

The role of metaphor in the recontextualisation of global to local in African youth language (practices)

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This paper aims to present youth language research in Africa spanning over a period of ten years. The multi-sited research collaboration aimed to understand the youth language practices in Africa, their characteristics and the role African languages, media, technology and globalisation play in the growth of these youth languages. The paper describes youth languages in the era of globalisation and the aspects of youth participation in linguistic change in Africa. It provides some examples of how youth linguistic cultures are practiced in everyday interactions. It also shows ways in which global cultures intersect with the local and how the youth in Africa recontextualise the global and create local traditions of youth culture. In this recontextualisation, metaphor plays a key role. In this paper, metaphors are viewed as mini-narratives that index the particular culturally- and contextually-shared experiences of a generation of young people, and for this reason tend to be specific to a peer group. We therefore maintain that the term 'youth language' is useful because youth continue to drive the relexicalization process, which is the core of phenomena such as Sheng and tsotsitaal.

Drawing on data from a comparative database, the analysis considers aspects such as generational narratives, the transition of a metaphor from a generational peer group context into a conventionalised metaphor, as well as multiple salience and ambiguity. We illustrate the use of metaphor in youth language and its relationship to popular culture, to make the case that youth language involves the innovation of new terms from popular culture. Examples for this talk will be drawn from Sheng (Kenya) and Tsotsitaal (South Africa)