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## Fluid identity construction in language contact zones: metacognitive reflections on *Kasi-taal* languaging practices

Leketi Makalela\*

*Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa*

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This study investigated how semi-urban, multi-ethnic and multilingual students in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa, negotiate their new identities through languaging experiences. Metacognitive reflections of their recreated language spaces were collected through 20 written narratives, which were analysed using a universalist reductionist approach. The results of the study revealed highly complex identifying processes that mark fluid, multiple affiliations and mobile and creative negotiation of an identity matrix through a hybrid language form, *Kasi-taal*, which breaks boundaries and embeds linguistic systems that were traditionally treated as discrete units. Using a translanguaging framework, I argue that the languaging strategies articulated in the narratives can be valorised to offset the symbolic violence of monoglossic ideologies that are dominant in our classrooms. Recommendations for further studies on identity-building spaces in multilingual language contact zones as well as the logic of hybrid linguistic repertoires are highlighted at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** identity construction; *kasi-taal*; townships; South Africa; *Ubuntu* translanguaging

### Introduction

The relationship between language and identity has been a subject of intense debate among language practitioners and researchers for nearly a century. This debate has, characteristically, evolved from language being viewed as a static mirror of one's sense of self or ethnic belonging to a postmodern ideology of a dialogic matrix in which both language and identity influence each other in a constant state of flux (Bakhtin 1981; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Li Wei 2011; Makoni and Pennycook 2007). Associatively, the later thinking has shifted traditional views of multiple identities as oppositional to more complementary views of complex identity construction that disrupts orderliness while simultaneously domesticating strangeness (Heller 2007).

What has also become conspicuous is that the effects of globalisation on language and identity have changed the scope of sociolinguistics research to encompass conceptual frameworks, such as sociolinguistics of super-diversity and critical sociolinguistics of globalization, where languages are seen in motion and where they can no longer be fixated in particular places and times (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Blommaert 2010). In describing mobility and the alternation of multilingual discursive resources from a range of languages, translanguaging has been used as an overarching node for all instances in

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\*Email: [leketi.makalela@wits.ac.za](mailto:leketi.makalela@wits.ac.za)

which multilingual speakers juxtapose the languages of input and output in their everyday ways of meaning-making (Garcia 2011; Hornberger and Link 2012). That is, language systems are conceived as fluid, mobile and dynamic constructs of multilingual speakers who flexibly utilise these systems to perform their personhood. When framed in this light, notions such as ‘linguaging’ and ‘ethnifying’ (Garcia 2009, 2010, 2011), which refer to constant disruption of language codes and simultaneous emergence of new and ordered language practices, are used to explain the fuzziness created by hybrid spaces between traditional language codes. While there is a considerable amount of research on the immigrant populations’ discursive practices in the developed countries (e.g. Creese and Blackledge 2010), it is noteworthy that there is a paucity of studies on the relationship between linguistic performances and identity construction in sub-Saharan Africa.

Indeed, on the one hand, many Western countries have recently experienced a new wave of multilingualism due to increased transnational migration into the megacities, which have prompted research that sought to valorise transnational literacies (e.g. Hornberger and Link 2012). Countries with established multilingualism (defined in this paper as countries in which multilingualism has been naturalised for more than two decades), on the other hand, are experiencing an increased migration of previously marginalised populations from the remote rural areas into the urban centres (Makalela 2013). For South Africa, the new wave of internal migration adds to the already complex identity matrix of the black people in the black urban reserves (referred to as townships) that were originally formed through a migrant labour system in the 42 years of apartheid government. The new language mobility has increased possibilities for multilingual contact zones in classrooms and enhanced more fluid interactions through linguistic resources that can no longer be bound as separate entities (Makalela 2013, 2014; Madiba 2014). In order to describe personal experiences with linguaging in multiethnic and multilingual contexts, this paper explores metacognitive reflections of linguaging experiences and identity expressions of university students who live in several townships in the vicinity of the city of Johannesburg. The label *Kasi-taal* for a hybrid language form used in the townships is preferred to negative labels, such as Iscamtho or Tsotsitaal, which carry stereotypes such as the language of thugs or a language of the underworld. *Kasi-taal* is an encompassing name that includes:

evolved forms of both Iscamtho and Flaaitaal/Tsotsitaal in order to account for weakening boundaries between Sotho, Nguni, Afrikaans and English language forms and to understand how its speakers, who claim *Kasi-taal* as their home language, redefine their identities. (Makalela 2013, 112)

At the end of this article, the notion of language mobility in relation to language and identity construction is discussed and implications for multilingual education in established super-diverse contexts are highlighted. First, social constructivism and a translanguaging framework are discussed in the following sections.

### **Social constructivism and identities of bi/multilingual students**

Studies on multilingualism and bilingual education can be understood within the social constructivism framework, which posits that language, ethnicity and identity are socially constructed and performed in a diverse world in which linguistic boundaries have become permeable (Makoni and Pennycook 2007). This lens generally views languages as contextually embedded entities and prioritises the ‘agency of a situated speaker’ (Creese

and Blackledge 2010, 555) who continuously recreates multiple layers of self. This means that the speakers choose who they want to become through a wide array of linguistic resources available at their disposal and, as contexts change, they form, efface and reconstitute new identities in every interaction they are enmeshed in (see Garcia 2009).

From the social constructivism angle, the very notion of 'language' is critiqued and the validity of boundaries between languages is questioned. Language is viewed as a social construct that was associated with the old notion of linguistic purity and the eighteenth century desire of nation states to consolidate political power (Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Garcia 2010). What we know is that the states:

established language academies, encouraged the preparation of grammars, dictionaries, and treatises to strengthen and standardize languages; and encouraged the enumeration of languages in ways that masked their differences or similarities. (Garcia 2010, 520)

It can be deduced from this quote that language is an invention, while identity is socially constructed. It is in this context that it would be difficult to innately attach specific language categorisations to an individual, based on ethnicity or language systems that are used by the speakers in multilingual contexts (see Creese and Blackledge 2010, 552).

The idea of the invention of languages is presented forcefully in the work of Makoni and Pennycook (2007) who espouse the idea of social 'disinvention' of languages. After they assessed the historical context in which languages were invented, Makoni and Pennycook (2007, 1) observed that invention occurred in a social process of classification and naming. Due to this classification act, boundaries and division of people corresponding with nation states were formed. These bounded inventions were influenced by the ideology of oneness that led to monolithic views about languages, which now need to be critiqued in the global world where pluralism is the norm. To respond to versatile language use of the twenty-first century, Makoni and Pennycook recommend disinvention of languages and their subsequent reinvention where heterogeneity is acknowledged and valorised. Engagement in the deconstruction exercise also applies to monoglossic language policies in which languages are treated as hermetically sealed units instead of having vernaculars that leak into one another (Makoni and Mashiri 2007). Framed in this light, it is apt that the new conceptual framework of languages should be indexical to the multiple ways or forms of being that are characteristic of the twenty-first century personhood.

Whereas languages have been socially constructed, our attention is equally brought to users of these languages who attach their languages to their sense of being. As shown above, Garcia (2010) uses the terms 'linguaging' and 'ethnifying' as verbs to reflect dynamism and agency of the people involved and the dialogic relationship (Bakhtin 1981) between language and identity. Her assessment of what people do with language leads to a conclusion that 'it is through linguaging and ethnifying that people perform their identifying' (Garcia 2010, 519). This is echoed by Creese and Blackledge:

If languages are invented and languages and identities are socially constructed, we nevertheless need to account for the fact that at least some language users, at least some of the time, hold passionate beliefs about the importance and significance of a particular language to their sense of identity. (2010, 554)

It is noteworthy that the new understanding of languages as social constructs provides a different lens of the speech performance of multilingual students. One of the obvious

views is that linguistic resources that multilingual speakers possess are an integrated sum, not two or three discrete monolingualisms. In this context, Garcia (2009, 45) observes that multilingual communication includes multiple discursive practices which are 'more like an all-terrain vehicle whose wheels extend and contract, flex and stretch, making possible, over highly uneven ground, movement forward that is bumpy and irregular but also sustained and effective'.

Perhaps Rampton's (2006) model of understanding the linguistic formation and social identity of the bilingual learner is instructive to understand the versatility of multilingual speech performance. According to Rampton, social identity of a bilingual learner encompasses three interrelated factors: (1) expertise, which refers to proficiency or knowledge of the language, (2) affiliation or identification felt with a language, and (3) inheritance, which refers to ways people are born into a language tradition. In support of these identity markers, work on heteroglossia has shown how adolescents in urban contexts may appropriate and invent linguistic practices to negotiate their identities (Creese and Blackledge 2010). All these taken together depict the reality of a globalised society in which language users constantly create, construct and negotiate identities on the basis of a range of resources that can be soft-assembled (Garcia 2011) in the process of meaning-making and identifying.

### **Evidence for identity construction through translanguaging**

The idea that discursive language practices are used by multilingual speakers to make sense of the world, to express their identities and to choose who they want to become from a wide array of identity options has spiralled empirical research on identity construction under the umbrella term 'translanguaging' (Garcia 2009). In a multilingual education context, translanguaging refers to a fluid 'alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes' (Hornberger and Link 2012, 262).

Studies on translanguaging in academic writing find a pattern of identity expression through what Canagarajah (2002, 2011) refers to as code-meshing. Canagarajah (2002) reports on how multilingual writers engage with academic discourses of the dominant language in second-language contexts. He uses the experiences of the student writers to reveal that 'it is not crossing over into the academy, but shuttling between communities that might be ideologically desirable for students' (Canagarajah 2002, 41). The idea of shuttling between discourse communities emphasises that the students belong to both worlds and the outcome should not be that they get immersed into the dominant discourse while leaving their voices behind. Makalela (2014) refers to this as the pedagogy of mediating and negotiating the incomes of multilingual speakers in academic discourses.

In his later work, Canagarajah (2011) conducted a case study of a Saudi Arabian undergraduate student's translanguaging strategies in an essay writing task. He focused on the students' integrated language use in a literacy narrative, which was part of a university course on the teaching of second-language writing. When the student used Arabic and French in her English essay, Canagarajah deduced four types of strategies for multilingual focus on academic writing: recontextualisation, voice, interactional strategies and textualisation strategies, which can be adapted in similar multilingual contexts. The study shows that feedback of teachers can help students to question choices, to think critically about diverse options and to develop metacognitive awareness. In this way, code-meshing as a translanguaging strategy becomes an epistemic resource for multilingual students.

Research has also consistently revealed that despite powerful ideologies of homogeneity, immigrant populations continue to be heterogeneous in their practices (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Li Wei 2011). The UK complementary schools are cited as prototypical cases in which expressions of translanguaging spaces find their way despite the dominance of monolingualism in formal schooling. Li Wei (2011) analyses how Chinese immigrant students in a monolingual dominant culture express their identities through translanguaging space. She notes that her multilingual students use their translanguaging spaces to engage in related performances of criticality and creativity (Li Wei 2011); that is, multilingual speakers constantly push and break boundaries, with a great deal of sensitivity to historical contexts. In particular, she finds that her participants have fun with words, create space, cultivate relationships and recreate transnational spaces (China and England) in their ongoing languaging experiences.

Creese and Blackledge's (2010) research focus on immigrant children's languaging practices in four cities in the UK. First, the study involved complementary schools where children learnt languages associated with their ethnic heritage. These languages included Gujarati in Leicester, Turkish in London, Cantonese and Mandarin in Manchester as well as Bengali in Birmingham. Cross-case analysis of these bilingual children suggests that language embodies heritage to mark distinction in space and time (spatio-temporality). Second, they observe that their participants' translanguage in flexible and non-conflictual spaces where up to three languages are used through intermeshing and interweaving of a range of language resources across boundaries and borders. These illuminating findings lead to their call for analysis of interactions that 'take account of plurality of affiliation, coexistence of cohesion and separateness, and the fact that people cohere to different social worlds and communities simultaneously' (Creese and Blackledge 2010, 568).

Related work has also been conducted on transnational literacies. Using the continua of the biliteracy framework, Hornberger and Link (2012) study transnational literacy practices of students that draw on knowledge, identity and social relationships rooted in and extending across national borders. They rely on a wide array of international case studies from elementary school to university education to illustrate how the continua of biliteracy have become a necessary practice in most diverse multilingual educational settings.

One of the continua of biliteracy cases cited in Hornberger and Link's (2012) work is the University of Limpopo's Dual Medium Degree Programme where students rely on code alternations to study literacy traditions such as private speech. Although private speech was originally written in Russian by Vygotsky, the degree programme provides research through the medium of English and Sepedi in Limpopo, South Africa, and gives the students the opportunity to use multilingual spaces to discover their own culture of private speech. By comparing the international literacy spaces in which transnational literacies are valorised, Hornberger and Link (2012) argue for education policies and practices that recognise mobile and fluid multilingual resources students bring with them to class.

As stated earlier, work on languaging practices in South Africa is in its infancy (Makalela 2013, 2014; Madiba 2014). Makalela (2014) studied languaging practices among speakers of traditionally 'boxed' African languages who were learning another African language outside of their traditional home-language base. In his experiment, Makalela sought to test the idea of language crossing by purposefully allowing the student participants to break boundaries between Nguni and Sotho language clusters. He found that the classroom practice replicated out-of-classroom forms of languaging, which is nested in the locus of plural identity and expanded linguistic repertoires experienced in

most African societies. This is referred to by Makalela (2014) as *ubuntu* translanguaging. Madiba (2014) has also shown that translanguaging practices among Tshivenda and isiXhosa speakers learning English as a second language are effective in increasing the quality of scientific concepts in an academic support programme at the University of Cape Town.

The most comprehensive study to date is one by Nkadameng (2013), which considered both multilingual performance and attitudes of over 130 high school students in different regions of the largest black township in South Africa, Soweto. She uncovers out-of-school communication patterns that remain in constant clash with monolingual school practices that officially permit only one language in spite of the language policy pretensions of additive multilingualism. Her analysis of the language performances reveals that language repertoires of the students have expanded beyond traditional linguistic codes, which are hitherto code-meshed in this translocated, urban setting (Nkadameng 2013). The identities of the teenagers studied have become so complex that they can only find expression through the hybrid language form described above as *Kasi-taal*, which is considered their home language. In view of the paucity of research on translanguaging and of the need to expand on the findings from these studies, the present study investigates narrative metacognitive reflections on languaging experiences of university students at a tertiary institution where monolingualism is entrenched. It seeks to provide insights on the indexical link between permeable linguistic resources and identity negotiation in the multilingual townships of Johannesburg.

### **The study**

This study was guided by the following questions:

- (1) What are the metacognitive reflections of university students on their languaging experiences outside of the formal academic environment?
- (2) How does languaging both in the present and past help them construct their identities?
- (3) What are the languaging incomes that multilingual speakers bring with them into a monolingual tertiary institution?
- (4) What are the languaging implications for bilingual education opportunities in higher education?

This study assessed metacognitive reflections on languaging experiences of multilingual students at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As an exploratory study, it identifies themes that cut across 20 cases of the urban youth from four semi-urban black settlements that are referred to as townships: Katlehong, Soweto, Alexandra and Tembisa.

### **Participants**

The study involved 20 self-selected students from a pool of 95 students who registered for a first-year sociolinguistics class at the University of the Witwatersrand. Initially, all the students participated in class discussions in which they were expressing views about their language journeys. After a very heated debate, students were asked to individually reflect on their past languaging experiences. Although this was a racially and ethnically mixed class of students from all social, linguistic and geographical backgrounds, the bulk majority of these came from the townships mentioned above. A small number came from

rural hybrid locations at the borderline between Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Sepedi in Limpopo as well as the Nguni boundary languaging spaces between isiXhosa and isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Although all the 11 official languages, spoken as home languages, were represented in this class, Afrikaans and English mother tongue speakers were not included in the pool whose narratives were used for this study because they did not meet the inclusion criteria of 3 languages. The age of the self-selected participants ranged from 18 to 22 years, and they were all registered for a four-year Bachelor of Education degree.

### ***Data collection***

Metalanguaging data were obtained from 20 written pieces collected from the cohort of first-year student teachers described above. After they had discussions about cultural heritage and belonging in this class, they were asked to come for a 2-hour session to write up their ideas and reflect deeply on the subject of self and how they came into contact with the languages they speak or write. In one writing setting, all 20 students were given the following instruction:

Write a detailed reflection about your contact with languages and explain how this contact has had an impact on your sense of self. (1000–2000 words)

Upon completion of the writing task, the researcher asked them to explain each of their stories so that everyone knew what they wrote. This was meant to validate the data and provide insights and clarification for the researcher to have a full grasp of larger contexts of being: history, space and socio-political dimensions. However, these oral reflections on their writings were not included for analysis as they are beyond the scope of this paper.

### ***Data analysis***

The researcher used the universal reductionist approach to arrive at salient points related to identity. As used in Canagarajah (2011), open coding data of emerging categories were applied to the data. For each script, an axial coding that refines categories was used in order to reflect on the constant comparison of incoming data-set with previously viewed data-sets. This was repeated until saturation points for each theme were reached.

## **Results**

The results of the analysis show multilayered identity constructions organised into the following categories: keeping coco-universe identities (see below), recreation of multiple identities and *Kasi-taal* as home language, convergence of cross-border identities, reconstitutive identities, identity crisis in monolingual classrooms and multilingual spaces at university level.

### ***Keeping coco-universe identities***

The majority of the respondents in the study showed a range of identity expressions through multiple languages of up to eight official languages in South Africa. They used a coconut metaphor to express their merged identities (brown on the outside and white on the inside). Here, coconut is used to mean that they had some identities formed as a result



of exposure to English. The respondents argued that such a merged identity makes them versatile to fit across traditional boundaries as in Example 1 below (quoted verbatim):

*Example 1*

I was and still am raised by a single mother who was born Xhosa and grew up in rural Transkei. My father was from a small town in Mpumalanga, where rare mixture of Pedi and Tsonga was the dialect. ... I grew up with a strange taste of speaking an unknown language because of the people around me. At home, I speak Setswana and English with my siblings, but Setswana and Xhosa with my mother. I mixed isiZulu and Setswana and I loved growing up in such a multilingual area like Alexandra. I did not know Xhosa very well so through speaking isiZulu I came to differentiate the two languages and that is how I learnt how to speak isiXhosa. Through all these languages I managed to keep my *coco-universe* alive.

The narrator in this extract shows how she moved from one variety to the next until she got a pool of languages including Sepedi, Xitsonga, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and English. Referring to her hybridised community, she refers to that phenomenon as the 'strange taste of speaking an unknown language'. In all varying contexts, she chooses from a range of linguistic systems or 'unknown languages' and utilises them accordingly to achieve different communication goals. For example, she was able to choose to use English with siblings and eliminate it while speaking to her mother. This practice finds resonance in Li Wei's (2011) observation that multilingual speakers are sensitive in their translanguaging spaces through the use of two *interrelated* strategies of criticality and creativity. The coco-universe in this case gives the students more scope to navigate and shift affiliations and to keep their diverse membership.

***Hybrid Kasi-taal as home language***

Many respondents narrated how they have come to see themselves in terms of a plural lens of selves. They showed how multilingual speakers have the tenacity to recreate themselves by using 'unconventional' means of communication. Example 2 is a prototypical case:

*Example 2*

I call myself *MoTswaPedi*. My father is Pedi, his father *ke mo* [is a] Pedi and his mother *ke mo* Sotho and he was born in Johannesburg, so basically *ke moPedi wa* [from] Gauteng and he grew up in the black township Soweto. So we already know that he is a polyglot hence he can speak at least 8 different languages including *Kasi-taal* of course. The queen of my heart, my mother *ke Mo Tswana wa* Kimberly. That is where she grew up and she became fluent in Setswana, Afrikaans and a little bit of English. I grew up surrounded by many languages and in Soweto we came up with our lingo.

In this example, the speaker has coined a new hybrid identity formed from three closely related languages: Mosotho, Motswana and Mopedi ('Mo-' indicating speaker of Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi). From her point of view, there is no difference between these systems which are merged into one in her enlarged spoken repertoire. While performing her identifying she resorts to translanguaging by inserting a phrase that cuts across these languages '*ke mo*' for 'he/she is a' and the '*mo*' prefix to identifying ethnic affiliation in all the three language groups. This is a typical heteroglossic view of oneself, reflected in the explanation and the strategy of explanation (i.e. translanguaging to show how

broadened and integrated the identity of the speaker is). Second, growing up in a polyglot environment where her father lived, Soweto, there were already eight languages spoken in the community. As a result of some code-meshing practice, they created and used a common language (lingo) that is called *Kasi-taal* (language of home or home language). *Kasi* here refers to a Black township where immigrant Black labourers were placed temporarily during South Africa's apartheid period, and 'taal' is derived from Afrikaans, meaning a language. This speaker has found *Kasi-taal* a hybrid language form that is not official, but is used widely and is appropriated as her home language.

### *Convergence of cross-border identities*

The study has shown that there were students who had immigrant parents from South Africa's neighbouring states: Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland and Mozambique, and they recounted how fluid verbal repertoires eased their stay in the Johannesburg townships. Due to similarities in the languages used across the borders, there has been a large convergence of these languages across the Southern African border that have become an integral part of the township life. The narratives revealed further that linguistic affiliation was not fixated to the place of origin once the immigrants' parents and grandparents mixed with the Johannesburg township communities as illustrated in Example 3:

#### *Example 3*

*Mhana na tatana* [my mother and my father] are both Gautengers as they were born and bred in this province. My father was born in Diepkloof, a dusty township in Soweto from Zulu and Ndebele parents hence the name ... was given to me by paternal grandparents. The Mathebula surname is from my grandfather but he stole it from his neighbours when he came to *Joni* so that he could claim that he was Zulu speaking because being a *Mushangani* who spoke Tsonga was seen as a low class. Our original surname is Chauke and my grandfather is from Malamulele, *Ma olady* is from Pretoria but moved to Diepkloof when she was 5 with native Tsonga speaking parents. Her dad was from Maputo to the bright city of *Joni* for a better life. In his case he pretended to fit in our country as people in Maputo spoke Tsonga.

The narrator in Example 3 begins his reflection through the medium of Xitsonga a minority language whose speakers, according to this narrator, are seen as low class compared to isiZulu speakers. His grandfather was able to 'melt' into the Xitsonga community of South Africa due to similarities between variants of Xitsonga in Mozambique and in South Africa. When the grandfather went to Soweto, he changed his ethnic identity to isiZulu, which was dominant in the area. Due to this seamless ethnic crossing, the narrator's father then believed that he [the father] belonged to the Zulu ethnic group, while his mother was a Ndebele speaker. What is also clear is that although Xitsonga suffered 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1991) meted out by isiZulu in Soweto, it was kept alive through flexible identifying.

We further deduce that the narrator in Example 3 does not only reveal a complex identifying process that was cross-border, but he also performs his present identity by prefacing Xitsonga: *mhana na tatana* (my mother and my father) and constantly renames Johannesburg through a Xitsonga derivative, *Joni* to emphasise his sense of belonging in the big city. In addition, the narrator shifts from 'mana' in Xitsonga for mother to a hybridised version, *Kasi-taal*, '*Ma olady*' to mark the merger of his old self (inheritance) and the new urban youth identity indexing the mobile and hybridised Johannesburg speech repertoires.

### **Identity reconstitution**

Following on transnational identities above, there were also a number of respondents who reported recent migration from a relatively monolingual neighbouring country to multilingual spaces in the townships of Johannesburg. The student-respondents' narratives revealed that there was a high versatility in expanding layers of selves in the new space. This was possible mainly due to similarities in the cross-border languages. Example 4 shows how a Lesotho immigrant student fits in well into Katlehong township.

#### *Example 4*

I migrated from Lesotho to Katlehong (a township south of Johannesburg). I was puzzled when I arrived to hear people speaking languages I had never heard of before. In Sesotho *bare ho tsamaya ke ho bona* [In Sesotho they say walking is seeing]. Well this was the beginning of my climb with languages. In Katlehong I was living in a place called Mopedi, the people living there were Sotho speakers, Pedi speakers and isiZulu speakers. I felt like I was in a different world because there was no one I could speak pure Sotho with. The Sesotho in Katlehong had words from English, Afrikaans and isiZulu. For example, when a friend greet they say, '*Eskse ho jwang mogita*' and the other friend will say '*Ke grant*'.

In this example, the speaker narrates about his initial contact with the multilingual township community of Katlehong where no 'pure' language is spoken. He observes a blend of languages that include Afrikaans, Sepedi, Sesotho, isiZulu and English used seamlessly by the residents. Although the area is designated Mopedi, i.e. a place where the Sepedi speakers live, in reality, it was an intermeshing of every language used in the larger area.

Like the narrator in Example 3, this narrator demonstrates that he has not lost his Sesotho identity from Lesotho. He translanguages by inserting the Sesotho phrase for 'walking is seeing' to emphasise his identity (a translocal identity). Equally, he has also learnt to use a hybridised language of this community for establishing rapport and performing a range of social functions. For example, the *Kasi-taal* greeting starts with Afrikaans '*Ekse*' for 'I say', followed by '*Ho jwang?*' in Sesotho for 'How are you?' and then '*Mogita*' from isiZulu for a guy friend. This form of greeting is responded to in Sesotho/English phrase '*ke grant*' for 'I am fine'. This *Kasi-taal* expression reveals that the Katlehong community has ritualised translanguaging practices that simultaneously index their expressions of multiple identities. When outside speakers join the community, they undergo identity reconstitution for multilingual group membership.

### **Identity crisis in monolingual classrooms**

As consistently pointed out in the literature (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Garcia 2011), bi/multilingual children tend to experience an identity crisis in monoglossic school environments when they are deprived of opportunities to use their multiple discursive language forms, varieties and modes they bring with them. The respondents in this study recounted experiences of being torn between school language expectations and out-of-school language experiences. A prototypical case is Example 5 below:

#### *Example 5*

Most of the languages that I spoke I acquired them from outside my house. When the time for me to started school arrived, things changed. All the many languages I was used to had to be minimised. I was introduced to English 'the medium of instruction'. At that moment in time I felt as if my home languages were sidelined as if they did not form part of my

schooling. There was this time in grade 3 when I asked my teacher, '*Go reng re sa buiswe ka Setswana?*' [Why are we not taught in Setswana?] Not that I really knew how to read in Setswana but because I understood it, I had the confidence to speak up. English took over; there was a point where I started to code-switch in *Seisemane*-Setswana and not in all my known languages.

This extract reflects the negative effects of subtractive language-in-education practice according to which African language speakers learn in their home language for the first three or four years of schooling and then suddenly shift to the medium of English at Grade 4 or 5 level. The narrator tells about her painful experience of using one language and leaving out a repertoire of multiple resources in her complex process of meaning-making. She was only confident to speak in Setswana, which was used to question monoglossic practice of English only in her Grade 3 class. Once English had taken over as the medium of instruction, she then resorted to code-switching strategies to express her multiple identities even though such a resistant practice was curtailed. Like the other respondents in the study, this student uses translanguaging to express this deep identity crisis imposed by monolingual practices at school. Feeling that her other self was compromised in this situation, she uses her primary ethnic affiliation, Setswana, when asking the question and then uses a Setswana name for English, *Seisemane*. As Creese and Blackledge (2010) observe, this case shows that multilingual students have the tenacity to debunk dominant monolingual impositions.

### ***Multilingual spaces at university level***

One of the dominant themes that emerged in the study was the idea of shrinking spaces to express multiple identities at the university campus that can be characterised as entrenched English monolingualism. This means that the multilingual experiences from the townships are inadvertently negated by the university campus language practices that gravitate towards English monolingualism. This is expressed in Examples 6 and 7 below:

#### *Example 6*

This was quite hard for me because my language is the best language to me even though I no longer get a chance to express myself in this language. Now that I have to speak English almost all the time I find myself speaking it even when I am not supposed to and when I go home they will say, '*Sowuzenza umlungu*' [You are turning to be a white person]. But I tell myself that no matter how far I go in life, I will always adore my home language isiBhaca.

In this narration, the speaker talks about the pride of being an isiBhaca speaker, who integrates all the Nguni languages into one system, and she decries the campus environment that limits her full means of expression. Her other concern is that her relatives in Transkei would think that she had become white due to her extended exposure to and use of English. Typical of the strategies observed in the study, the narrator uses isiBhaca to talk about how her Bhaca relatives would react. Example 7 puts the shrinking campus space into sharp focus as follows:

#### *Example 7*

One day it was lunch time and I was sitting in the cafeteria all by myself. I saw this guy coming towards me and he said to me '*Why uhleli wedwa?*' [Why are you sitting alone?] I did not know what to say so just told him that I prefer to be alone sometimes. He had asked me

in Zulu and I understand Zulu so I wished he could stay a bit longer and that maybe we could chat just until lunch was very (...) but then his friends were waiting. I never saw him again.

This extract shows that the speaker celebrated momentary use of isiZulu on campus where use of many languages has suddenly dropped. Although the environment has become less multilingual, it has not changed her sense of being and the desire to use the linguistic resources for interaction on the campus premises.

## **Discussions**

The languaging experiences of the multilingual students in this study revealed features of the twenty-first century, which extend our understanding of identity construction in super-diverse contexts: fluidity, versatility and mobility. First, the study showed that speakers alternated highly complex and vast linguistic repertoires that include up to eight language varieties, which are intermeshed to express their identities without boundaries. It is this type of mobility that allows them to navigate their *coco* (blended) universe, which refers to their heteroglossic way of knowing and making sense of the world. While these flexible identity expressions attest generally to Blommaert's (2010) view of the sociolinguistics of mobility due to immigration, the township experiences revealed an already established melting point created by translocal movements between closely related languages. Because multilingual speakers in the context of this study simultaneously break old linguistic codes and re-recreate new ones, it is fitting to describe their identity construction as a representation of a discontinuous continuity (Boomkens 2013).

The second finding of the study is that the student-respondents are able to recreate themselves in new spaces and adopt new identities. As illustrated in Example 2, the speakers have an enlarged sense of being where they see themselves as an amalgam of the whole within different cultural and linguistic spaces. I have shown elsewhere that this holistic regard for oneself in a larger ecosystem that is shared with others allows seamless crossing between language systems of all speakers and the resultant linguistic alternation can be referred to as *ubuntu* translanguaging. Here, the plural locus of being is widely shared by black South Africans under the concept of *ubuntu* – an incompleteness of oneness (Makalela 2014). It is in this connection that notions like home language and mother tongue in these townships become too narrow for these speakers who rather prefer *Kasi-taal* as the language of their location (Makalela 2013; Nkadameng 2013). This recreation process is cogently captured by Garcia (2010) who uses the progressive verbs 'languaging' and 'ethnifying' to emphasise fluidity of the process of identity expansion through language use.

What has also come to light is that multilingual speakers are engaged in a constant process of pushing and breaking national boundaries and borders. This cross-border languaging allowed immigrants from Mozambique and Lesotho to fit in well with the Xitsonga and Sesotho community of South Africa, respectively, due to similarities between languages that crossed the physical boundaries. The extent to which languages index identities across borders is perhaps a stronger indication that the boundaries both between the neighbouring nation states and the clustered languages are artificial. As Makoni and Mashiri (2007) pointedly observe, languages are not hermetically sealed units; rather they leak into one another through seamless multiple identity and language performances. The geographical boundaries between the Southern African nation states are thus weakened by cross-border identifying processes.

Whereas the township's identity expressions allow multiple voices that co-index ethnic and linguistic identity affiliations, contact with English in early school grades limit spaces for creativity and expressions of being. The results show a sharp contrast between the language-in-education policy and multiple language resources that children bring with them to school. In the face of strong monolingual ideologies at schools, multilingual speakers become sidelined and alienated when they struggle to make meaning and reconstitute themselves as monolinguals (Nkadimeng 2013). Their multivocality is silenced by the symbolic violence of English as the only language of education, upward social mobility and success (Bourdieu 1991).

### ***Implications for bi/multilingual teachable strategies***

There are far-reaching implications for students' identity construction in multilingual classrooms where translanguaging can be used as a teachable strategy for bi/multiliteracy development. According to Hornberger and Link (2012, 268), translanguaging is a useful strategy that can valorise 'all points along the continua of biliterate context, media, content and development'. Bilingual models like the continua of biliteracy (Hornberger and Link 2012) and pluriliteracy (Garcia 2009) all point to allowing students to access academic content through multiple discursive resources which they bring into the classroom. The narratives used in this study have also illustrated how antecedent genres or students' multilingual incomes can be derived from historical, educational and linguistic backgrounds and be embedded in a sociolinguistics course. That is, translanguaging through *Kasi-taal* was used to challenge constraints of a monoglossic English classroom and gave space for multilingual students to express their mobile sense of self. It has also allowed them to gain deep content knowledge about language and history and raised their metalinguistic awareness of key sociolinguistics concepts. Canagarajah (2011) illustrates how feedback on translanguaging in academic literacy narratives becomes a practical way to recontextualise the student's incomes in non-conflictual ways. With all these in mind, it seems that bi/multilingual classrooms need to capture the mobility of language systems in the twenty-first century and develop a plural vision in which students' complex sense of being is affirmed, encouraged and developed as they continuously acquire new ones.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the study was to explore how identities are performed through languaging practices among multilingual students who live in polyglot townships of Johannesburg. The study has shown highly complex interwoven identity negotiation where relationships are formed in fluid, versatile and mobile usage of the participants' linguistic repertoires. Not only are these multilingual speakers constantly shifting identities in their meaning-making process and choosing who they want to become (Garcia 2009), but they also break and transcend conventional boundaries of 11 discrete languages and recreate new forms of expression that index their expanded sense of selves through *Kasi-taal*. To this end, *Kasi-taal* as a languaging practice disrupts the traditional linguistic codes and embodies their plural locus of self: *ubuntu* translanguaging.

It was also shown that, in the context of monoglossic language in education policies, these multilingual speakers find themselves restricted within the narrow confines of monolingual language of instruction practices. Yet, the resilient nature of multilinguality

is all-important to challenge the symbolic violence of monolingualism. Creese and Blackledge (2010, 553) correctly observe:

Despite powerful ideologies of homogeneity, populations in many countries – especially in countries with a history of recent immigration – continue to be heterogeneous in their practices.

I have shown that the townships of Johannesburg defy the traditional logic of a single mother tongue or home language due to their highly plural orientation of selves. As a result, I contest that their multilingual incomes can be affirmed in classroom interactions through translanguaging, teachable strategies such as narrative scaffolding. This is possible once we accept that language and identity are systems in constant motion, not fixated in time and space. In other words, they disrupt, interfere and overlap old structures while restructuring a new logic of orderliness. It is thus apt to observe that the multilingual spaces, such as the one described in the study, reflect fluid identity constructions in new language contact zones, in a discontinuous continuity. More studies are needed to deepen our insights into these new hybrid language forms and their relationship with what I described here and elsewhere as the plural locus of self.

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