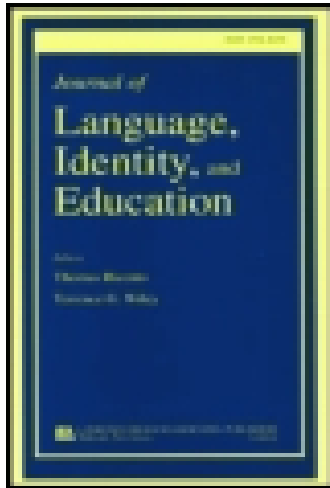


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The Wordy Worlds of Popular Music in Eastern and Southern Africa: Possible Implications for Language-in-Education Policy

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ARTICLES

The Wordy Worlds of Popular Music in Eastern and Southern Africa: Possible Implications for Language-in-Education Policy

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Language-in-education policy in Africa is replete with debate regarding the use of standard African languages as part of mother-tongue education. An issue inadequately addressed within this debate is the role and function of urban vernaculars which have become “the” mother tongue of the greater part of Africa’s population. Using data from the lyrics of popular music from eastern and southern African songwriters as an instance of ground-level language practices, this article argues that, to the extent that urban vernaculars and standard African languages act as international languages in popular music, there is justification for using urban vernaculars as languages of instruction. The extensive use of urban vernaculars in popular music has led to its popularity, and if these urban vernaculars are used as part of mother tongue education, socio-cultural relations between the school and society may improve. Despite the fact that educational strategies based on language practices in popular songs subvert social hierarchy, the use of urban vernaculars reshapes and blurs linguistic boundaries and, thus, constructs plurilingual identities. Using urban vernaculars not only provides access to education for a large portion of the population but also consolidates “glocal” identities while affirming cultural roots.

Key words: popular music, urban vernaculars, language in education, mother tongue education

The most well-known language policy debate in non-Western postcolonial contexts relates to the status and function of indigenous/local languages vis-à-vis that of European languages (Cook, 2006, 2009; Meeuwis, 1999). In terms of language-in-education policy, this debate translates to discussions about the use of local languages as languages of instruction in mother-tongue education programs. In African contexts, this has meant the introduction of indigenous African or minority languages as languages of instruction in schools.

While there is a tendency to dwell inordinately on the merits and demerits of mother-tongue instruction and at what stage it should be introduced, reduced, and replaced by the former colonial languages, “the value of mother tongue instruction is literally incontestable” (Prah, 2002, p. 3). Yet what constitutes the mother tongue for the greater part of the population in plurilingual contexts such as Africa is highly contestable. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, there are strong suggestions that the majority of the population use urban vernaculars or hybrid varieties and that these varieties are indeed “the” mother tongue of most school-going children (Calteaux, 1996; Cook, 2009; Makoni, Brutt-Griffler, & Mashiri, 2007; Mungai, 2008). The first challenge that African children face in the classroom is the use of and identification with standard varieties of African languages.

Focusing on the status of African languages vis-à-vis former colonial languages is “a language ideological debate” (Meeuwis, 1999, p. 401) that has “erased” from view a long-standing and more pertinent debate about the role and status of varieties of African languages, including the different dialects and urban hybrid forms. This article focuses on “this less visible debate” (Cook, 2009, p. 96). In addition, this article “starts from the premise that language and in particular the distinction between standard African languages and urban vernaculars provides a critical lens into the process of identity formation, ideological tensions” (p. 96) and, most importantly, considers how different varieties of African languages can be utilized in education for effective learning.

In Africa’s educational milieu, discussions of the role and functionality of urban vernaculars show “a contradictory impulse of simultaneously denigrating and celebrating the vernacular” (Nero, 2006, p. 503). While the worlds of advertising and book publishing have seen the value of urban hybrid varieties for promoting brand products, education seems stuck in a standard-language ideology that associates urban vernaculars with low socioeconomic status and lack of education. Yet some researchers have argued for the use of urban vernaculars as languages of instruction (Calteaux, 1996; Cook, 2009), noting that the characterization of urban vernaculars mirrors a similar debate of the 1930s in which standard African languages were rejected (Adejunmobi, 2004).

Nonetheless, others have called for the promotion of urban vernaculars as national languages because they reflect commonality and a shared identity, which is, at times, cross-national in nature. After all, urban vernaculars cut across national and ethnic boundaries and, therefore, do not reflect a rigid ethnic or linguistic-based identity (Leischa, 2005) that standard varieties enhance. Thus, urban vernaculars “invoke a collective identity,” thereby avoiding “ethnic othering” (Wa Mutonya, 2007, p. 163).

A more paradoxically polemical issue is that prior to most African communities’ colonial encounters, African identities were not founded on rigid ethnic and linguistic lines. Thus, if one of the major objectives of national language policies founded on standard languages is to facilitate the consolidation of postcolonial Africa, then the use of standard languages is essentially a return to colonial practices, while such policies seek to advance postcolonial interests by mitigating the effects of colonialism.

This article focuses on analyzing popular music, primarily the language used in the lyrics. As Alim and Pennycook (2007) point out, “putting language at the centre of the analysis opens up levels of significance in terms of language choice, style and discrimination” (p. 90). By analyzing language use in the lyrics of popular music, the aim of this article is to establish the potential implications for and use of urban vernaculars in education. Drawing on songwriters from eastern and southern Africa, the article uses ground-level evidence to evaluate critically the descriptive adequacy of current language-in-education policy by focusing on language use in popular music and the politics it implies.

The choice of popular music as a site for ground-level language practices is based on the premise that music as a form of social practice has complex transnational links and deep historical and social roots in Africa, permeating many aspects of African social life. After all, Africans experience music from the “cradle to the grave” (Mbambi-Katana, 1977, p. 26). Popular music is also “an important site of educational practice” (Alim & Pennycook, 2007, p. 90), and as a “significant pedagogical site,” it “is inevitably part of school culture and becomes either formally or informally part of the school curriculum” (Alim & Pennycook, p. 90). The analysis of popular music, therefore, “brings together issues of language, identity, and education” (Alim & Pennycook, p. 89).

Popular culture as an area of social and linguistic experience has rarely featured prominently in language-in-education debates in Africa. This article seeks to argue that while issues of mother-tongue education in Africa have revolved around the role of English vis-à-vis that of African languages, few have sought to confront the grassroots debate among African language communities about which variety is appropriate for use as a language of instruction. Yet research has shown that standard African languages lack popularity and that most students find these standard varieties incomprehensible. Herbert (1992), for example, cites evidence that students who have Zulu attributed to them as a mother tongue based on their ethnicity liken learning in Zulu to learning in a foreign language, to an extent that teachers have to shift to urban vernaculars. In light of the problematic nature of using standard African languages as languages of instruction, we ask whether urban varieties can provide a viable alternative. In this case, the language practices in music represent an interesting area to study, not only in terms of the interpretable meanings of the lyrics, but also in the symbolic significance of the varieties of language used and the possible reasons for using such varieties. Instead of framing standard versus nonstandard languages as “other,” this article proposes a radical shift in language in education for speakers of African languages that has a potential to validate different varieties of African languages in the classroom and perhaps to render the African medium of instruction more comprehensible (Jeater, 2001).

SETTING THE SCENE

The centrality of popular music in Africa is evident from the large number of studies conducted from a cultural studies tradition (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007). Most of these studies emphasize how urbanization, globalization, and commercialization have influenced traditional African music. Although the language of the lyrics has not been the central focus, some studies have remarked that different musicians use various languages in a single song, including local vernaculars (Mphande, 2007; Nyoni, 2007; Wa Mutonya, 2007).

In this article, we use the term *popular music*, which is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *world music*. However, the use of the term *popular music* “reflects, cultural, social and economic categories, particularly those found in North America and the UK” (Tagg, 2005, p. 135), while *world music* is an umbrella category used for music variously referred to as “Afro-pop,” “Afro-music,” “African jazz,” and “Afro-beat” (Guilbault, 1993; Rasolofondrasolo & Meinhof, 2003). These terms refer to different types of music that originate in non-English-speaking countries. Because of these conflicting definitions, it may be more appropriate to conceptualize popular music as a form of practice, a field of activity produced primarily in controlled environments with a variety of acoustic and electrified instruments.

The controlled nature of the environments has a bearing on the forms of language used. Auzanneau (2002), for instance, notes that “the choices are generally conscious” (p. 120) or “intentional” (Billiez, 1998) since they take place during the compositional phase and constitute “a deferred speech act” (Auzanneau, p. 120). The choices are not “acts of identity” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) but “intentional identity acts” (Auzanneau, p. 120) because the language used closely approximates carefully crafted and stylized language (Rampton, 1995) in order to project the artificial or rehearsed as “authentic.” The concern for authenticity is “linked to broader notions of authenticity and Afrocentricity” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 41).

The choices of language in most popular music reflect particular ideologies held by the musicians or songwriters. Thus, the discourses used in the lyrics are usually a reflection of popular beliefs in the communities where the musicians or songwriters come from. However, this is not to suggest that popular music is a mimetic commentary. As Negus (1997) posits, “No music can be a mirror to capture events or activities in its melodies, rhythms and voices” (p. 4) as the artists are also contributing toward creating alternative futures and, hence, affecting the present and not simply passively reflecting it.

The ability of musicians to either directly reflect or create these possible futures may be constrained by recording companies who have some influence in shaping and determining what gets edited in and edited out in the lyrics. This is evident in situations such as those in immediate post-independence Tanzania, where the government controlled both the production and distribution of music. In spite of the influence of recording companies, the varieties of languages used in the lyrics speak more directly than standard varieties and create feelings of being part of “imagined local communities” (Anderson, 1983) oftentimes with translocal affiliations. Such translocal affiliations are captured using urban vernaculars because these reflect a melting pot of languages, identities, or fluid ethnicities of the communities where these varieties are used. The use of urban vernacular or multiple languages and varieties in popular music is strategic. It reflects and emphasizes plurilingual dexterity; after all, the use of multiple codes corresponds to the way people talk in plurilingual contexts (Mitchell, 2000).

While language use in the lyrics of popular music from Africa has not received significant attention in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, Kwaramba’s (1997) study of the language of protest in *Chimurenga* (colonial struggle) songs by Thomas Mapfumo is seminal. Kwaramba undertook a narrative analysis of *Chimurenga* songs using critical discourse analysis. Kwaramba’s findings suggest that the discursive use of pronouns from varieties of African languages and urban mixtures has the effect of excluding some and including others and, thus, sharpening the “them” and “us” dichotomy, which serves to conscientize the audience on the power of the collective force toward a shared goal. Similarly, in Palmberg and Kirkegaard’s (2002) *Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa*, chapters by Akindes, Palmberg, and Nannyonga-Tamusuza on Cote d’Ivoire, Cape Verde, and Uganda, have substantial sections on language issues relating to music. Akindes, for example, shows how musicians have used “Ivorian French,” an urban vernacular developed as a medium of communication by “illiterate laborers, house servants, shop attendants, and other low-rank workers with little or no formal schooling” (p. 98), to reach a wider audience. In addition, Palmberg points out that the use of “Kriolu language” in Cape Verde music had a substantial impact in corpus planning. It facilitated its codification and “reduction” into a written language, thereby changing its status.

The studies cited above reflect the degree to which nonstandard varieties or urban vernaculars are widely used and the extent to which a wide range of African communities identify with

them. Perhaps when these varieties are used as a medium of instruction, students might identify with them more easily than with standard varieties, rendering it possible for students to construct more meanings for the school content. Thus, use of urban vernaculars in the classroom may erase “the putative home/school language divide” (Rampton, 1985, p. 188).

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The songs used in the analysis were from the “Top Ten Africa’s lifetime favorites” played on DTSV Africa-to-Africa channel. These songs were initially in the top 50, then made it to the top 20 in all of Africa’s African languages radio stations. The compilation of the songs was through Africa-to-Africa channel’s phone-in, write-in, e-mail, and fax message requests made by community members through the community radio stations. The songs that were in the top ten led us to specific songwriters and the specific albums on which each song was released.

Data collection occurred in early 2007. That the songwriters who made it to the top 10 were from southern and eastern Africa was a coincidence. Nevertheless, one of the authors, a DJ who had worked in eastern Africa, provided the transcriptions of all the songs that formed the basis of our analysis.

The methodology used in analyzing the language of the lyrics in popular music is discourse analysis with particular focus on language choice. In analyzing the language of the lyrics of popular music, we explored the nature and type of language varieties the musicians used and how they fashioned and constructed the identities of their audiences or “taste publics” (Scannell, 2001, p. 22; Weber, 1975, p. 10). Specifically, the questions asked were as follows:

1. What are the role and status of African languages in popular music?
2. What are the role and status of European languages in popular music?
3. What types of multilingualism are exhibited in popular music?
4. What is the relevance of the responses to the above questions for language in education?

FINDINGS: STATUS AND ROLE OF THE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IN POPULAR MUSIC

In order to investigate the role and status of different languages (i.e., African languages, English, and French) in popular music, this study analyzed the languages used in the lyrics and explored the implications for language in education in African contexts. Examining language use in the lyrics of popular music shifts the focus away from state-level language policy pronouncements toward more “authentic” ground-level linguistic practices, not imposed linguistic boundaries (Cook, 2009).

Extracts of song texts from the music of the following popular musicians from southern and eastern Africa were analyzed: Oliver Mutukudzi, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Paul Ngozi, Chris Chali, Samba Mapangala, Hukwe Zawose, Shalawambe, Eric Wainaina, Abou Chihabi, and Chebli.

Most popular musicians in eastern and southern Africa use a wide range of African languages and linguistic mixtures or urban vernaculars in their music. In addition, there is a predominant use of indigenous minority languages. For instance, Comorian songwriters such as Abou Chihabi have adopted Swahili as a linguistic identity marker. However, some of the titles and

lyrics of the songs on Chihabi's album *Folklor Ocean* (1997) are in languages other than Swahili. One such language used in this album is Shingazidja. For example, "Sote Ndugu" is a close approximation of standard Swahili, while "Vura Nkasiya na Pondro" is in Shingazidja. The use of various other African languages reflects the multilingual character of the Comoros in which Swahili is but one of the languages spoken. In some cases, the spelling of the words in Chihabi's titles differs significantly from the textbook version of standard Swahili, a tendency that also shows up in the work of the Congolese performing artist Samba Mapangala. In standard spelling, song titles such as "Lewo! Lewo!," "Maesha," "Tsi Haki," or "Masiwa" would be rendered as "Leo! Leo!," "Maisha," "Si Haki," and "Maziwa," respectively.

While Chihabi's songs are in Swahili and Shingazidja, the songs of the late Hukwe Zawose, the most famous traditional singer and musician in Tanzania and possibly in the whole of east Africa, are sung in both Swahili and Kigogo. The title track from his album *Mateso/Suffering* (1989) deals with the situation in South Africa during the apartheid era. The song "Sisi Vijana (We who are young)" mirrors the camaraderie in Chihabi's "Sote Ndugu." However, other songs such as "Nhongolo," "Kononze," "Mbiji," and "Chosanga" are all exclusively in Kigogo. As a counterpoint to Chihabi, the language strategies employed by Chebli, another Comorian singer, suggest that he has moved away from "traditional" forms of musical composition, such as the accordion-driven *twarab*. However, Chebli still composes his lyrics in Shingazidja.

The analysis of the language of popular-music lyrics indicated that African languages, including their hybrid forms, play a prominent role (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007; Nyoni, 2007). A number of scholars working in Africa have raised serious questions about the "language-killing potential" (Edwards, 1994, p. 8) of languages such as English, French, and Portuguese. From the viewpoint of popular music, African languages are not likely to be endangered in the near future. However, the language of the lyrics suggests that the standard varieties are promoted at the government policy level. It is equally true that ground-level language practices in the music industry fly in the face of such policy orientations. In popular music, the linguistic hybrids are more frequently used than English, French, or Portuguese.

Developing countries justify the elevation of exogenous languages such as English, French, and Portuguese by claiming that these languages allow their citizens to participate in the world economy. Popular songwriters and their audiences, however, are receptive to alternative visions of the global community and the sort of interactions and transactions most relevant to their own lives. Many of the ways in which their songs express these concepts can be ascertained through attention to the linguistic strategies that they employ and systems of deployment which frequently countermand the official policies. A case in point is the song "Sote Ndugu" by Abou Chihabi.

Extract 1: Abou Chihabi, "Sote Ndugu" (We are brothers)

Afrika Kusini ina ubaguzi.
Kwa nini ndugu?
Ni aibu.
Yo yo yo yo yo yo yo yo!
Unasikia kama huko kwetu,
Sote vijana tunapendana sana.
East Africa—sote ni ndugu.
West Africa—vile vile ndugu.
South Africa—eyahh!
North Africa . . .

South Africa is rotten with racism.
Why brethren?
It's shameful.
Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!
[Here] you feel as if you are at home,
All us youngsters really love one another.
East Africa—we are all brethren.
West Africa the same we are brothers.
South Africa—eyahh!
North Africa . . .

Dunia nzima sote ni ndugu—kweli!	Through the world we're brethren truly!
Kweli ndugu—kweli!	Truly brethren—truly!
India, Arabia, China, Japan, Russia,	India, Arabia, China, Japan, Russia
Amerika,	America,
Europa—ropa ropa Comorock.	Europa—ropa ropa Comorian rock
Afrika—Freedom	Africa—Freedom
Afrika—Music.	Africa—Music
Chantons tous	Let's all sing
Dansons tous	Let's all dance
We will get it someday	We will get it someday
We will get it someday	We will get it someday

In a linguistic analysis of Chihabi's "Sote Ndugu," the first element that is immediately obvious is the minor role of French in the song. The entire song contains only two lines in French (lines 18 and 19), which do not convey any serious propositional content. Reducing the role of French to a few lines is striking when one considers that the album was released in France and was composed by a former French colonial subject. This seems to suggest that there is a complementary relation between French and African languages in France. In the universe of popular music, African languages and their hybrid varieties are dominant. Conversely, English and French are dominant in a different linguistic universe. Although there is a single physical world, each language is dominant in a different social world.

Not only do French and, indeed, English have minor roles to play in the lyrics, but more significantly, the use of African varieties of French and English also shows that there are "several French languages today, and allows us to conceive of their unicity according to a new mode, in which French (and indeed English) can no longer be monolingual" (Glissant, 1997, p. 119). This raises an interesting point about social identity and language learning. If, as part of their social identity, African children already feel that they speak English and all the other African languages, they may not see the need to learn the standard varieties of the same languages in school. Pierce (as cited in Nero, 2006), states that "a person's investment in learning a language is an investment in his or her own evolving social identity" (p. 508). To the extent that African students already identify with varieties of English, French, Portuguese, and African languages and their linguistic bricolage, "they are less likely to make a deliberate investment in learning" (Nero, p. 508) them as separate languages.

Nonetheless, the practice of singing the same songs in different languages is also evident in the music of southern African musicians such as Oliver Mutukudzi in his songs "Todii (What Shall We Do?)" and "Magumo (The End)." As shown in Extract 2, in "Todii" he sings first in Shona, then Ndebele, and lastly in English (Sibanda, 2004).

Extract 2: Oliver Mutukudzi, "Todii" (What Shall We Do?)

Chorus:

Hooo todii; senzeni what shall we do

What shall we do, tingadii

Senzenjani, what shall we do

Senzeni

Tingadii; senzenjani, what shall we do

The same line is repeated in three different languages. What is significant is the implied hierarchy in the sequencing of the languages. Mutukudzi sings first in Shona, then sings in

Ndebele, and concludes with English, suggesting a hierarchy that runs counter to the Zimbabwean language policy of English as an official language and Shona and Ndebele as the two national languages. This seems to suggest that within Mutukudzi's singing universe English is not a "dominant" language, lessening the language's power in the same way that French is reduced to insignificant lines in Chihabi's song. However, the implied hierarchy changes in "Magumo" in that Mutukudzi sings in Ndebele before Shona. The suggested hierarchy in "Magumo" is interesting because it runs counter to sociolinguistic literature from Zimbabwe that has argued that Shona is the only dominant African language. For instance, Hachipola (1998) states the following:

One could be misled by politics to think that the government sees Shona and Ndebele on par. The truth is that Shona has a much higher status than Ndebele. In the media, for example, on television, radio, news is read in Shona first (p. xxi).

This state of affairs, Ndhlovu (2006) suggests, has rendered Shona the only dominant African language in Zimbabwe. Yet in "Magumo," Mutukudzi seems to challenge this position. The song lyrics in Magumo are initially in Ndebele and then Shona, as shown in Extract 3.

Extract 3: Oliver Mutukudzi, "Magumo" (The End)

Ndebele: Ma ulemali eningi besuhlupha abantu uzotholani ngalokho, (*If you have a lot of money, then you mistreat others*)
Uzophelelaphi (Where will all this end?)

Shona: Kuzvirova dundundu (*You beat your chest*)
 Tozvinzwa kuti ndisu tiri pano (*Feeling all your importance*)
 Magumo acho chii (*How will it all end?*)

As shown in "Magumo," some of the musicians sing in languages that are not their first language/s, suggesting that we need to be skeptical of the tendency to assume a one-to-one relationship between language and ethnicity encouraged by the ethnonyms in common use (Blommaert, 1999). For example, the South African singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka sings in Shona in one of her songs: "Kana uch chma" (which rendered in native form would be "Kana uchichema").

Popular songs in Zambia likewise bear witness to the variety of language choices among the creative artists who compose them. Artists such as the Amayenge band have developed a fusion of "traditional" musical performance with modern instrumentation, reflecting hybridity not only at the level of language but also at the level of music, style, and instrumentation, indicating the extent to which mixing at both linguistic and musical levels is mutually reinforcing. The lyrics of these songs are sung almost exclusively in "indigenous" Zambian languages. In a recent album, *Dailesi* (Amayenge, 2004), one finds that the songs are in Nsenga, Chewa, Bemba, Tumbuka, Lunda, Lenje, Luvale, Soli, and Lamba; this list indicates the extent of linguistic diversity in Zambia and the degree to which these indigenous languages are utilized as a resource rather than a constraint in the universe of music (Ruiz, 1984).

Just as common as these songs with lyrics composed in languages native to Zambia are those that contain linguistic mixtures within a single song. This ability to carry out fluid and seemingly instantaneous movement from one language or lect to another within the course of an oral performative work may serve any number of purposes, depending on the intentions of the artist. A case in point is the song "Samora Machel" by the group Shalawambe (1989).

Extract 4: Shalawambe, “Samora Machel”

Chinshi Chalenga	What has caused this? (6 times)
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Zambia balelila	Zambia is in mourning
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Zimbabwe balelila	Zimbabwe is mourning
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Mozambique	Mozambique
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Afrika Mama	Africa mother
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Africa Mama Iye!	Africa mother iye!
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel is gone
Oh! Shalawambe iko matata	Oh! Shalawambe the problems are overwhelming
Oh! Shalawambe iko matata	Oh! Shalawambe the problems are overwhelming
Oh! Shalawambe iko matata	Oh! Shalawambe the problems are overwhelming
I fell very sad mama here we go	
Yalila yalila Shalawambe	Shalawambe is in tears
Nalelo Ilelila Shalawambe	Today Shalawambe is crying
Samora Machel Aya	Samora Machel has disappeared
Afrika Mama	Africa mother
Samora Machel—o	Samora Machel is gone ¹

Between lines 14 and 18, the song diverges from its main text in Bemba into both Swahili and English, possibly in order to impress upon the listener the true weight of Samora Machel’s death, which had and continues to have serious political repercussions throughout the region.² Politically, Shalawambe’s strategy of employing lingua francas used throughout the region literally “gives voice” to those communities impacted by Machel’s assassination.

The use of these mixed languages is also evident in the work of artists such as Paul Ngozi, who is credited with creating some of the most memorable Zambian songs. “Half Mwenye Half Muntu” (re-released 2003) is one of these songs and is featured on the recently released *Greatest Hits* album. The song deals with sexual relations between Zambians of Indian origin and “indigenous Zambians.” Most of the song is sung in Nyanja. There is a chorus sung in English by women singers, but there is no Hindi, Panjabi, or Gujarati anywhere in the song. Yet Ngozi claims at one point to be paraphrasing the words of such men, as shown in Extract 5:

Extract 5: Paul Ngozi, “Half Mwenye: Half Muntu”

Manja a mwenye	Now these Indians
Kuti akwatile	When told to marry
Akuti iyayi	They say no
Ise isiti kwatila banthu	We, we don’t marry Africans
Chifukwa kwathu	Because where we come from
Chechi chikana	Our church doesn’t allow us
Kuti iyayi osakwatila munthu	To marry Africans

In the first chorus, Ngozi appeals to the sentimental feelings of his listeners by assuming the voice of a half-Indian, half-African child (singing in Nyanja).

¹Transcription and translation by Maureen Mulenga.

²Samora Machel was the first Mozambican President and was allegedly assassinated by South Africans through a manufactured plane crash.

Ife tabana muti sausa	We the children are mistreated
Atate athu siti baziba	We don't even know our fathers
Kufunsa mai a waya waya	When we ask our mother she doesn't answer
Kusukulu batiseka	At school they laugh at us
Akuti patelo uyo shame-shame	Saying there is Patel, shame-shame

The above is an example of a song sung using linguistic mixtures. Words such as *chechi* (church), *Kusukulu* (at school), *waya waya* (way lay), and *shame* (shame) are not drawn from standard Nyanja.³ One recent work that appears to quintessentially encapsulate many of the issues of language use touched upon in this article is the title track from the album *Twende Twende (Let's Get a Move On, 2006)*, recorded by the Kenyan artist Eric Wainaina in collaboration with the Zimbabwean recording artist Oliver Mutukudzi (mentioned elsewhere in this article). The title song moves faultlessly between Swahili, Shona, and English in its attempt to promote a pan-regional if not pan-African message of self-motivation and love.

Extract 6: Eric Wainaina [singing in Swahili] and Oliver Mutukudzi [singing in Shona], "Twende Twende"

VERSE 1

Eric: Kuja nami tuungane tuache kuzozana
(*Come with me let's join hands and stop being divided*)

Oliver: Ngatiende tiende mberi
(*Let's move moving forward*)

Eric: Wajua Upendo hauna mfano hauna adui kaka
(*Love has no equal or enemies*)

Oliva: Takabatana savatema
(*United as Blacks*)

Chorus
It's pole pole going slow
But still we're keeping time moving on
We're facing forward looking up
Forgetting what's behind
E: Twende Afrika heyoy!
(*Let's go Africa heyoy!*)

Extract 7: Oliver Mutukudzi [singing in Swahili] and Eric Wainaina [singing in Shona]

Oliver: Ukiumizwa hata mimi ninasikia uchungu
(*When you are wounded I feel your pain*)
'kiangaishwa ninalia ukilia dada
(*I cry when you cry*)

Eric: Chikakubada misodzi yangu inobuda
(*I will cry when something happens to you*)
Paunosuwa moyo wangu unorwadza
(*When you are sad, my heart aches*)

³Note the similarity with examples from Street Setswana in Cook (2009).

Chorus
 I wish we had a fighting chance
 To show you who we are
 We'd stand up proud for Africa
 Nkosi Sikelela

Both singers sing various sections of the song in English. Interestingly enough, while it might be expected that a Kenyan singer such as Wainaina would limit himself to singing the sections in Swahili and English, leaving the Shona passages for a native speaker such as Mutukudzi, that is not the case, and the song contains numerous points at which we find Mutukudzi singing in Swahili and Wainaina in Shona. The singing in Shona by Wainaina and Swahili by Mutukudzi is a type of language “crossing” (Rampton, 1995) because the singers are appropriating forms of identity which, conventionally, do not belong to them.

However, this form of crossing is an expansion of the term *crossing* as defined by Rampton (1995) in that *both* interlocutors appropriate each other's languages, unlike in Rampton's research in which only one interactant appropriates the other individual's language. This type of crossing can be referred to as “double crossing,” which has significant implications for language in education. In plurilingual contexts, appropriating each other's language is the norm. In contrast, the use of a single standard language in a classroom setting is an aberration.

Wainaina's entire album, in fact, speaks (or rather sings) profoundly to the issues of language hybridity and multiplicity (Njogu & Maupeu, 2007). While perhaps two of the songs on the album are exclusively in one language, the remaining songs reveal a concentrated effort to incorporate a variety of languages spoken throughout Kenya and, as mentioned earlier, as far away as Zimbabwe. Wainaina's utilization of Luo and Panjabi in his songs is especially important, given the historical animosity between these groups and the Gikuyu, Wainaina's ethnic group. The incorporation of these languages into his songs, as he himself stated in a recent interview, is a political move intended to provide a space to interrogate and undermine such hostile relationships through sociocultural interaction.

In sum, the analysis of the language of the lyrics of popular music has demonstrated the following:

1. The use of indigenous African languages is predominant in the recording and performance of popular music in local and international markets. The corollary to this is that English, French, Portuguese, and so on, as international languages, play a very limited role in African popular music.
2. In the lyrics of popular music, the varieties of African languages used are often non-standardized urban vernaculars.
3. Language practices in popular music reflect a language hierarchy wherein urban multi-lingual varieties come first, followed by standard African languages, with English, French, and so on, in third place.

DISCUSSION

This article set out to analyze the language of the lyrics of popular music and to establish the role and status of African languages, English, and French in popular music from eastern and

southern Africa. Furthermore, the article sought to establish the potential implications of the language of the lyrics in popular music for language, identity, and education in African contexts. Music as performance draws attention to communicative processes, which foreground speech as social action. The language of the lyrics of popular music is important insofar as it provides insight into the language practices of the music industry and the consumers of the music, which essentially is a reflection of the language practices of the subaltern.

Language use in African contexts is not a simple matter. Notwithstanding the multitude of African languages, colonial languages such as English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese were official languages as well as media of instruction in schools. After independence, the status of African languages changed to either official or national languages. In post-colonial Africa, English and French are “link languages” to the international world. Yet the language of the lyrics of popular music suggests that access to the international world is achievable through using indigenous African languages in either their standard form or using urban mixtures supported by the use of English in marketing.

In the previous section, we suggested that Chebli’s songs are in Swahili and Shingazidja. The fact that Chebli’s song titles, which circulate in international contexts, are not translated from their original Swahili in such titles as “Mwana” (Child), “Haki” (Truth), or “Mapinduzi” (Revolution) is a reflection of an increasing confidence in the social validity of Swahili as an “international” language. This suggests that Swahili has entered the same discursive space previously dominated by English and French. The issue is not whether Swahili is “factually” an international language or whether it can compete with English as an international language but that it is discursively imagined to be. To some extent, this suggests a dramatic revalorization of African languages possibly due to globalization and the proliferation of recording and broadcasting technology. The revalorization takes part largely based on the initiatives and choices made by the musicians themselves, perhaps as part of a complex realization of their individual identities.

In Western and North American contexts, the audiences may regard popular music sung in African languages and mixed varieties as more “African” than those sung in, for example, French or English. This critical observation raises a paradoxically polemical issue. In order for African musicians to penetrate Western markets, they need to sing in African languages and not in English. From such a perspective, English is the local language, and African languages are foreign. Put differently, African languages and urban vernaculars are local and “link languages.”

This suggests that the same language may be “valued and evaluated” differently across contexts and, indeed, across historical space (Perullo & Fenn, 2003, p. 4); thus, the same language may have different associations (Dlamini, 2006). If the same language is valued and evaluated differently, then uniformity in policy produces divergent results, even within the same state or continent. This is crucial in light of numerous calls for national language policies for the African continent as shown, for instance, in the Language Plan of Action for Africa.⁴

Popular music constitutes a powerful site of socialization, perhaps more important than schools (Woolard, 1985). If language-in-education policy is to succeed in African contexts, it needs to follow ground-level language practices rather than running contrary to them, even if the practices subvert the notions of language and identity that underpin them.

⁴See <http://www.bishrat.net/Documents/OAU-LPA-86htm>.

Viewed from the perspective of popular music, the promotion of standard indigenous African languages in language education is not only a conduit through which African students are taught but also a powerful mechanism that alters the worldview of the students and contributes toward developing their folk metatheory of language and language practices (Kramsch, 2006). Notwithstanding the fact that most African students do not speak standard African languages, using standard African languages creates a conundrum for African students. Using indirect, obfuscated language in indigenous languages indicates depth or intellectual sophistication, whereas in a school setting, this shows confusion or lack of clarity in thinking.

Education requires a more direct relationship between form and meaning. In contrast to standard African languages, urban varieties use a very direct and explicit style that enables the songwriters to deal directly with what would be considered “taboo” or highly sensitive topics in standard languages (Mungai, 2008). Urban vernaculars are, therefore, more appropriate for use in education than the standard varieties. Perhaps it is for this reason that Calteaux (1996) states that standard African languages used in the classroom are “remote from the everyday life of the learners” (p. 14). If the primary purpose of language in education is to facilitate learning, utilizing urban vernaculars will support effective learning in schools and may consequently improve social lives (Busch & Schick, 2006).

The use of standard African languages is, not only teaching through a medium, but it is also teaching a very specific view of language (Harris, 2008), which might run counter to the students’ experiences and perceptions of language. Students from plurilingual contexts may not be aware that they speak “different” languages, as the distinctions or boundaries between the languages may be insignificant. The idea of being taught in a medium called a “language” is a metalinguistic extrapolation that creates and imposes boundaries between the language of the students based on a particular language ideology. Standard African languages are a “language-teaching construct,” an extrapolation reinforced by a school timetable in which they are languages called Shona, Zulu, and so forth.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

The research reported in this article is consistent with interest in local perspectives on language planning, using a site that is rarely explored in language planning research: the wordy world of popular music. Analysis of the language of lyrics has shown that extensive use of African languages, especially urban vernaculars, runs counter to claims of the limited role that African languages play in domains such as education. Popular music as a site of research provides evidence that policies that promote standard African languages have not been able to resolve and exploit the tensions between standardized African languages as “rigid, monolithic structures” (Haugen, 1972, p. 325), on the one hand, and flexibility, fluidity, and ambiguity, on the other.

The analysis of the language of lyrics in popular music suggests that ground-level language practices and language-in-education policies differ significantly. Language policies in education are founded on the notion of languages as discrete codes that belong to particular states and ethnicities with specific linguistic identities. Language practices in popular music are based on everyday language practices and their discursive perceptions and interpretations of lived linguistic realities. Musicians reflect, in part, how they appropriate and resist dominant-language ideologies associated with top down language policies.

The significance of research into music is that it provides empirical evidence of the descriptive inadequacy of language-in-education policy, which enhances “the putative home/school language divide” (Rampton, 1985, p. 188). However, utilization of such mixtures in curricular activities also raises potential problems. If the mixtures are not directed at a pre-given target, it means that proficiency in such contexts is always provisional. It depends, not so much on how close the individual is approximating an imagined target, but on how well individuals’ language use meets their current requirements, the demands of the situation, and the ways in which they are able to exercise their agency.

An attempt to link popular music with language-in-education policy draws attention to the need to develop approaches to language planning firmly grounded in local perspectives. Clearly, popular music highlights the diversity of linguistic styles, while language-in-education policy is founded on assumed, predetermined groups sharing common linguistic features and focuses on a “linguistics of language.” Popular music is oriented toward a radically different direction: emphasis on commonality. After all, use of urban vernaculars reflects that these varieties have “an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders” (Alim & Pennycook, 2007, p. 90). By using urban vernaculars in the classroom, one taps into both the local and global identities of the students.

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