mase ungenile ku**My Photos**, ungene ku **Camera** kuno 1 lapho, uvele uthi kuyo kuno shamkhayn le **file** ke engayqondi ukuthi ibhal'ukuthini inama-**number** amaningi.*

'You're there? Go to the camera folder, no, to camera. It's written there in that file, the one for the memory card.. When you're in My Photos go into camera and there's a 1 there and then enter there and there's a thingy in the file, I don't know what's written there it just has a lot of numbers.'

P3: ***Camera**? Hai.*

'Camera? No.'

P4: *Ethi ngik'dalele ngayo mfethu.*

'Let me do it for you bro.'

P3: *Ng'dalele. Aw'dale kube kdala ngishay isene, nesosha.*

'Do it for me. Do it, I would have run into it a while ago soldier.'

P4: *Nayising duzula ke name, oho nayi isi yenza. Uyaybona ke, nayi la ku**camera**, yabo? Ethi ngi enterishe, seng'phakathi ke.*

'Now it's even confusing me, oh now it's coming along. You see it now, it's here under camera, you see? Let me enter I'm in now.'

Here, P3 is attempting to help him but still doesn't manage it. He says he is 'running into your filing system' which he is presumably not familiar with, in terms of finding the relevant profile picture file. Then P4 instructs him how to navigate the filing system. But eventually he takes the phone back and does it himself. They swap one further time and P3 assists again and returns it. At this point it seems like P3 has fixed the technical issue of changing the picture, and P4 finds the correct file.

Between the two, in the course of the above exchange, they therefore figure out how to interact with the tech to resolve the issue. Meanwhile the other friends make meta-comments on the interaction between the phone owner and his technology, in terms of his bad luck and lack of technological savvy. The phone and apps, and the filing/operating system becomes not entirely passive in the interaction – it is active in 'confusing' speaker P4, so in a way it is an actor in the conversation. And the filing system

is something that P3 'runs into', therefore blocking him from resolving the issue. Note as well that many of the terms used for the technology are English, highlighted in bold in Example 5 above.

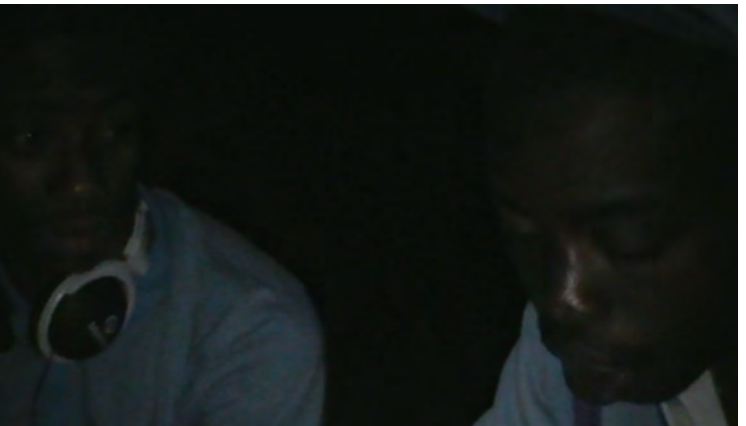
Importantly, the tech becomes an event that a friend assists with and working together the two friends are able to resolve the issue. The commonality of the tech, the cell phone itself, the app, the filing system, all the parts of the technology, are therefore something that are investigated and resolved or problem-solved locally.

In between this whole interaction the group is also chatting about other things – about girls, smoking, about a trip they're planning to a rural area, about a friend of theirs who is supposed to be coming, and an imaginary scenario involving the police. So the interaction with the material object is a part of the wider communicative event taking place, a part of the interaction and socialisation between the group members.

Analysis: Interaction with music

The next set of interactions with cultural artefacts involve interactions with music that take place during the peer group interactions. Many of the recordings involve music playing in the background, often as background noise or ambient sound, but in various ways this background breaks through into the conversations and becomes something that the friends comment on, interact with, sing along to, or reflect upon. Two group members are also seen wearing headphones, although it's not entirely clear where the music is coming from, it may be played via a cell phone.

Figure 5: P2 and P3, P2 is wearing a set of headphones round his neck. Video still from Durban database, Kwamashu 2012, copyright with the author.



Example 6

Song (in background behind talk):
Let's dance in style, let's dance for a while
Heaven can wait we're only watching the skies
Hoping for the best, but expecting the worst,
Are you gonna drop the

P4: *bomb or not?*
Let us die young or let us live forever

Song: We don't have the power but we never say never
Sitting in a sandpit, life is a short trip
The music's for the sad man
Forever young
I want to be forever young
Do you really want to live forever?

P4: *Forever, and ever*

In example 6, Speaker P4 is involved in an ongoing conversation with his friends, but also completes the lyrics at various key points in a song as it plays in the background. The song is a house remix of a song from the 1980s by Alphaville called 'Forever Young'. As the song begins to build towards the chorus, he first completes the line 'Are you gonna drop the

bomb on us', then leads into the second verse with 'Let us die young or let us live forever'. Finally, he completes the chorus which asks 'Do you really want to live forever' with the response, 'Forever, and ever'.

The lyrics resonate with the realities of the group as young men, and the catchy tune and appealing lyrics lead P4 to join in, in this way the song becomes woven into the conversation that the group is having through the speech of P4. These speakers are bi/multilingual – English is the second language in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, behind isiZulu which these men speak as their first language. The lyrics are notably in English while the majority of the conversation is in isiZulu.

There are a number of similar examples from the different participants throughout the data recordings. They often join in with the riffs or choruses. Different music in the background also sometimes seems to change the tone of the conversation – a more lively song may spark a more lively conversation, while a quiet song with lyrics may lead to silence or quiet talk.

Example 7

P1: *Hhayi ilempahla! Hhayi le ngoma mfethu, hhayi! Ngigcwele, ngigcwele!*

'No [shaking head in time with the music and exclaiming] this song! No [exclaiming again] this song man, hhayi [exclaiming]! I'm into it, I'm into it!'

P2: *Ngazile ukuthi izodlala lengoma!*

'I knew that this song would play!'

In this example, the song is appreciated as we see from the reception by speaker P1 who says that he is into it. He expresses how much he likes the song by shaking his head and exclaiming '*hayi* / 'No!', a negation which implies positive reception of the song. P2 then agrees with the evaluation by indicating he was expecting, or perhaps anticipating, the song.

In the next example the participant also signals an appreciation of the music that is being played. He refers to the DJ, presumably another of the participants, and compliments him that he 'knows his songs', referring to Gqom music, which is a music genre from Durban in Kwa-Zulu Natal, where this group lives.

Example 8

P1: *Awu DJ, dlala DJ, yazi leziyngoma zakho. Sengathi ngiyazishaya ngazo, ngiyazi shayo ngazo. Uphethe elinye igqom, ngigcwele! Ungadlala mfethu, uyakwazi ukuyibamba intsimbi? Heh?*

'Awu [exclaiming] DJ, dlala DJ, you know your songs [bobbing head]. I think I am into them, I am into them. You have another type of gqom [music], I am into it! Would you play man, do you know how to play steel? Heh?'

As the evening progresses the participants seem to get more into the music and increasingly start nodding their heads and singing along. The type of music they are listening to determines the interaction to an extent. Music that is more straightforwardly dance/house music and has repetitive beats is responded to with nodding and head shaking, while some

songs break through into anthem — like lyrics to which the participants sing along, such as in Example 6.

The participants also interact with various international artists, for example in example 9 with a song by Bob Marley, a global international artist. The music is cut off in the middle of a song by Marley, and in the silence, P1 completes the lyrics by adding the chorus line. Marley's work has a connection to Rastafarianism, and some of the participants in these recordings referred to one of their members as a Rasta. So the music also links to cultural or social identities in some way, although Marley is also widely known and appreciated beyond Rastafari culture/religion.

Example 9

Song: [No Woman No Cry playing in back ground behind talking]
I remember when-a we used to sit
In the government yard in Trenchtown
And then Georgie would make the fire lights. I seh
A log wood burning through the night…
[Music stops]

P1: *No woman no cry*

Elsewhere the friends refer to other specific artists, both local and international, that they like and would like to listen to. Sometimes they request a song by a specific artist, or sometimes they discuss them in response to the song that is already playing. In the examples below, the participants evaluate a local artist who is likely to win an upcoming music award; one participant requests a song by Wale, an American Rap artist, and they have a discussion about Tupac, reprising the international conspiracy theory that he never actually died.

Example 10

P1: *Yonke indawo kudlalwa lengoma.*

'Everywhere you go, they are playing this song.'

P2: *Hhayi uyayithatha iaward losisi. Plus ngigcewele mina. Yabona nje mfethu kuma SAMA Awards, uma enomineythiwe, gcwala.*

'No [in agreement] she is taking the award [music award such as the South African Music Awards, SAMA] this lady. Plus I really like her. You see man, at the SAMA Awards, if she is nominated, you will be into it.'

[Participants continue singing along to the song]

Example 11

P2: *Umphethe uWale?*

'Do you have a Wale song?'

Example 12

P1: *Tupac bitch, Tupac bitch*

[Speaker getting encouraged by the song playing]

P2: *Nizwile ukuthi u Tupac akafile? Nizwile?*

'Did you hear that Tupac is not dead? Did you hear?'

P4: *Ufile wabuye wavuka, angaphinde afe futhi*

'He died and came alive again; he can die again'

In this way, artists, both local and international, are weaved into the conversation and become a shared interest. The friends influence each other in what they enjoy and also in what they do not like. In this way they build their friendship community and individual and group identities, in dialogue with global and local cultural practices.

As we have seen, breaks in conversation are filled with background music, so the music becomes a participant or actor in the conversation. Speakers 'talk to' the music by singing along, signalling pleasure or appreciation. As the participants engage with the music and the language of the lyrics by moving or singing, they are engaging in a cultural practice. The singers themselves also become part of the interaction by being explicitly referred to – both local and international stars. The friends therefore grow a common portfolio of songs and artists they appreciate and share, and which indexically signals local and global social identifications. The lyrics also at times interact directly with the lived realities of the group – as in the case of 'forever young' and other songs which have resonances for the group.

Conclusions

The analysis above has considered examples of practices happening in the urban spaces of Africa amongst youthful multilingual peer groups. It has described the ways that global influences and local practices coincide in local contexts. It is clear that these interactional spaces are firmly connected to local contexts, but at the same time they are intersected by global flows, both material and cultural (Kanana & Hurst-Harosh 2020). This rich blend of resources allows youth to express South African modernities, group and individual identities in their linguistic, extra- and para-linguistic practices.

The article has considered extralinguistic features of peer group interaction – indexicality, and the use of objects and cultural artefacts, namely cell phones, music and brands, as pragmatic features of talk. The inclusion of objects and cultural artefacts in the analysis adds an additional layer to the description of talk in context. The analysis shows that youth draw on international metapragmatic stereotypes alongside global brands in their identity affiliations; that they interact with and manipulate global tech in local contexts; and that objects and cultural artefacts such as material technology and music become part of communicative events, even 'actors', in peer group settings. Examining extra linguistic features of youth talk can therefore tell us a great deal about the ways that youth create community and friendship within peer groups. As such the article has demonstrated how pragmatic approaches considering the broader context and extra-linguistic features of a communicative event can contribute to our understanding of youth practices.

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