

Negotiating culture, identity and language through the ‘Keshey’ verlan: the perspectives of the youth in Kumasi

The Keshey verlan; best described as a salad of different languages is fast gaining grounds among Senior High School students in Kumasi, Ghana. Keshey is a coded street ‘language’ popularised by the Asaka Boys and other Ghanaian musicians. This study set out to investigate the shift in preference to speaking Keshey by the youth in Kumasi instead of pidgin English normally spoken by the youth in Ghana as well as the formation of words of this verlan and the meaning non-initiates get from it. To understand the strategies the youth adopt while speaking ‘Keshey’ in a multilingual setup such as school campuses, students from selected schools in Kumasi were observed, audiotaped and interviewed through focus groups. Preliminary findings from the data analysed show, among others that, ‘Keshey’ is a peer-group language formed from already established languages in Ghana which requires a lot of alertness to deduce its meaning when spoken, and symbolises a ‘passport’ to youthful identity and membership of the perceived new ‘Kumerica’(Kumasi-American)’ society, the youth of Kumasi hope to create. This research has implications for both academia and researchers interested in language development.

Key words: Culture, Keshey, Kumasi, Peer-group language, Pidgin English, Verlan, Youth identity