

***African Youth Language: New Media, Performance Arts
and Sociolinguistic Development***
Ellen Hurst-Harosh and Fridah Kanana Erastus (eds) (2019)

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The dynamics of language is often grasped in the complexities of human, structural and ideational interfaces that appropriate language and everyday life's social interactions into discourses, agencies and mechanisms that serve as a catalyst for shaping the present, and at times, offers roadmaps for the future. The essays in *African Youth Language: New Media, Performance Arts and Sociolinguistic Development*, edited by Ellen Hurst-Harosh and Fridah Kanana Erastus, aptly convey this complexity. Different contributors to this volume explore African youth language and the new media in local context, and simultaneously engage the ways in which they are being influenced in global perspective. The mode of social exchange between language and new media in these essays is adequately designed to conquer space and transform its nature (Berland, 1988). The editors have provided timely and crucial interventions on the politics of language use, identity formation, social change and meaning-making, youth engagement and new media interactions.

Hurst-Harosh and Kanana define African youth language practice as 'a phrase that has come to refer to the linguistic practices of young Africans across the continent which step away from "standard" or "traditional" language and often incorporate mixing, borrowings, slang and neologism' (p. 2). The editors intend

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this volume to convey ground-breaking contributions on evolving trends in language use on social media, music and performative arts across Africa, highlighting the impacts of youth creative energies and versatility in the shifting globalized contexts. These essays navigate ‘networks of representations, identities, and differences within the multiple layers of [African’s] social system’ to maintain self-conscious experiences of structural and historical processes of change in linguistic ecology, performative logic and new media culture (Boluwaduro, 2018:51). Covering a wide range of cultural contexts, the volume authenticates determinations of young Africans in engaging new media technologies as sites of negotiating language change and development in a bid to push the frontiers of African indigenous performing arts, music and other oral cultural repertoires from multicultural spatiality. Hurst-Harosh and Kanana hope that, eventually, the analyses, methodologies and theoretical engagements offered in this volume will facilitate further conversations and debates on issues that impact on youth language development and social change.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first section, ‘Social and Advertising Media’, includes six chapters, each of which deals with African youth language practices in different contexts, demonstrating youth creativity in negotiating linguistic and communicative complexities of everyday life through various media. These chapters explore ‘the use and impact of youth languages in social media spaces across the continent’ (p. 6) and ‘current research into print media, and linguistic landscapes in African’s intersected urban centers’ (p. 7). Fridah Erastus and Hilda Kebeya, for instance, scrutinize the multiple functions and social engagements of urban and youth language in the new media (Chapter 2) using *Sheng*, a Kenyan youth colloquial language, as a ‘symbol of youth autonomy and creativity’ to facilitate communicative and social networks among their immediate linguistic and virtual communities as a way of identity construction (p. 47). In an essay on the updating of Nouchi lexicon and expressions, Akissi Boutin and Jean-Claude Dodo (Chapter 3) make a notable contribution to facilitate understanding of the contextualization and interpretation of the lexicon of Nouchi, an African (urban) youth language in Côte d’Ivoire as well as its socio-cultural impact, through various media, in engendering communal interconnection, innovative identity and novel ethics. For Boutin and Dodo, ‘Nouchi has become a key factor of integration into current news and youth culture through its vocabulary and expression’ (p. 70). In Côte d’Ivoire and South Africa, as Roland Kouassi and Ellen Hurst-Harosh explain in Chapter 4, first-hand analysis of comparison between Nouchi (Côte d’Ivoire) and Tsotsitaal (South Africa) is foregrounded in term of identity construction, authenticity and meaning-making using social media as a site of negotiation for youth language engagements and

community of practice. Investigation into the comparison of linguistic varieties in different spatial contexts underscores the centrality of broader conversations on contemporary identities of African youths. This essay helps in widening notions of what African youth language is about, and how it is experienced, by rearticulating familiar conversations within new or unmapped contexts.

In Chapter 5, Augustin Ebongue demonstrates how certain linguistic features often engaged by social media interlocutors in Cameroon implicate on contemporary language change within the broader social system of new media conversational exchange. The chapter is a robust discursive elaboration of terms of address engaged to generate interpersonal relations on multiple social media interactions using a conversational interaction approach. Leonard Muaka, in Chapter 6, re-situates the impact of youth language on linguistic landscapes of Kenya and Tanzania within the domain of political economy of language use. Drawing from print media, this study is an insightful contribution to theoretical questions relating to interconnectivity of linguistic features in many African urban centres. The study explicates on how the realities of a neoliberal economy has not only facilitated but also located youth language at the centre of linguistic prominence. Not only this, the marketability and economic visibility of this youth language in public media and spaces are profoundly reinforced in its multilingual capacity.

In Chapter 7, Edinah Mose and Orpha Ombati adopt the Kenyan linguistic community to problematize the engagement of certain linguistic features of urban youth language in order to explore their creativity and versatility in public advertisements. This ethnographically informed contribution is especially notable because the authors allow their data to offer insights into and understandings of how linguistic means shape and reshape the structure of popular and public advertisements. Beyond the familiar, this chapter reveals the centrality of engaging African youth language in influencing public sentiments and tastes, through new media advertisements, in terms of collective choice on social consumption using linguistic mechanism. The chapter might serve as a model for conducting a kind of media anthropology that can be at once vigorous, dialogic and a cardinal scholarly contribution to the analysis of the relationship between media advertisements and ever-changing youth languages.

The four chapters that comprise Part 2, 'Music, Performance Poetry and Video', examine 'the use of urban youth languages in creative arts, particularly popular forms of music and poetry such as performance poetry and hip hop/rap, as well as home movies' (Hurst-Harosh and Kanana, p. 8). In cases presented by Adeiza Lasisi Isiaka (Chapter 8) and Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (Chapter 9), glocal complexities of musical repertoires are engaged as they interrogate inter-

lingualism, multiplicity, as well as hybridized expressions of African musical idioms, while negotiating meanings within the socio-cultural grid of postcolonial globality. Interestingly, both essays situated in Nigeria address deliberate constitutions of intermixed linguistic forms in African youth language through musical practices in order to facilitate communal frameworks that reflect African worldviews.

Enthused by Barber's 'creativity on the street' (Barber, 2018:159), Isiaka analyses the politics of dialectal ingenuity and aesthetic flexibility in Nigerian hip hop, more specifically, the engagement of slang, linguistic metaphors, neologism, and other meta-symbolic structures deployed by Nigerian hip hop artists in negotiating multiple networks of 'glocal' visibility. He emphasizes that 'these verbal practices to a great extent constitute the casual linguistic factories for the streets and, correspondingly, reflect various turns of social deconstructions' (p. 163). Isiaka's assessment is a careful consideration of the way African youth language influences music artists in the use of linguistic properties to shape identities and labels, which may in turn have significant socio-cultural implications. The essay by Oloruntoba-Oju is a fascinating and timely exploration into the socio-political deconstruction of colonial hegemony on linguistic practices in Nigerian music and social media. Oloruntoba-Oju explains the centrality of hybridity in making sense of colonial language, and foregrounds how it revolutionizes indigenous languages through the inventiveness of African youths, who in turn deploy it both as linguistic as well as political capital. He analyses African (urban) youth language as embodying pidginisation, code-mixing, slanging, semantic transfer, relexification and other stylistic codes, which essentially reflect postcolonial African consciousness and imagination.

In the final two chapters, the contributors demonstrate how African cultural practices interrogate linguistic creativeness in the process of generating meanings for the contemporary African populace. Unathi Nopee (Chapter 10), for instance, presents South African experiences of urban performance poetry, exploring the complexities of both trans-linguistic and non-linguistic repertoires deployed from South Africa and the United States that have shaped the texture, structure and rendition of performance poetry. The author argues that linguistic manipulation remains a connective line between African youth language and performance poetry. Hameed Tunde Ashiru and Emily A. Ogotu (Chapter 11) analyse the use of slang in Yoruba home videos in Nigeria, and provide an insightful engagement of the morpho-pragmatic analysis of their communicative functions within Nollywood, the Nigerian entertainment industry.

Empirically, while the authors in this volume cover quite a network of crucial issues related to the sociolinguistic conversations on African youth language as

well as the fundamental contributions of youths in language change and development, there is limited attention given to the receptivity of youth language in the African adult and elitist populace. Coverage of the African populace also seems inadequate in this volume. For instance, there is no single chapter looking at North Africa. Some readers might find lacking a consideration of African youth language and its emerging trends on societal psyche in many other countries in Africa that are not covered in the volume. Authors articulate their arguments with ample data except some like Unathi Nopee in Chapter 10, who could have substantiated her analysis of performance poetry with copious data for more engaging dialogues. There is no robust performative analysis without evidence of performance. There is need for studies that provide more deep-seated comparative standpoints juxtaposing ethnographical inquiries as well as interrogating global practices. Nevertheless, this collection speaks to a broad audience, especially those interested in youth language, language education and development, as well as scholars interested in particular theoretical concerns such as linguistic creativity and variations in new media, the politics of identity and labelling, and language change. Undoubtedly, this collection deserves a wide reading.

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