



Presentation of my Bachelor Thesis

The Role of Language in the Context of Identity: Igbo,
Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin in the Cape Town Region

Humboldt – Universität Berlin

Regionalstudien Afrika/Asien

Praxiskolloquium

Fanny Sigler



„We use or speak Igbo. We know that
language is what identifies a people”

(Onwukwe and Gibson 2023: 797)



Table of contents

- ▶ How did I come up with that topic?
- ▶ Research Questions and Sub-Questions
- ▶ Previous Research
- ▶ Theory
- ▶ Method
- ▶ Background
- ▶ Ethnifying, languaging and national identity
- ▶ Identity negotiations between local and heritage identity
- ▶ External factors
- ▶ Conclusion
- ▶ References



How did I come up with that topic?

- Combination of Language and Identity
- Focus on internal African migration
- South Africa, because I have been there > it has many Nigerian migrants



Research questions and sub-questions

- **Which role does language play for speakers of Igbo, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin in the Cape Town Region for identity?**
 - 1. Is there a connection between language and identity for the participants?
 - 2. In what way is language used as a tool for identification, as well as identity construction and deconstruction for the Nigerian diaspora in Cape Town?
 - 3. Which influence does the surrounding and the languages present in Cape Town have on the language use of the Nigerian diaspora?



Previous research



- ▶ Banda, Felix, und Idowu Adetomokun. 2015. "African Renaissance and Negotiation of Yoruba Identity in the Diaspora: A Case Study of Nigerian Students in Cape Town." *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 10 (1): 83-101.
 - ▶ Onwukwe, Chimaobi, und Hannah Gibson. 2023. "Migrant identities in multilingual contexts: Nigerian migrants' language use in public spaces in Cape Town." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 44 (9): 794-806.
 - ▶ Umana, Beauty Friday Happy. 2018. "Nigerian Pidgin English in Cape Town: exploring speakers' attitudes and use in diaspora." Master Thesis, University of Cape Town.
 - ▶ Umana, Beauty Friday Happy. 2022. "Immigrant language vitality: exploring the language practices of some Nigerian immigrants in Cape Town." Dissertation, University of Cape Town.
 - ▶ Adetomokun, Idowu Jacob. 2012. "A Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Analysis of Yoruba Students' Narratives of Identity at Three Western Cape Universities." Master Thesis, University of Western Cape.
- > Main sources of information for my thesis



Theory



- ▶ Transnationalism (Vertovec 2009)
- ▶ Translocality (Freitag und von Oppen 2010)
- ▶ Identity performance (Pennycook 2010)
- ▶ “Languaging” and “ethnifying” (García 2010)
 - ▶ “Languaging refers to the discursive practices of people. And ethnifying points to the act of signifying and calling attention to an identity by pointing to certain ethnic practices, including languaging” (García 2010: 519)
- ▶ Translanguaging (García 2009)
- ▶ “Superdiversity” (Vertovec 2007)
- ▶ Etc.



Method



- Qualitative literature review
- Using five literatures as the main sources
- Find similarities and differences, summarise, find new aspects in the data > concerning the main question
- Advantages: facilitates further research, reveals research gaps
- Disadvantage of method: limited amount of available literature > selection bias



Background



- ▶ Language and religious background of Nigeria
 - ▶ Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, NP, English
 - ▶ Christianity and Islam
- ▶ Migration to South Africa
 - ▶ Reasons: education, business opportunities, asylum etc.
 - ▶ Xenophobic violence in SA
- ▶ Language situation in South Africa and Cape Town
 - ▶ 12 official languages
 - ▶ Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa (Western Cape)

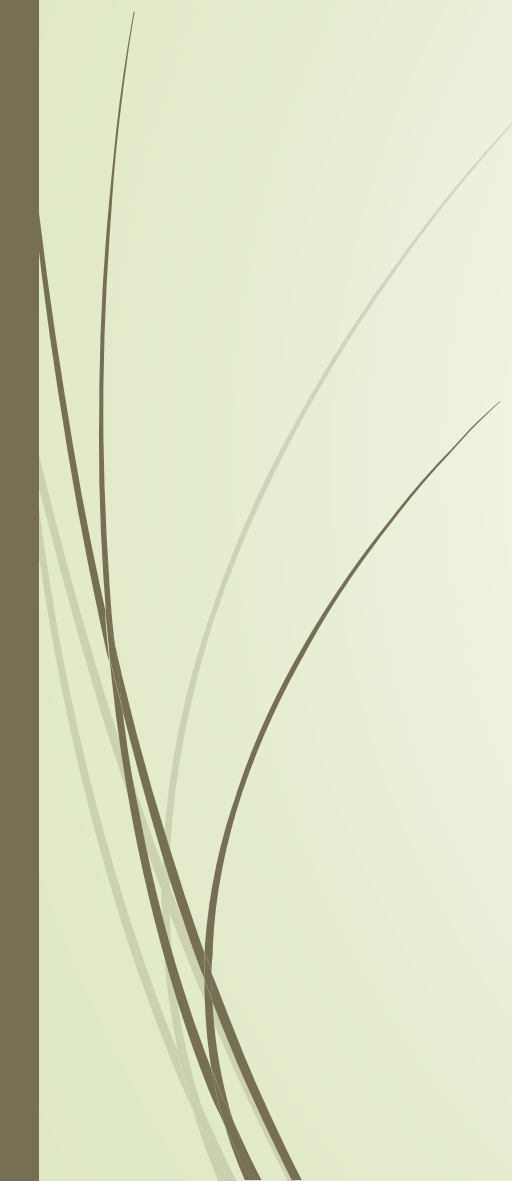


Ethnifying, languaging and national identity

- Addressing the question of the connection between identity and language for many people
- Using García's theoretical approach
- BUT showing, that the connection is not inevitable (Yoruba, Igbo)
- Difference to NP > neutral, national identity?
- It's not either or > complex identity performance with different languages
- Besides language there are other practices which can be used for identity performance



Identity negotiations between local and heritage identity

- ▶ Umana 2022: “insider”- / “outsider” identity
 - ▶ Concept of “superdiversity” (Vertovec 2007)
 - ▶ Unity vs “Othering”
 - ▶ Knowledge in local languages and other languages > access to groups (religious, local), strategy for acceptance
- 



External factors

- ▶ Identity and language vitality
 - ▶ Nigerian languages used mainly with relatives/friends > “togetherness in the diaspora” (Umana 2018 > NP), different communities named: Igbo Association for Igbo (Onwukwe und Gibson 2023), UWC for Yoruba (Umana 2022) etc.
 - ▶ Also occasionally in public spaces
 - ▶ Even in English-dominant households heritage languages remains with relatives (Yoruba, NP; Umana 2022)
 - ▶ Attitude towards NP varies according to formal, informal
 - ▶ Prestige plays a role: English as a global language
 - ▶ Language use with children influences language vitality



External factors

- ▶ Language contact phenomena
 - ▶ Based on García's "Translanguaging"
 - ▶ South African tags ("yah, "ne"..), isiXhosa terms ("haibo", "eish"...) found in their speech up to whole parts of a sentence in a South African language
 - ▶ Multilingual signs
 - ▶ Neologism: "Ofunbia" (*come once*) > translates to "Xenophobia" (Onwukwe and Gibson 2023)
- ▶ Xenophobia and economic factors
 - ▶ Local languages, less accent to avoid stigmatization/violence
 - ▶ English or isiXhosa can be important in terms of economical chances



Conclusion



- ▶ Diverse and complex reality with many factors having an influence on language and identity construction and deconstruction of Nigerians in SA
- ▶ Challenges:
 - ▶ Limited literature
 - ▶ Balancing between terms that categorize and fluid concepts
- ▶ Not enough research done
- ▶ Research needed in other practices, used to show identity



Thank you for your attention!

Are there any further questions?



References

- ▶ See “previous research”

- ▶ Others:

Freitag, Ulrike, und Achim von Oppen. 2010. „Introduction: ‚Translocality‘: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Area Studies.” In *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, herausgegeben von Ulrike Freitag und Achim von Oppen, 1-21. Leiden: Brill.

García, Ofelia. 2010. “Conclusion: Languaging and Ethnifying.” In *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*, herausgegeben von Joshua A. Fishman und Ofelia García, 519-534. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pennycook, Alastair. 2010. *Language as a Local Practice*. Abingdon und New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Vertovec, Steven. 2007. “Introduction: New directions in the Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6): 961-978. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599416>.

Vertovec, Steven. 2009. *Transnationalism*. Oxon und New York: Routledge.