



Global and Local Hybridity in African Youth Language Practices

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Abstract

This article investigates and describes youth language practices in Africa in the era of globalisation. It opens up debate over the impacts of globalisation on youth linguistic identities in Africa. Further, it suggests some aspects of youth participation in linguistic change in Africa and provides some examples of how youth linguistic cultures are practised in everyday interactions. The authors show the intersection of cultures in everyday discourse and in youth language vocabulary, and the incorporation of global (popular) culture in African youth language practices through bricolage to achieve hybridity. The ways in which the global intersects with the local and how the youth in Africa recontextualise the global and create local traditions of youth culture and identity are discussed and exemplified. The article concludes by arguing that, while global brands impact on youth language and practices, they are interpreted and applied locally; youth culture in Africa is enriched by global symbols and cultural artefacts and figures, not impoverished by them; the global does not displace the local, but rather complements it. The youth in Africa, in their spaces, are therefore active creators and contributors towards linguistic and cultural change and through this change they are agents of Africa's globalisation.

Keywords: Youth language, mobility, technology, globalisation

Résumé

Cet article examine et décrit les pratiques linguistiques des jeunes en Afrique à l'ère de la mondialisation. Il ouvre le débat sur les impacts de la mondialisation sur les identités linguistiques des jeunes en Afrique. En outre, il suggère certains aspects de la participation des jeunes au changement, linguistique en Afrique et fournit quelques exemples de la pratique des cultures

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linguistiques des jeunes dans leurs interactions quotidiennes. Les auteures montrent la rencontre des cultures dans le discours de tous les jours et dans le vocabulaire linguistique des jeunes, et l'incorporation de la culture mondiale (populaire) dans les pratiques linguistiques des jeunes africains, parvenant ainsi à l'hybridité. Les moyens par lesquels le mondial et le local se croisent et la manière dont les jeunes en Afrique recontextualisent le global et créent des traditions locales de culture et d'identité sont discutés et illustrés. L'article conclut que les marques mondiales ont bien un impact sur le langage et les pratiques des jeunes, mais elles sont interprétées et appliquées localement ; la culture des jeunes en Afrique est enrichie, et non appauvrie, par des symboles, objets et figures culturels mondiaux ; au lieu de remplacer le local, le global le complète plutôt. Les jeunes en Afrique, dans leurs espaces, sont donc des créateurs et des contributeurs actifs au changement linguistique et culturel et, à travers ce changement, sont des agents de la mondialisation de l'Afrique.

Mots-clés : langue des jeunes, mobilité, technologie, mondialisation

Introduction

Many African countries are highly multilingual, characterised by intense language contact, especially in major urban centres. The underlying reality of each multilingual context is complex, distinctive and changing (Gadellii 2004). Additionally, twenty-first century technological advancement in Africa, digital media, and the resultant accessibility of global popular culture and music have played a role in creating language contact situations where urban youth language practices thrive. The spread of communication technologies, e.g. personal cell phones and smart phones that provide access to the internet and social media, has provided African youth with access to global culture in unprecedented ways and thus created new and dynamic 'communities of practice' (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Community of practice is a term first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) and later defined by Eckert (2000) as a group of people who share a common mutual endeavour. This concept replaces the earlier model of speech community, which emphasised localised groups of people with homogeneous language norms. A CoP, on the other hand, is not necessarily a bounded or geographically based community, and the concept is thus useful when considering the mobile and unbounded nature of digital spaces, or far-reaching social groupings such as youth, linked by aspects of popular culture through digital means. The youth who are members of a CoP need not share a locality, ethnic identity or linguistic heritage. What binds them is a common interest or practice which can be supported by a virtual space as easily as a physical one.

The evolving linguistic space as a result of technology and globalisation has led to complex language practices across cities in Africa which are represented by

linguistic and generational attitudes and ideologies – [amongst] young, modern, urban youth who recognize and incorporate African traditional forms and languages, but blend them with a range of other resources, national, continental and global (Hurst-Harosh and Kanana Erastus 2018:5).

The African urban context has therefore been represented as a ‘melting pot’ of linguistic creativity influenced by globalisation (Kiessling and Mous 2004:333). This article investigates and describes youth language practices in Africa in the era of globalisation using examples from youth languages such as Sheng (Kenya), Tsotsitaal (South Africa), and Nouchi (Côte d’Ivoire) as well as from a corpus of natural conversation data from South Africa. The article outlines some of the trends of youth participation in linguistic change in Africa, as well as raising questions about the ways in which youth linguistic cultures are emerging in African urban spaces. We show the impact of the intersection of cultures in everyday youth discourse and youth language vocabulary, and the incorporation of global (popular) culture in African youth language practices, involving a process of bricolage to achieve hybridity. Kraidy (2005:148) says hybridity ‘entails that traces of other cultures exist in every culture’. We also highlight the recontextualisation of the global, and the emergence of local traditions of youth culture and identity.

The article argues that youth culture in Africa is enriched by global symbols and cultural artefacts and figures, not impoverished by them; and the global does not displace the local, but rather complements it through linguistic enrichment and cultural hybridity. Building on theories of hybridity and globalisation that have emerged in linguistics and cultural studies, the article focuses on understanding not just large-scale cultural and political processes such as globalisation that shape the lives of youth, but also the ways in which youth (linguistic) identities emerge through fine-grained interactional work and local linguistic practice.

African Youth Language Practices

The rapid and often expansive growth of African cities in the twenty-first century has given rise to a multiplicity of innovative and often transformative cultural practices, including the emergence of language varieties and practices which are primarily associated with the youth and urban life. African youth language (AYL) is a term that has commonly

been used to refer to phenomena of language mixing and styling in rapidly urbanising contexts of African cities. Some of the named and often well-researched examples include: Sheng (Kenya), Camfranglais (Cameroon), Nouchi (Côte d'Ivoire) and Tsotsitaal (South Africa). More recently, other varieties have come to the attention of researchers, such as Yabâcrane in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Nassenstein 2016), Luyaaye in Uganda (Namyalo 2017) and S'ncamtho in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu 2018). There is a great deal of debate over their status, as it is not clear that any of the described AYLs are significantly 'mixed' in terms of syntax. One avenue of recent research has been to make a distinction between urban varieties as described by, e.g., McLaughlin (2009), and specialised youth registers. For example, Mesthrie and Hurst (2013) argue that, linguistically, Tsotsitaal can be seen as a stylised register of the urban varieties of South African languages, taking the most urban form of a vernacular as its base language. Kiessling and Mous (2004) wrote the first comparative article to consider the similarities of a number of these phenomena – they focused on Nouchi (Côte d'Ivoire), Camfranglais (Cameroon), Indoubil (DRC), Tsotsitaal (South Africa), and Sheng (Kenya). They suggested that these urban codes may represent 'project identities' for young Africans in rapidly modernising cities. According to these authors, AYLs function as an interethnic bridge and 'it is the modernity and urban status of youth languages that dissociate them from ethnic associations' (Kiessling and Mous 2004:316). They argue that AYLs are part of a project of identity-building amongst African youth, and that these identities do not arise from traditional identities (characterised as being confined to rural settings, ethnic and linguistic minority communities, and 'emblematic of a way of life that is felt to be incompatible with modern challenges' (Kiessling and Mous (2004:330)), but rather the 'source material' for these new identities 'is taken from the totality of cultural features to be found in the urban setting of the large African cities' (Kiessling and Mous 2004:330).

This includes the influence of the 'information society' (Castells 1996) – the worldwide spread of information technology enabling access to youth culture such as hip hop and rap along with associated linguistic emblems (Kiessling and Mous 2004:331). These authors posit that the cultural communities of African urban youth are primarily construed as:

...reactions against the traditional way of life in a rural setting, dominated by patriarchal family structures and networks of obligations towards elders and the community, and as an identity-creating reaction towards globalization, seeking access to and partaking in the possibilities and prospects of globalization (Kiessling and Mous 2004:331–2).

Referring to the supposed rejection of ‘mother tongues’ in favour of AYLs, Kiessling and Mous (2004:333) suggest that these vernacular languages are representative of traditional ways of life, which is in ‘sharp contrast to the urban setting and to these youths’ general outlook on modern life’. The identity they wish to project is ‘the identity of an urban cosmopolitan, constituting the new identity of urban progressiveness’ (Kiessling and Mous 2004:335). At the same time, peri-urban and rural youth appear to be increasingly accessing and adopting these language practices, as borders become more porous and mobility and technology more widespread (Kanana Erastus and Hurst-Harosh 2019).

Whilst the function of youth languages as an inter-ethnic bridge is debatable in contexts where non-ethnically marked *linguae francae* exist, e.g., the urban varieties described by Mesthrie and Hurst (2013), or the case of Kiswahili in Kenya, it is not contested that the youth language serves a communicative function among the youth, a function that other ethnically marked languages cannot perform. From this perspective, we suggest that youth languages are not only markers of identity, but they also have a unifying function. However, we do not consider them as languages of wider communication, due to their reliance on the *linguae francae* to provide the morpho-syntactic frame. We suggest they can in fact be considered as a set of language resources and other stylistic resources which form a register or ‘stylect’ (Hurst 2008) rather than ‘languages’ per se (Hurst 2015:169).

Global Capitalism and Technology

Globalisation, seen as the increased integration of economic, social and governmental aspects of society worldwide, is not a new phenomenon. However, it has been facilitated by recent rapid advances in transportation and communication technologies. The resulting global economy is based on international trade, the movement of goods and people, as well as digital markets and global capital. Accompanied by liberalisation, globalisation has attracted critiques, including anti-corporatism and anti-consumerism, and particularly in relation to its impacts on the environment. There is also a critique of the uneven benefits for various countries and people globally, and advocacy for global justice and against rising social inequality. Within this framework, ‘African countries have benefited relatively less from the positive effects of globalization than other parts of the world in terms of economic growth and development’ (Nissanke and Thorbecke 2007). As a corollary to this, some cultural effects of globalisation, sometimes framed as ‘Americanisation’ are also seen as having negative impacts on African countries.

Kraidy (2005:148) suggests that hybridity is the cultural logic of globalisation because it offers ‘foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities’. On the other hand, Pieterse (2004) argues that an understanding of globalisation as hybridity counteracts views which see the process as homogenising, modernising, and westernising. The effects of globalisation are particularly pertinent for African youth in a continent where three-quarters of the population are under 35 years old. Yet, as intersected as they are by the global, to what extent are African youth and their linguistic practices being transformed by globalisation and, in particular, global capitalist consumer culture?

The concept of the network is central to the work of Castells (1996), in which the term ‘network society’ is used to describe the current technology-based system that enables networked actors to participate in a global economy. This system encompasses media, information systems, international institutions and states, and it is driven by an economic logic based on what is valuable. A side-effect of this logic in Castells is that there are insiders and outsiders to this economy; those who are valuable and those that are not; while urban centres may be networked into the economy, rural areas are often excluded, remaining part of a ‘basic, survival economy’, yet still impacted by the global economic system, perhaps providing poorly-compensated raw materials or agricultural produce. Under-resourced regions such as large areas of sub-Saharan Africa are among the most excluded. This leads to the ‘digital divide’ between those with technological capacity, and those without it.

The matter of technological capacity can be extended to linguistic studies. Deumert (2015:562) argues that communication using digital media is only tenable if people have access to the material artefacts such as hardware and software which make virtual interactions possible. While defining digital communication, Deumert 2015:563 says:

...digital participation is not merely about speaking/writing “in the right way,” but about being able to speak/write at all. That is, having access to digital technology in order to communicate with others.

She further describes the digital divide in the world today noting that the number of *have-nots* is dropping significantly. She writes:

The inequality of access to digital artifacts is commonly referred to as the *digital divide*: some people in the world have ample access to the internet and other digital media (such as the phones, tablets, laptops, the haves), others

have some access (the *have-less*) and even a shrinking proportion of the world's population have none (the *have-nots*) (Deumert 2015:563).

The spread of communications technologies, particularly personal cell phones and smart phones that provide access to the internet and social media, has provided African users with access to global culture in unprecedented ways, as well as providing businesses with new markets and new ways of engaging youth populations in consumer products.

A 2017 Pew Research Center study (Silver and Johnson 2018) found that approximately 91 per cent of South African adults own mobile phones, with 51 per cent of adults owning smartphones, while the corresponding figures for Kenya were 80 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. Companies are competing for a share of a domestic market which has become a basic household expense for the majority of people.

In Kenya today, for example, telecommunication companies are competing to provide cheaper internet bundles which can also be purchased on credit, leading to wider access. They offer a range of tariffs to cater for the needs of all their users. Users can purchase internet bundles for a day, a week, a month, etc. For example, the Safaricom advertising slogan *okoa jahazi* ('save a [capsizing] boat') refers to a service that enables a user to request an airtime 'bailout' without having to pay for it immediately, and the amount is deducted the next time the user purchases airtime. This is a strategy to ensure mobile phone users are not disconnected from the network at any time. Such strategies have been adopted by other service providers as they compete for the available market space. This technological access means that African youth, now more than ever, can be influenced by global trends, businesses and products, as well as global and technologically based forms of communication and language itself.

What does this increased access to technology and global culture mean in terms of linguistic practice, new CoPs, pop culture and consumerist culture amongst African youth? Incorporation of global culture is often explained in the AYL literature as a desire by youth to connect to a 'modern' lifestyle. As Bogopa (1996:113) explains,

[The urban youth] like to live a life which is modern in orientation, and their thinking as well as their lifestyle is based on modern technology; for example the clothes and the hairstyle they wear and the music they play and so on.

The following analysis seeks to investigate some of the ways in which the global is involved in local youth practices, in interactional discursive practices, and in digital contexts.

Study Data on Global-Local Discourses

The data for this article is drawn from an ongoing African youth language project which involved a network of researchers around the continent collecting data such as audio and video recordings of natural conversations, public data such as music lyrics and advertising, and social media data such as posts from Facebook groups and WhatsApp conversations. A distinction needs to be made between these different types of data – for example, recorded conversations provide evidence of actual practice, while Facebook groups may showcase stylised written forms of youth language.

The specific data used here are, firstly, recordings of a series of conversations between a group of young men in a township called KwaMashu, just outside Durban, in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. The young men were approximately 18 to 20 years old, and the social context was a peer group of six friends who regularly gathered in the evening at various venues to smoke and drink. The first two examples below come from a conversation between three members of this KZN friendship group and took place in one of their houses. The analysis in this case focuses on the discourses and themes which arise during the conversation, highlighting those which incorporate aspects of global popular culture.

The Kenyan Kiswahili data presented in Example 3, which is used to understand the implications of the global digital space and its impact on local youth practices, was collected through a social network approach ('a friend of a friend'). This approach allowed us to gain access to various social media sites and then purposefully select social interactions on various platforms with a bearing on language and identity, language and globalisation, the materiality of digital interactions, the creativity this material enables, and the ways in which the technological medium reshapes interaction and questions of identity.

Lexical data was gathered through various public sources, including previous publications, as well as the corpuses and sources described above.

Example 1: Skinny Jeans and Sneakers (KZN, South Africa)

- M3: *Heh mfethu indaba zo skinny.*
'Eh bra these things about skinny jeans.'
- M1: *Ziyabhedha mfethu.*
'They suck bro.'
- M3: *Ukhu bone mase kuvela abo Snoop.*
'Have you seen people like Snoop and them.'
- M1: *Angiy'phakamiseli leyo shandis ke mina. Iskinny. iskinny jean mfethu.*
'I don't raise that thing bra. Skinnies, skinny jeans bro.'

- M3: *Sek'khone ney'bovu mfethu kodwa hai.*
'Have you seen they even have red ones bro.'
- M2: *Kodwa mina mfethu. Mhlampe photoshoot Umak'hiwa mhlampe kumele uw'fakuskinny uk'thath' isthombe yinto engingayenza.*
'But like for me bro. Maybe like for photoshoots and stuff if they say maybe I should wear skinnies to take pictures I could do that.'
- M3: *Yah uyfake yah.*
'Yes and wear them yah.'
- M2: *Ngiyfake ng'that' isthombe bese ngiyaw'khipha.*
'Yes and wear it and take pictures then I can take it off.'
- M1: *Ehe uw'khiphe.*
'Yes then take them off.'
- M3: *Bakhaphun'oskinny besuzofika uwaqokile uthi hai bafethu.*
'Like imagine wearing skinnies and then you come here wearing them and say "hey guys".'
- M1: *Yonke lento leyo. Uy'thathe uy'bondelane la eceleni.*
'All that bro. And take it and wear it here on the sides.'
- M3: *I-sneaker sona ke mfethu ngisaqoka kodwa.*
'But I could wear sneakers though.'
- M2: *Hai mina ngasfaka. Nfaki-straight leg ne sneaker.*
'Yes, I'd wear them. And wear like a straight leg with sneakers.'
- M3: *I-sneakers eqaqile. Ngeke ngiyqoke lez ezbedhayo oSupra nobani bani.*
'A sneaker that's on point. I won't wear these ones that don't make sense like your Supras and stuff.'
- M1: *O-bhedha bhedha.*
'The sucky ones.'
- M3: *Ngeke ngisaqoke futh eseNike. Ngigaqoke'sendida.*
'I won't even wear a Nike sneaker. I'd wear an Adidas one.'

In the example above, the speakers are discussing skinny jeans (snugly fitting jeans which taper narrowly at the ankle), and evaluating them in use by international US rap artist Snoop Dogg, who they claim wears red ones. The speakers are not impressed by skinny jeans. One of the speakers (M2) is involved in making music and currently about to submit a demonstration recording, and they are discussing whether he would wear skinny jeans if he were asked to go for a photoshoot. Their evaluation is that skinny jeans *bhedha* 'suck' and would not be acceptable in their local context (M3: *bakhaphun'oskinny besuzofika uwaqokile uthi hai bafethu* 'Like imagine wearing skinnies and then you come here wearing them say "hey guys"').

This excerpt shows how international artists and artefacts from global popular culture permeate youth discourse, and how they are evaluated in interactions that take place within local contexts amongst peers. It is also noteworthy that while some of the consumer items and brands being discussed are given in English (straight-leg, skinny jean, sneaker, Supra and Nike), the most popular brand, and the only brand that these speakers evaluate positively – Adidas – has been relexicalised as *indida* in the youth language. In general, though, both Example 1 and Example 2 are quite light in youth slang, only using a few terms associated with the local Tsotsitaal style (called isiTsotsi in KZN) – *shandis* ‘thing’; *mfethu/ bafethu* ‘bro/ guys’; *bheda* ‘suck/ bad’; and *indida* ‘Adidas’. While in other recordings from the corpus these speakers use a much more pronounced slang style, the mild use here is likely due to the topic of discussion, context, and interlocutors (see Hurst-Harosh 2020 for a full discussion of youth stylelects and their use in different contexts, topics, and styles).

Later in their discussion, the same speakers evaluate international brands of headphones including Skull (Candy), Bullet, and Dr Dre. The Dr Dre earphones are said to be very expensive and this leads into a discussion about why America has so much money, in Example 2.

Example 2: Natural Resources (KZN, South Africa)

- M2: *Nase America bebenganawo ama-natural resources.*
‘Even in America they didn’t have natural resources.’
- M3: *Bas overpowera la yabo.*
‘They just overpowered us, you see.’
- M2: *Sebashaya nango moba ngalena mfethu.*
‘They even have sugar cane that side now bro.’
- M1: *Yizwa nje.*
‘Just hear that.’
- M3: *Yini leyo!*
‘What is that!’
- M2: *Zincungwe lan’izinto.*
‘They were taken from here these things.’
- M3: *Yazi ukuthi lakulokhuzwa khona mhlampe ku... ku kuu... la kuphuma khon’uRonaldinho?*
‘You know where they have things at like perhaps in.. in... where Ronaldinho came from?’
- M1: *Brazil.*
‘Brazil.’
- M3: *Ko Brazil, khona la kh’pethe khona omobhanana.*
‘In Brazil there’s a place where they have lots of bananas.’

- M2: *Obhanana bakhona lapho?*
‘They have bananas there?’
- M1: *La kufresh.*
‘Where they are comfortable.’
- M3: *Gcwelobanana lapho.*
‘They have a lot of bananas there.’
- M1: *Into zakhona ey fresh.*
‘Things there that are fresh.’
- M3: *Yabona noArgentina. Kodwa laph’ eAmerica, laphaya kuzomele nje.*
‘You see like Argentina and those places. But in America, it’s just dry there.’
- M1: *Ak’kho lutho nje.*
‘There’s nothing.’
- M3: *Yin’etholakala laphayana?*
‘What do you get there.’
- M2: *Khhephi?*
‘Where?’
- M3: *EAmerica nje mfethu. Inteyiresource yakhona.*
‘In America bro. Like something that is their resource.’
- M2: *Hai kuyabhedh eAmerica.*
‘No it sucks in America.’
- M3: *Neynyoni azikho njee. Yinekhona? Is’lwane? Khona kodw’obhubesi bafethu eAmerica? Khona bafethu iy’lwane?*
‘They don’t even have birds. What is there? Animals? Do they even have like lions there guys? Do they have animals?’
- M1: *Hai zizwakele for sure zizwakele.*
‘No there are I’m sure there are.’
- M3: *Akuyifaneli ilwane laphayana.*
‘It doesn’t look suited for animals there.’

The discussion develops around the topic of natural resources. The speakers accuse other countries, such as America (referring to the USA), of taking African natural resources, and suggest that the USA does not have resources of its own. Their knowledge of the world is framed by local resources such as sugar cane and bananas, which are seen as having been transplanted from Africa to the Americas (sugarcane and bananas are both grown in KZN, although they are native to southeast Asia). Their knowledge of Brazil is framed by a popular Brazilian soccer player, Ronaldinho. Meanwhile, America is seen as dry and barren of resources, not even having animals. They mention lions specifically, an animal historically present in the KZN region, although today confined to wildlife reserves.

We see in these interactions how the global discursively becomes part of everyday conversations through partial knowledges of other places, perhaps gathered through film, television, and the internet. The global, including pop culture and consumer brands, is discursively constituted and simultaneously frames and is framed by local experiences and knowledge.

Meanwhile, Example 3 provides evidence from a WhatsApp group to highlight the affordance of global digital spaces for youth, and the ways in which African youth are ‘networked’ and able to participate in the global economy through online platforms and digital access.

Example 3: Capital Accumulation (Kenya)

Mahendeko yakutumia simu kuhenda bye benki yahenda rahisi sana. Ami natumia Facebook kubula ne bank yangu. Hata Safaricom unaipata naino. Eevisanga vyangu naviguza phanopha. Sijo lachwebatini.

‘Online banking by use of (cell) phones has become very easy. I use Facebook to talk to my bank. Even Safaricom can be reached through this [Facebook or cell phone]. I sell my products here [online]. Don’t be left out.’

The WhatsApp group is called *RealPokomo* which encourages its members to preserve their mother tongue by using it in online spaces to communicate their development agenda to their politically elected leaders. (Pokomo is a Kenyan Bantu language in group E71, according to Guthrie’s classification (1967–71).) In this particular post, however, the discourse is emphasising to its youthful membership the value of modern technology (cell phones, Facebook, online banking and marketing) for entrepreneurs. The messenger is encouraging other youth to take advantage of the changing trends in business by tapping into the virtual marketplace in order to reap maximum benefits. In this view, technological media are seen as a way of earning revenue, and also a means of being locally and globally connected or ‘networked’ through virtual means. Global platforms such as Facebook are therefore promoted in discourse and seen to have a positive impact on youth identities and their ability to accumulate capital.

The examples in this section have shown how the global becomes part of youth discourse in peer group talk and digital discussions. The global informs youths’ conceptualisations of local style and popular culture, local and national socio-economic standing, economic participation, and local technological practices.

The Relative Influence of Global and Local on Lexicon

Global culture has of course historically influenced youth language. For example, through analysis of the lexicon of South African Tsotsitaal over time, we can see how global terms enter the lexicon. Tsotsitaal lexical items such as *Clark Gable* meaning ‘aggression, virility and sex appeal’, or *Humphrey Bogarde* meaning ‘situations in which young men displayed physical violence and aggression’ (Molamu 2003) relate to figures from global rather than local popular culture and were popular in previous peer group generations (stemming from the 1940s and 1950s when Tsotsitaal first emerged in the townships surrounding Johannesburg). There was a strong influence from American movies in the development of Tsotsitaal (Hurst 2009). This kind of influence is also seen in the case of Indoubill, a youth language in the DRC, and a forerunner of Lingala ba Bayankee (Nassenstein forthcoming). Nassenstein (from Gondola 2009) outlines how the youth that spawned Indoubill, the *Bills* (possibly related to Buffalo Bill) were described as ‘tropical cowboys’ and reappropriated the aesthetic from images in wild west movies of the time. The subsequent term Lingala ya Bayankee is also drawn from American popular culture, meaning ‘the Yankees’ Lingala’ (Nassenstein forthcoming). International brands have also played a role in AYL lexicons, for example *Dobbs* was an old Tsotsitaal lexical item meaning head or brain and was derived from a hat brand. Generationally-linked terms may fall out of use, no longer being relevant for contemporary youth, or they may become conventionalised and enter the urban vernacular. Meanwhile, new terms are innovated relating to contemporary aspects of popular culture, such as the more recent South African slang terms *iPod* – ‘a slender girl’ and *Johnnie Walker* – ‘someone who doesn’t have a car’ (Hurst-Harosh and Kanana Erastus 2020).

US culture is the most dominant pop cultural export into Kenya. A striking feature is its effect on Kenyan social media urban language practices. Words like *yolo* (acronym for ‘you only live once’), *krump* (a kind of street dance characterised by high-energy body movement), *bootylicious* (description of a woman with huge buttocks), *diss* (make fun of someone, usually to belittle them), *twerk* (the vigorous hip movements and squatting stances seen in modern music videos), *bling* (jewellery, e.g., silver or gold chains and earrings worn to attract attention – a culture started by male international pop music celebrities to signify wealth and attractiveness), *bad an bougie* (a show of means and extravagance and usually used to refer to a woman with expensive taste or a man who spends time and money on classy women), *sophistichet* (a sophisticated and well-educated person mostly eloquent in speech and conversant with modern trends in fashion, music, and slang;

stylish but also shows some ghetto and streetwise mannerisms – originally heard in international music videos) have found their way to Kenyan urban youth lingo via cable television and other digital media. Other semiotic practices are influenced by African American reality stars like Tamar Braxton (Braxton Values), and Tammy Roman (Bonnet Chronicles on YouTube) who have invented their own vocabulary and conversational mannerisms that are characterised by loud mouth smacking, finger snapping and ‘stare downs’. Use of expressions like *you are on fleek* in Kenyan urban lingo (originally from US videos) means ‘you look good, you are beautiful or well dressed’. Here, we see an intersection of cultures in the vocabulary through the incorporation of global (pop) culture in African youth language practices.

Elsewhere, Boutin and Dodo (2018:63) present the term *liverpool* from Nouchi, which refers to a 1,000 West African CFA franc banknote. The banknote is red, and the allusion is to the red colour of the jersey of the Liverpool Premier League Football team in the UK (see also Waliaula 2018 on European football fandom in Kenya). They also mention the term *gunter* meaning ‘wealthy’, drawn from the name of the wealthy German art collector Gunter Sachs (Boutin and Dodo 2018:64). Oloruntoba-Oju describes hybridity, glocality and the incorporation of Americanisms, transnationality and continental references in Nigerian hip hop music, and argues that youth language in Nigeria is a hybrid form and ‘reflects both local and global (transnational and transcultural) coding’ (Oloruntoba-Oju 2018:198).

An alternative description comes from Williams (2017) who describes the ways that youth in Cape Town’s hip hop culture ‘remix multilingualism’ as they combine cultural practices and symbols in new ways, including drawing on local and global language resources. His notion of remixing multilingualism perhaps provides us with an alternative to ‘hybridity’, which is sometimes critiqued for its assumption of the prior existence of whole cultures, as well as its historical connections to racial theory.

Despite such descriptions, global influences on youth languages nevertheless remain slight – lexical coinages are often very locally contextualised (Hurst 2009). As Oloruntoba-Oju (2018:198) argues, AYL ‘expresses a linguistic and rhetorical dominance in favour of indigenous codes’. A number of youth language terms (metaphors) with local derivations from South Africa, Kenya and Côte d’Ivoire are presented in Table 1. See also Hurst-Harosh and Kanana Erastus (2020) for further examples of metaphors as mini-narratives, where we can see a case for how local events have the largest impact on youth language terminology development.

Table 1: Youth language terms from South Africa, Kenya and Côte d’Ivoire derived from local events or figures

Term	Country	Meaning	Derivation
<i>Kelly Khumalo</i>	South Africa	Claiming to be a virgin when you are not one	Kelly Khumalo is an award-winning kwaito star who became famous during the mid-2000s, but who was in the news towards the end of the decade primarily for stories relating to her personal life, including relationships and addiction.
<i>Khanyi Mbau</i>	South Africa	Gold digger	Khanyi Mbau is a South African actress who dated a much older and wealthy businessman.
<i>Niko maji</i>	Kenya	I am wet, (drunk)	Popularised by a rapper in his song KERORO (sour).
<i>Ulijifanya mamba</i>	Kenya	Pretending to be a crocodile	From a rap song. The singer is deriding a woman he is leaving; she pretends to be too tough to be hurt.
<i>M-pigs/ MaMpigs</i>	Kenya	The corrupt Kenyan government	Kenyan activists once painted pigs red and let them loose in the parliament buildings in a symbolic protest. Pigs are thought of as dirty and they were used in the protest to metaphorically refer to the greed and corruption of Kenyan politicians. Other terms for the corrupt government include: <i>System ya majambazi</i> (a system of thieves), and the Mafia.
<i>Gbagbo/ Gbagboter</i>	Côte d’Ivoire	‘small towel’/ ‘walk lengthily’	Laurent Koudou Gbagbo, former Côte d’Ivoire head of state, used to hang a towel around his neck when he was part of the opposition and leading peaceful protest marches (Boutin and Dodo 2018: 63).
<i>Kouamé Adigri</i>	Côte d’Ivoire	‘articulated bus’	Named after the Ivoirian accordion player Kouamé Adigri – as the articulated joint of the bus looks like an accordion (Boutin & Dodo 2018: 64).

Hybridity in Youth Linguistic Practices

While a popular term from a current international song or a popular global meme may have an impact, these things are often re-interpreted locally, and a brand may develop its own hybridised meaning in a local context. In South Africa, brands like Converse All Stars sneakers have come to represent township style; while the BMW325iS car is a symbol of township life as young people engage in competitions involving controlled skids in these cars in local informal events. Other terms for this car are *gusheshe* ‘panty dropper’ (relating to their supposed effect on women) and *Themba la magomusha* ‘hope of the township’ (relating to their speed) (see Kouassi and Hurst-Harosh 2018).

Another example is Carvela, an Italian shoe that has become central to a number of evolving styles in South Africa from as early as the 1940s. The following post from a Facebook group Ikasi Ringas-School of Tsotsi Taal describes the shoe and asks for comments from other group members regarding what they call it in their local neighbourhood:

Example 4: Carvela Shoes

Ikasi Ringas-School of Tsotsi Taal: Sho bafwethu! This is a shoe made famous by ama grootman nabo my sister ema kasi la emzansi, way before ama ‘Skhothane’ nama ‘Pex-ara’, the name of the shoe is ‘Carvela’ but tina ema kasi have given this legendary shoe all sorts of names eg. Sporo. What do other kasi’s call it?

‘Hi friends! This is a shoe made famous by our elders my sister in South African townships, way before the ‘Skhothane’ or ‘Pex-ara’ [two subcultural groupings that wear these shoes], the name of the shoe is ‘Carvela’ but people in the townships have given this legendary shoe all sorts of names eg. *Sporo*. What do other townships call it?’

Responses include derivations of the name such as *caracara*, *cavava*, *caravela* or *vela*, *iskaranova*, *capital C*, *CV*, *kit kat*, *ikati* or *icat*. It is also known as *two-five*, *2-step*, *3-step*, or *4-step*, *nkomo* ‘cow’ or *nkomo nkomo*, *sporo* (unknown), *ikhokho* ‘football shoe’, *tweba* ‘mouse’ or *topo* ‘hills’.

Within digital interaction spaces such as Examples 4 and 5, the reappropriation of cultural artefacts leads to hybrid African modernities or identities that cannot be claimed as fully local or fully global. In Example 5, the local context in Kenya is intersected by global brands (iPhone), language (such as the English borrowing ‘takes photo eating...with an iPhone no captions’), cultural artefacts (pizza) and the social media platform itself. And yet this event is contextualised to the local in that the image posted with the caption becomes representative of a local event, includes Swahili and is hashtagged #TeamDarkSkin as well as the global #WCW (Women Crush Wednesday).

In this post, the writer of the text is responding to local events and while borrowing from multiculturalism and global fabric shows how youth culture in Kenya is enriched by global symbols and figures.

Example 5: iPhone No Captions

Sti [sic] takes photo eating Githeri with an Iphone no captions yaani hatuumbui alafu mbuzi ingine inapelekuwa galitos siku moja [h]ata labda mlienda kujua bei ya pizza ama una order pizza yeyote juu haujui majina umetusumbua [h] uku hata hatuwezi pumua =Team DarkSkin =WCW

‘STL [a Kenyan-Norwegian celebrity] takes a photo eating *Githeri* [a local dish made of boiled maize and beans] with an iPhone no captions that is [to say] she does not bother [disturb] us, then another goat [person] is taken to Galitos [a South African franchise] one day, even though perhaps you went to find out the cost of pizza or you order any pizza because you do not know the names, you have disturbed us here until we cannot breathe [we cannot get a break from the many posts on social media] =TeamDark Skin =WCW’

The text in Example 5 demonstrates a current trend among youth where every activity is documented on social media through posting photos and status updates. It contrasts what it frames as the simplicity of a global icon (the iPhone) and a local celebrity (STL) with the affected appropriation of affluence by the urban youth. Note the use of the word *mbuzi* ‘goat’ and the expression *hata hatuwezi pumua* ‘we cannot breathe’ [we cannot get a break from the many posts on social media] which are used metaphorically and represent mini-narratives that describe how the urban youth attempt to appropriate a certain lifestyle.

Hatuwezi pumua and *mbuzi* are used to describe people who show off on social media for everything new and fancy that they buy, whether it is a car, designer shoes, sunglasses etc. They are described as goats here, perhaps ironically – goats are usually considered witty, curious and independent, as opposed to sheep which tend to be considered aloof and foolish. Yet here the person is mocked for bragging and viewed as foolish because she is affecting affluence through visiting a South African franchise.

What we mean by mini-narratives is that these metaphorical expressions are not just expressive words – there are mini-stories behind these expressions which can only be understood in the local context. The global terms, brands and artefacts such as iPhone, pizza, Galitos, and the social media platform jargon such as #hashtags do not replace the local and contextualised terms such as *mbuzi*, *githeri*, etc., but complement and reinforce the message being communicated. In fact, this hybridity and appropriation leads to linguistic enrichment.

Hurst-Harosh and Kanana Erastus (2018:2) submit:

The domains of popular culture (music, movies, performance), consumerism (advertising, style and fashions) and social media are currently interacting and cross-influencing in extremely interesting ways in the African context, not least in terms of language.

It therefore is not simply that cultural diversity is being undermined in the sense of 'Americanisation'. Rather, (urban) cultures are being reconfigured, bricolaged, and hybridised in a two-way process as youth draw on all their resources, and as global and local brands seek to attract this demographic.

We must still acknowledge that physical and often social mobility remain curtailed by the economic disempowerment of African youth. However, technology can enable some level of mobility as local youth engage with their peers and gain access to global networks through mobile technologies. This permits an increased dialogue between Africa and elsewhere, although inequalities remain in terms of who can speak and who is heard. Yet African youth are part of the conversation as never before, and certainly bring what they connect with in the wider world into their own local contexts.

Conclusion

This article has surfaced the ways in which the global intersects with the local and is recontextualised for local contexts. While global brands impact on youth language and practices, they are interpreted and applied locally; youth culture in Africa is enriched by global symbols, cultural artefacts and figures, rather than impoverished by them; the global does not displace the local but rather complements it.

In youth practices there is an evident desire for international brands, music etc., as a symbol of cosmopolitanism or a demonstration of being up to date with the latest trends. Yet youth language is often actually very locally contextualised in its lexicon and practices. There is therefore a productive impact from international popular culture as youth adopt new terms and practices, but then innovate and contextualise them locally, both discursively and lexically in generationally relevant slang lexicon.

As a result of growth in communication technology in Africa, globalisation has aided and has had an impact on the use of youth languages. The youth in Africa, who are the main consumers of technology and technologically aided modes of communication, are active innovators in globalised linguistic space, both online and within local peer groups, commonly drawing from the wider linguistic repertoires available through globalised channels. They use language dynamically and build and develop vocabulary and styles through a complex blend of local and popular global culture and trends. Accordingly, the urban

youth in Africa are sophisticated participants; not victims of global change, but agents of globalisation. African youth continue to be active contributors to linguistic change, both locally and globally.

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