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Migrant identities in multilingual contexts: Nigerian migrants' language use in public spaces in Cape Town

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Abstract

The study investigates language use and identity navigation among Nigerian migrants with a focus on language use in public and social spaces in Cape Town, South Africa. It reports on ethnographic observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed use of spoken Igbo and isiXhosa in interactions among primarily Igbo, Nigerian migrants in public and social spaces. Central observations relate to the ways in which the Igbo-speaking migrants draw on their newly acquired (and often relatively limited) knowledge of isiXhosa in interactions and for economic exchanges. Key themes that emerged were language learning (primarily of isiXhosa), code-switching, and Igbo neologisms as well as speech stylization by the migrants. In the suburbs, menus and signs in restaurants are written in a range of languages, including Igbo, isiXhosa, and English. While the use of Igbo expresses and affirms their Nigerian identity, isiXhosa is used to avoid identification as 'foreigners' against a backdrop of xenophobic violence. The strategies underscore the challenges of navigating economic and social pressures in a society saturated with codes, whilst also maintaining the language of 'home'. The study provides original insights into the factors affecting African language use in public spaces by an often-over-looked group.

Key words: Language use, Identities, Public spaces, Migration, Multilingualism

Background

The threat to the use of African languages in public spaces as a result of the apparent hegemony of English and other ex-colonial languages (Batibo, 2005; Street, 2010; Onwukwe & Okugo, 2015; Emezue, 2020) has given rise to the need to explore the visibility and audibility of African languages in a diverse range of public spaces. It is pertinent to reflect on language use in the context of migration, where languages exogenous to the host country may become visible in public spaces. Migration entails not only movement of people from one country or locality to another, but the mobility of linguistic and other semiotic resources. Multilingual practices may evolve and adopt new functions as identification strategies in migrant and contact spaces (Beswick & Pozo-Gutiérrez, 2010; Blackledge & Creese, 2017), highlighting complex interactions that render these languages newly visible.

Migration to South Africa from other African countries provides a specific but globally applicable trajectory relating to language contact and identity negotiation. In South Africa, as globally, urban multilingualism is fluid and characterized by a high level of complex multilingual practices (Nchang, 2018; Jama, 2019; Mesthrie, Nchang and Onwukwe, 2020). This feature adds to the visibility of these languages – and multilingualism as a practice – in public spaces. Language is implicated in social activities, in identity construction and negotiations that take place against a backdrop of differing power relations. This aspect of language enables us to explore the relationship between language use, evolving identities, attitudes and strategies adopted in different migrant spaces. Identity emerges and is formed through complex social, cultural, and interactional phenomena. In our use of language, we may both represent and construct a particular identity simultaneously. In this study, we adopt an approach informed by the sociolinguistics of language use. We consider language as a nuanced record of interactional complexities. This idea informs the notion of 'Interactional sociolinguistics' (Goffman and Gumperz, 1982) which assumes that the use of language informs social and cultural face-to-face interactions. This approach focuses on how people manage social identities and social activities as they interact, viewing identities as fluid and constructed via social interaction.

This study investigates language use and identity navigation among Nigerian migrants with a focus on language use in public and social spaces in Cape Town, South Africa. It reports on data

collected via ethnographic observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. It shows that language use in this context of migration renders both the Nigerian language Igbo and the South African languages isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English visible in a range of public and social spaces. This includes in community meetings and cultural festivals which are organized and primarily attended by the Nigerian community in Cape Town, as well as small shops and lounges owned by Igbo-speaking Nigerians in the city which are largely patronized by South Africans.

The paper begins with a brief contextualization of the study. This is followed by the theoretical and methodological background which details the link between language and identity within the interactional sociolinguistic approach, as well as the methodology employed. Thereafter, we highlight different informal domains in which Igbo is used in Cape Town, exploring the multilingual practices of Nigerian migrants in the city.

Contextualizing the study

Language as an identity marker (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Kinginger & Pavlenko; 2004) is used in multiple and complex ways in different migrant, social and contact spaces (Beswick & Pozo-Gutiérrez, 2010; Blackledge & Creese, 2017). Extant literature reveals different linguistic means of identity negotiation in multilingual societies. Language choice is the main foci of many of the studies on identity negotiation, with code switching and translanguaging regarded as resources which speakers use to express social and rhetorical meanings and index ethnic identities (Bailey, 2012; García, 2009; Lewis et al, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013; Blackledge & Creese, 2017). Other linguistic means of negotiating identity in multilingual settings include the creative formation of hybrid social identities through speech stylization and 'language crossing' (Rampton, 2005; Chun, 2011; Nchang, 2018), linguistic innovations and adoption (James & Woll, 2004; Onwukwe & Mesthrie, 2020), second language learning or 'translanguaging in mobility' (Kinginger & Pavlenko, 2004; Blackledge &Creese; 2017) and broader linguistic, social and cultural practices in migrant and contact spaces (Beswick and Pozo-Gutiérrez, 2010).

Despite the body of work which examines the diverse language practices of different communities in context, there has been little discussion of language use and identity negotiation with a focus on visibility and audibility of languages in public and social spaces in migrant settings. The current study aims to address this gap and represents a context and topic which provides

original insights into the factors affecting African language use in public spaces. By focusing on a the Igbo-speaking migrant community in South Africa, we also provide insights relating to language practices by a group who are navigating social pressures and expectations, and harnessing their multilingual resources in the process. The study seeks to explore the following questions:

(1) What language(s) are used by Igbo migrants in public and social places in Cape Town?

(2) What language practices characterize interactions and social exchanges among Igbo-speaking migrants in public and social places in Cape Town?

(3) What are the locations and domains of use for these language practices?

(4) In what ways do the language practices relate to identity navigation among Igbo migrants in Cape Town?

Theoretical and methodological framework

Identity in discourse as it pertains to and interacts with language has been conceived of in a number of different ways. One of these is via the 'Interactionist sociolinguistics' approach (Goffman and Gumperz, 1982). Interactional sociolinguistics is a theoretical and methodological perspective on language use that is based in linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. Because of these disciplinary roots, it shares the concerns of all three fields with language, society, and culture. Schifrin (2009) observes that "Goffman's analysis of face-to-face interaction provides an understanding of how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life and how it both reflects and adds meaning and structure to those circumstances", and that "Gumperz's analyses of verbal communication help us understand how people may share grammatical knowledge of a language but differently contextualize what is said, in such a way that very different messages are produced and understood" (Schifri, 2009 p.2).

Mai (2011:90) observes that "identity is an independent variable accounting for participants' use of linguistic or discursive variables, as a means of referring to and referring about self and others or as a constructed display of group membership, as a rhetorical device". Explaining the interactionist approach, Mai (2011) further argues that sociolinguistics is concerned with how people invoke life structures in social interactions. Interactional sociolinguistics views identities as dynamic and constructed in social interaction through fluid language practices.

Ethnographically orientated interactional sociolinguists show that identities can also be constructed by invoking discourse identities through language practice. Discourse identity is the "persona along with the degree or range of power a particular person can claim in a specific discourse. It consists of the range of production/reception format roles intersecting with the social interactive roles over which one has the power, right, or obligation to enact in any particular discourse" (Scollon, 1996, p7). Interactional sociolinguistics as an approach to understanding identity in discourse therefore assumes that the use of language informs these interactions.

In terms of methodology, the study employed ethnographic observation, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews in Cape Town. Ethnographic observation was conducted in small shops and lounges in Mowbray, Rondebosch, Langa, and Parow where there are Igbo communities. Participant observation was conducted at community meetings including the 'Nigerian Igbo Association' and 'Enyimba group'. While the 'Nigerian Igbo Association' is an umbrella body for Igbo migrants in Cape Town, the 'Enyimba group' is an association of Nigerian Igbo migrants who were born and raised in Aba in Nigeria – a major city popularly referred to as *'Enyimba* city' in Igbo-land. The associations meet monthly and deliberate on the welfare of its members. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author using English and Igbo with 20 informants (17 male, 3 female, aged 28-42) comprising skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Igbo-speaking migrants. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were used to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' language use patterns and attitudes. Interviewees were identified during the community meetings. The first author is a member of these groups, and this conducted observations at the meetings. Further participants were identified via a snowballing technique. The observations and interviews were conducted September–December 2020. The author is a native speaker of Igbo. We employed a research assistant to interpret into isiXhosa and Afrikaans. Pseudonyms are used for all informants and participants throughout the paper. The necessary ethics approval and participant consent were obtained. However, for peer-review process, details of these are not provided here but will be provided upon acceptance and preparation of the final version.

Languages in use and their domains

In this section, we draw together the key themes that emerged from the study and report on language practices, domains of use and highlight factors that appear to encourage – or dissuade – use of certain languages and linguistic features.

We identified two primary types of domains. Firstly, we explored somewhat more 'closed' social spaces such as community meetings and cultural events, which, although they constitute public spaces in the broadest sense, tend to take place behind closed doors. Secondly, more 'open' public spaces include shops, lounges and *shebeens* (or wine shops). We note also that the linguistic landscape varies according to location. In this paper we focus on Cape Town where, overall, English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans dominate (Statistics South Africa, 2011). However, there is also variation in this regard. For example, isiXhosa is dominant in urban Townships such as Parow and Langa, while Afrikaans and English are more dominant in areas such as Mowbray, Rondebosch and Observatory.

Observations revealed the dominance of Igbo language during community meetings, and cultural activities. This included celebrations such as the new yam festival and child naming/welcoming ceremonies. The use of Igbo outside of Nigeria is notable particularly in the light of observed negative attitudes towards Igbo in Nigeria (Ndimele, 2019). The use of Igbo among migrants in these community-oriented spaces could be explained in the context of Borland's (2006) 'facilitating' and 'motivating' factors for language maintenance. The use of Igbo in Cape Town reflects maintenance of the migrant's 'home' language. While facilitating factors refer to socio-political contexts including traditional activities that encourage frequent contact with the migrant's homeland, motivating factors include individual decisions and commitment, for example to maintain and transmit the home language to the next generation. Community meetings and festivals are therefore facilitating factors for the use of Igbo. (Our own translation into English is presented below the original, here and throughout the paper):

Anyi na-asu Igbo. Anyi ma na-asusu bu ihe eji ama mba. Ogbako anyi nile di ka emume iwa ji, iti mmanwu nakwa iba nwa ohuru aha na-enyere anyi aka ina-asu Igbo. Anyi mere iwu onye asukwala bekee ma o bu asusu ndi obodo. (Emeka, 2020)

> We use or speak Igbo. We know that language is what identifies a people. In ceremonies and meetings like new yam festival or child naming ceremony we speak Igbo. We made a law that nobody should speak English or even South African languages.

In Emeka's statement, the desire to sustain group membership and identity can be seen as motivating factor here as there is a conscious attempt to sustain Igbo identity. Observations also revealed the use of Igbo language for interactions in families especially in cases where both parents are Igbo-speakers. This alludes to Nwankwere, Mmadike and Eme's (2017: 13) observation: "Recently, there is significant progress among the Igbo diaspora in the use of Igbo in different fora such as in family socialization and group meetings…this is a welcome development in our collective fight to rescue the language from endangerment". This is also explicit in Arinze's statement below:

> *A na m asu Igbo nke oma. Anyi agaghi ekwe ka asusu anyi wuo. A na m asu Igbo n'ulo m. Nwunye m bu onye Igbo. Anyi na-suru umu anyi Igbo. Ufodu ha amutala. Ha nwere ike su cha oyibo na asusu obodo di ka isiXhosa n'ezi, ha lota ulo ha asuwa Igbo. (Arinze, 2020)*

> I speak Igbo very well. We will not allow our language to die. I speak Igbo at home. My wife is Igbo. So we speak Igbo to our children. Some of them understand it and speak it too. They can speak English and South African languages like isiXhosa outside but when at home, they speak Igbo.

The minutes of the community meetings are written and read in Igbo. Igbo is also used on the community's social media channels, as well as the community WhatsApp group which is used for sharing of information. This seems to reflect an effort to maintain their home language, and serves to strengthen the group identity, as well as ensuring that their language is visible in the new environment.

Language use in contact spaces

Observations also reveal multilingual practices in which Igbo and isiXhosa are dominant in the contact space. This includes public spaces such as small shops, and lounges owned by Igbo migrants but where a large proportion of the customer base are South African. The use of Igbo dominates interactions between shop owners and Igbo-speaking customers although isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English are also seen. The use of Igbo expresses and affirms their Nigerian (Igbo) identity, while the use isiXhosa, as we will argue in further detail below, serves to avoid identification as 'foreigners'.

Most migrants interviewed for this study report a stay of over five years in South Africa as traders, estate agents, and researchers. Their knowledge of South African languages constitutes basic words and short phrases and occasional sentences to make requests and to offer greetings and thanks. These are made in isiXhosa or Afrikaans depending on their location and addressee. There was no record of advanced competence in any of these languages. Despite their often relatively limited acknowledge of these languages, Igbo-speaking shop and lounge-owners appear to draw on their knowledge of isiXhosa in customer interactions and for economic exchanges wherever possible. From an economic perspective, Nigerian migrants in South Africa engage in a wide range of employment, all of which require interaction with South African locals. From a social perspective, the use of isiXhosa in these contexts also reflects a desire to 'integrate' and engage in social interactions. This was observed in the Townships where some migrants operate small shops. We captured the experiences of Bright who was initially a customer and later became an attendant in a *shebeen* in Maitland:

> *I try to use some words in isiXhosa when I speak not that I am a good speaker but because it helps me socialize in the environment where I live. Like here now (shebeens), if I don't use their language, they won't see me as part of them. Again, here (shebeens), the bar man does not speak English very well, he prefers Xhosa. So, I have to order drinks and interact with my friends and other people here in Xhosa. They know I am not that good but they encourage me because I am a regular face, I am a bra! (Bright, 2020)*

Bright's last sentence speaks of the migrant's basic competence in isiXhosa but also of the importance placed on a sense of belongingness and social interaction.

Another motivating factor for the use of South African languages among the Igbo migrants is the need for personal security and safety. This relates to the broader underlying threat (perceived or otherwise) of violent crime and insecurity associated with xenophobia. Jacob, a medical doctor, explains how understanding isiZulu helped him evade a possible attack:

I was in one local town like that in this area and some locals who had come for medical check-up were narrating how another local was killed by a foreigner in Joburg. I was able to pick that cos I could understand bit of Zulu. So, I quickly finished with them and left. I was told after I had gone that some locals came there looking for me. Hmm! (Jacob)

The 'othering' of Nigerian and other African migrants in business ventures and formal activities is seen in both the city center and in the urban Townships. Interviews reveal that language is often central in the identification of potential targets for xenophobic attacks or looting. Ada who owns a small shop in Maitland narrates her experiences below:

They will come here and speak their language to you. When you don't respond, they walk away and will not visit your shop again. And your shop becomes target of their petty crime or looting when there is this xenophobic violence. It is very annoying and discouraging. I try as much as I can to learn the local language (isiXhosa). Just the basic aspects of the language like greeting, thanks, etc. When that happens, you see them coming to buy from you. (Ada)

In addition to the desire to 'integrate' and avoid potential xenophobic encounters, economic necessarily also motivates language choice in these exchanges. As observed in previous studies (cf. Wildsmith-Cromarty & Conduah, 2015), we noted the use of isiXhosa, and, to a lesser extent, Afrikaans, in city areas and urban townships in Cape Town. In these areas, many Nigerian migrants make a living as shop attendants who are paid by their usually South African managers. This kind of job is common in environments with large migrant communities. The attendant serves to make the shop 'migrant-friendly', and to attract potential customers. This set-up has also been reported in other

large migrant communities in South Africa, such as the Chinese migrant community (Thompson, 2018).

Public information in public spaces

Written information in public places is also found in English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and Igbo on shopfronts and signage. This is designed to attract patronage from as broad a range of communities. Menus in some of the restaurants are written in isiXhosa, including those run by Nigerians. We also identified a sign written in a number of languages including English, isiXhosa, French, Swahili and Igbo (see Image 1 below).

Image 1: Signpost from a restaurant in Maitland

The texts reflecting the multilingual reality of the area and the presence of migrants from a range of other African countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Cameroon, as well as Nigeria. Some food items are written using terms familiar to these groups. For example, 'Egusi' written as "egussi" (also known as agusi, ohue, agushi) is the name for the protein-rich seeds of certain cucurbitaceous plants (e.g. squash, melon, gourd), which are dried and ground and used as an ingredient in West African cuisine including among the Igbo.

The sign also shows the use of terms common in South Africa. For example, *groundnut* /*peanut* and *pepper*/*chilli.* The name for the food known as garri in Nigeria which is made from cassava flour is written as GaiGai on the sign, which is common parlance in Maitland, as well as the French equivalent *tapioca. Palm oil* is also referred to using the Swahili *mafuta* 'oil'. This kind of use of languages reflects the multilingual nature of the area, and speaks to the visibility of the languages in this public space. French and Swahili are used to attract the Swahili and French speaking communities from Cameron and DRC in the area. This strategy is used to identify with the speakers of these languages. While the use of English is to bridge linguistic divides, reflecting its role as a language of wider communication in present day Cape Town. In contrast, Igbo affirms the Nigerian Igbo identity, and isiXhosa appeals to the broader South African community. This use of languages in this context is strategic since identity impacts on a range of social and economic relations and activities.

We captured the following information on a signpost in a shop owned by Nigerian migrants in Newlands:

Example 1: Label on the signpost of a meal shop in Newlands
Kate food shop - We give you African delicacies. Ukutya Okuhle. Ericha amicha aka.

The name of the shop (Kate food shop) is shown in English alongside an explanation of their services (We give you African delicacies) which is also in English. IsiXhosa is used in *Ukutya Okuhle* 'good food' and a further description is provided in Igbo **in** *Ericha amicha aka* 'delicious food'.

Another example of a shop sign found in Parow incorporates words from Afrikaans and Igbo as well:

Example 2: Label on the signpost of a shop in Parow

Green life food shop: All your African delicacies: Buy from us; thank us, Enkosi, Dankie, Imeela

In this example, the shop name and services provided are written in English. This is followed by isiXhosa (*Enkosi*), Afrikaans (*Dankie*) and Igbo (*Imeela*) all of which mean 'thanks'.

The use of Igbo, isiXhosa and Afrikaans is also evident in complex multilingual practices which render the languages visible in public spaces. We report on language practices that characterize interactions in different domains and how these relate to navigation of social and national identities. We identified code-switching in trader-customer interactions, language learning (primarily of isiXhosa), and neologisms, as well as speech stylization, reflecting the migrants' changing linguistic repertoire.

Below is an excerpt of an interaction between a Nigerian migrant Chikezie who operates a small shop in Langa and his customer, KG, a South African. English words are in plain font, isiXhosa is in bold.

Example 3

KG: Hello!

Chikezie: Yes! **Ninjani bantu?**

KG**:** <laughs> Really? **Ndilungile.** Thanks.

Chikezie**: Ufunani?** What do you want?

KG**:** A pack of ciga.

Chikezie**:** Have it. **Enkosi!**

KG enters a shop and greets the shopkeeper: 'Hello!'. Chikezie responds first in English with 'yes!', and then in isiXhosa with *ninjani bantu* "How are you (plural)". In reaction to Chikezie's use of isiXhosa, and particularly perhaps the use of the plural addressee form to a single customer KG laughs, and responds in isiXhosa with *Ndilungile* "I am good". Undeterred, Chikezie asks in

isiXhosa *ufunani* meaning 'what do you want?', reiterating this also in English "What do you want?" He closes the short conversation using the isiXhosa phrase *enkosi* "thanks".

While the use of both English and isiXhosa reflect the languages of the wider environment, it is notable that Chikezie began the interaction in, and switched back again to, isiXhosa for the interaction with the isiXhosa-speaking customer. Such switches are often very short so can be considered as examples of emblematic switching or 'tag switching' and appear to be made primarily for social reasons. The emblem or tag in these cases serves as an identity or solidarity marker. The use of isiXhosa also facilitates economic exchanges given that the majority of the customers in the shop are isiXhosa-speakers. While Chikezie uses the plural address form "*Ninjani bantu*" rather than the singular form *Unjani* "How are you? (singular)" (as seen in KG's reply), to analyze the utterance along grammatical lines only would be to miss the point. Chikezie is using his isiXhosa resource to navigate the exchange and to mitigate the possible effects of the cultural, social and linguistic divides which may impact on patronage. This motivation for this linguistic choice is made explicit in the excerpt below:

> *For the sake of our business here, I try to speak Xhosa. They will come here and speak their language to you, and when you don't respond, they will walk away. Speaking their language helps us attract customers. They appreciate you when you show them you appreciate them too by speaking their language even though we are not very good. Yea! (Chikezie, 2020)*

To show that this experience is not an isolated case, consider below an excerpt of another conversation between a shop owner (Arinze), his apprentice (Emeka) and a South African customer (Sanele). Plain text is used for English, italics for Igbo and boldface for isiXhosa.

Example 4

Arinze: *Emeka weta **i-peni** ahu* that is on the table. Please. ***Enkosi***

U-Sanele help me tell him. I need that pen on the table

Umthengi is waiting for me. Bra!

Arinze's first statement is an example of a multilingual utterance par excellence. It means "Emeka, bring me that pen on the table. Please. Thank you". It starts with the Igbo verb *weta*, made up of the root *we-* ('to bring') plus *-ta* (a ventive directional suffix encoding 'towards me'). The sentence continues in English with the isiXhosa *enkosi* "Thank you" at the end. Note however also the isiXhosa word *i-peni,* "pen", reflecting his knowledge of this lexical item. When Arinze's request is met by blank looks from his apprentice, he directs his request instead to Sanele in isiXhosa. Here he uses the isiXhosa prefix -u on the name, yielding u-Sanele). He also uses the isiXhosa word, *umthengi* "customer". In this exchange we can see Arinze navigating – and perhaps attempting to mimic – the linguistic repertoire of a South African whose speech repertoire is fluid, and incorporates a range of languages from the environment, either in full or in snippets.

Consider also a statement made by a Nigerian migrant (Chinedu) directed at a South African mini-bus taxi driver. Boldface is used for isiXhosa and plain text for English:

Example 5

Chinedu: Driver, **Imali yam**, yea, I need it **ne,** and **i-foni**.

'Driver, my money, yeah, I need it right, and phone'

Chinedu begins his statement in isiXhosa *imali yam*, "my money", and switches to English but with the incorporation of a South African tag, *ne*. The tag *ne* is an affirmative question marker originally from Afrikaans but which has become widely used across South Africa including isiXhosa-speakers. Again, we see the use of isiXhosa *i-foni* 'phone'. Note here therefore the incorporation of a range of codes. Moreover, this incorporation is not strictly functional, as it is quickly likely that the English words for 'money' and 'phone' are known to his interlocutors. Similarly, in Example 4 above the Igbo equivalents would also have sufficed in the case of Arinze's communication with his Igbo-speaking apprentice Emeka. Arinze and Chinedu are subtly showing a sense of belonging by playing the role of one who understands the language in the environment, avoiding the social identity of a 'foreigner', as well as reminding everyone in the discourse space that he has been in the environment for a long time – a strategy that may be desirable for evading xenophobic attacks. Consider Arinze's use of the isiXhosa expression *U-Sanele.* In fact, his competence is clearly not advanced, as he uses the prefix *u-* (an over-generalization) which is not typically used with a proper name or when addressing someone

directly. We might even say that Arinze is feigning more competence than he actually has in an attempt to navigate the complex social and national identities of the broader environment. The use of isiXhosa therefore functions as a badge for the one who is familiar with and savvy about his environment. This is a point which is explicit in the statement below:

> *Aside the violent cases of xenophobia where they kill, steal and destroy properties of foreigner nationals, we also suffer from subtle xenophobic attacks often in form of extortions, humiliation, and bullying by some South Africans especially in some townships and this often happens once they can identity you as a foreigner. Not being able to speak or express yourself in their language especially while in their midst or in such areas gives you out for such subtle attacks. Sometimes they subject you to language test to identify you. I have heard of the* idolwana *story (Emeka, 2020).*

The account above speaks of how the hostility in relation to xenophobia in South Africa implicates linguistic differences. Press reports from 2008 drew attention to spontaneous street xenophobic tests drawing on language (Pilane, 2015). Included in such tests is a demand for someone to proove their belonging through knowledge of a less widely known word. For example, someone suspected of being a 'foreigner' is asked the isiZulu word for elbow *idolwana*.

The attempts by the Igbo-speaking migrants to navigate linguistic codes and identity issues also render the Igbo language more visible in the South African context. For example, we observed the use of Igbo in public spaces by the migrants for the exclusion of non-Igbo-speakers in certain conversions. Consider the conversion between two Igbo-speakers (Kalu and Udo) in a lounge in Mowbray. Igbo words are in boldface.

Example 6:

> **Kalu**: Heey! Bro wat's up? How was the market?
> **Udo**: **Jiri nwayo nwanne. I ma na ndi a juru ebe a…**
> **Kalu**: **O bu eziokwu nwanne. Nti ndi a no n'ihe anyi na-ekwu. Suba Igbo…**
> **Udo: Ka anyi nwe nwanne…**

Kalu meets his Igbo-speaking friend in a lounge populated primarily by South African locals and other African migrants. He begins in English asking about a business transaction they are both aware of. Udo responds in Igbo and reminds his friend of need to exclude non-Igbo-speaking people from their conversion ("*Jiri nwayo nwanne. I ma na ndi a juru ebe a…*" which means "Take it easy brother. You know that these people are here…"). Kalu quickly switches to Igbo to reaffirm their Igbo identity, and to show his in-group status ("*O bu eziokwu nwanne. Nti ndi a no n'ihe anyi na-ekwu. Suba Igbo…*" "It is true my brother. These people are eavesdropping. Let's speak Igbo…"). Udo continues in Igbo (Ka anyi nwe nwanne... "Lets discuss privately brother…").

The visibility of isiXhosa is further revealed in Nigerian migrants' adaptive strategy involving speech stylization influenced by the presence and prevalence of isiXhosa in the wider community. Stylization involves "reflexive communicative action in which speakers produce specially marked and often exaggerated representations of languages, dialects, and styles that lie outside their own habitual repertoire" (Rampton, 2008: 149). Stylization has been noted to be evident in use of ethnic, racial or socially designated markers (Rampton, 2005), and frequently involves incorporation of lexical items/elements (Chun, 2011). We identified incorporation of South African tags such as *ne, yho, and bra!* While the use of *ne* is described above, *yho* is an exclamation and *bra* is derived from 'bro' (brother). These use of these markers which characterize urban South African speech style (Branford, Hacksley, and Silva, 1996) by Igbo community members signals (attempted) integration into the South African linguistic space. Their use is a manifestation of the use of African languages in public spaces, as well as reflecting their changing linguistic repertoire as evident in the statement below:

> **Bra***, I speak Xhosa* **ne.** *It could be that my language use is not good enough* **ne** *but it is helpful. If you have witnessed this xenophobia thing...***yho***! It is terrible. But we have to survive* **bra***.*
>
> *This place is good* **ne.** *Forget about all these things they do here but it is not like back home.* **Yho***! If you ask me to choose, I will choose here* **ne***. (Chukwu, 2020)*

Another example of speech stylization is the use of clicks by Igbo-speaking migrants. Click consonants are part of the sound inventory of isiXhosa and isiZulu, as well as a number of other languages found in Southern Africa. However, click consonants are not part of the Igbo sound inventory and give rise to challenges for an Igbo learner of isiXhosa. An Igbo-speaker may omit the sound entirely since there is no close substitute in Igbo. However, we observed the production of clicks amongst some Nigerian migrants when using isiXhosa, representative of speech stylization. As noted by Rampton (2008), one might in fact argue that this as case of speakers specifically targeting marked aspects of language. The ability of Nigerian migrants to produce clicks when they occur in isiXhosa words for example is considered a badge of integration. It allows for identification with the larger South African (multilingual) linguistic community and their linguistic markedness may facilitate avoidance of the 'foreigner tag'. This is made explicit in the statement below:

> *We not only try to speak their language, we also try to speak like them. It's funny but you know we have to survive here, and socialize with them. I had an encounter of exemption from xenophobia because I spoke Xhosa very well. Like this their sound. It sounds like you are clapping… (Laughs). I don't know what it is called. But when you speak Xhosa and make such sounds, they know you have arrived. Like you are part of the place. Laughs!- (Chidi, 2020)*

Language contact and language change

Social and national identities are centrally implicated in the everyday exchanges and interactions involving migrants and their hosts. The use of Igbo during migrant community meetings and festivals serves to identify and maintain the Igbo identity. However, the Igbo also exhibits linguistic innovations that are the result of the broader linguistic context. Chukwudi made the following statement while discussing their experiences of the 2019 xenophobic violence in Johannesburg with fellow migrants:

> *Nwanne, **toyitoyi** nke afo a, o di no ka **ofunbia** a agaghi ebi*
> *Nna, mgbe **ndi xbia** bidoro **ogu nanimgebi**, anyi agbakwaghi nkiti o*

*Anyi chiri **ngwongwo xbia**…ahia azuo! - (Chukwudi, 2020)*

> Brother/friend, this year's xenophobic violence, it is like this xenophobia thing will not end Friend, when the xenophobes started the xenophobic violence, we did not keep quiet o! We brought some items/weapons of xenophobic violence….it was great! Things changed!

Social and national identity biases manifest through labelling and stereotypes. We identified a number of neologisms in Igbo used by the migrants in shops and barbing saloons in Mowbray during conversions among Igbo-speaking migrants. These are coinages and new uses of existing terms in Igbo as (often disparaging) labels, reference or address terms that speak to identity navigation and "othering". The examples we present here are just a few that relate to the topic of this study, and to xenophobia in particular:

(a) Ofunbia "xenophobia" ('come and go')

(b) Ogu Nanimgaebi "xenophobic violence"

(c) Ngwongwo xbia "weapons to fight xenophobic violence/war"

(d) xbia 'xenophobia' (a clipped form of the English word 'xenophobia')

The phrases *ofunbia, ogu nanimgebi, and ngwongwo* are Igbo words but here are being used with new senses. *Ofunbia* literally means 'one-off trip' or 'come once', and has undergone semantic narrowing to encode 'xenophobia' since foreigners are supposed to 'come once and go'. For the neologism *ogu nanimgebi, ogu* means 'war/fight', *nanimgebi* literarily means 'only I will live (here)', and it is its original use refers to particular plant that grows alone. This meaning is extended to refer to the notion of dislike or prejudice against foreigners in South Africa. *Ngwongwo* means 'property' or 'items'. In this context, its meaning is restricted to 'items of war or weapons' and in association with xenophobia (*xbia*), refers to 'weapons to fight war/xenophobic violence'. These neologisms are not just attempts by the migrants to accommodate their experiences of xenophobia into their speech repertoires but are also reflective of survival mechanisms in a hostile environment – adopting creative new linguistic strategies to maintain group identity.

Coinages or neologisms by migrants are fast gaining currency in public and social spaces as they are reported to be used by South African locals in mini-taxis in Cape Town (Uzuegbulam,

personal communication, 2020), especially those drawn from Nigerian music/songs which are popular in South Africa (Nchang, personal communication). Nigerian hip-hop songs have an increasingly large fan-base particularly among the youth in South Africa (BBC Igbo, 2019). We observed the use of some Igbo neologisms and coinages. The majority of these neologisms relate to love and romance which are common themes in these Nigerian songs. These include: *Asa nwa* 'beautiful girl', *Ita ife* 'make love', *Mmicha* 'boobs', *Ifu* 'love'. This use of Igbo neologisms and coinages both by Nigerian migrants as well as South African locals render the Nigerian Igbo language more visible in these contexts.

Summary and conclusion

In this paper we have provided insights into Igbo-speaking Nigerian migrants' language use and identity navigation with a focus on language use in public and social spaces in Cape Town. Our investigation revealed language use in the context of migration that renders Igbo visible and audible in a range of public and social spaces. Domains of use include community meetings and cultural festivals which are frequented almost exclusively by members of the Igbo community. However, other domains include in small shops, lounges, wine-bars and *shebeens* in urban areas in which isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans are otherwise dominant. Igbo was also overhead on mini-taxis in the form of neologisms or coinages, and slang drawn from the songs of popular Nigerian Igbo rappers and artists. We identified code-switching in trader-customer interactions, language learning (primarily drawing on isiXhosa). Crucially, in many of these encounters Igbo is found alongside these other languages, resulting in multilingual practices in these public spaces. The study also identified isiXhosa-influenced speech stylization and linguistic innovation, reflecting the migrants' changing linguistic repertoires.

A number of factors motivate and/or facilitate the use of these languages in the domains in which they are found, including attempts at integration, to secure a livelihood and to ensure personal safety. These multilingual practices speak of both social and national identity. They also tell a story against the backdrop of xenophobic violence in South Africa, and constitute part of the migrant's attempts to evade violence. While practices at community meetings reflect efforts to maintain the home language in the contexts of migration, these more publicly visible linguistic

practices are impacted by a range of factors. While fluency in isiXhosa may be desirable – both from an economic and security perspective – the opportunities to gain such competency remain limited. English therefore plays an important role with many Nigerians arriving in South Africa with some prior exposure to English, which also plays a central role in South Africa. In many ways, while the practices identified in the current study are reflective of the visibility of African languages in public spaces, rather than this being characterized by the presence of a specific individual language – i.e. Igbo or isiXhosa – what is found is that multilingualism and multilingual linguistic practices are dominant. In this sense, the Nigerian migrants are adopting features of the new linguistic context in which they find themselves. They draw on the linguistic repertoires of the communities they have become a part of, adopting words from isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English. But the over-arching adaptation is one which reflects the multilingual practices of the local communities. The visibility of African languages in this context is therefore one which is influenced by the specific domain of use – local, small shops versus supermarkets – as well as the clientele.

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