Language Use in Postcolonial Zimbabwean Alternative Theatre Performance

Nkululeko Sibanda

University of Pretoria, South Africa
sibandankululeko84@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper deploys the sociolinguistic concepts of indexicality and language ideologies to examine Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' use of language and linguistic frames as a performance resistive strategy in the postcolonial Zimbabwean landscape. These concepts offer a framework to critically appraise the political, social, ideological and cultural meanings latent in language/s used in alternative theatre performances, which have the ability to influence and define identities and ideological structures. From this lens, colonial residual hegemony, dominance and cultural subjugation expressed through English and/or Shona are challenged and re-framed through code-switching, translanguaging and language mixing. From an interpretive approach, this paper shows that the creative linguistic methods employed by Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions to reject normative and metropolitan power enforced by English purists (Ndebele and Shona in the context of Zimbabwe) over means of communication. In essence, this paper provides deeper insights into syncretic linguistic forms, and culture vis-à-vis colonial residual domination, hegemony and cultural subjugation in postcolonial Zimbabwean alternative theatre.

Keywords: indexicality; hegemony; code-switching; Amakhosi; Rooftop; syncretic

Introduction

> Though the post-colonial dramatist can hardly avoid issues of language and the ambivalent and often contradictory feelings attached to them, what needs to be stressed is the richness with which they have created the linguistic means to render their and their people's experiences. Crow (1983, 8)

The above epigraph observes the creative strategies employed by contemporary theatre practitioners in creating linguistic frames that express the contemporaneity of people's experiences. In this paper, I deploy the sociolinguistic concepts of indexicality and language ideologies to examine Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' use of language and linguistic frames as a performance resistive strategy in the postcolonial Zimbabwean landscape. These concepts offer a framework to critically appraise the political, social, ideological and cultural meanings latent in language used in alternative theatre performance, which can influence and define identities and ideological structures (Garcia and Wei 2014). I argue that from this perspective, Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions were able to challenge colonial residual hegemony, dominance and cultural subjugation expressed through English by re-framing and expressing their experiences through code-switching, translanguaging and language mixing (Jonsson 2009; Jonsson 2014; Schildkret 2017). Departing from an interpretive approach, I show that *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* are creative linguistic methods employed by Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions to reject normative and metropolitan power enforced by English purists over means of communication. In essence, in this paper, I provide deeper insights into syncretic linguistic forms, and culture vis-à-vis colonial residual domination, hegemony and cultural subjugation in postcolonial Zimbabwean alternative theatre (Amkpa 2003).

Elizabeth Schildkret (2017, 21) observes that plays cannot be examined as separate pieces of text; they must be examined as examples of larger ideological structures, produced by specific social, cultural and political circumstances. Indexicality draws on this property of language to document complex systems by which language practices point to social identities and belonging. To this end, indexicality offers a concrete system for examining the ways in which language use in specific social, cultural and political contexts connects to and influences identity production (Silverstein 2003). Language ideology allows for the examination of these social, cultural and political contexts which produce and are produced by language (Kroskrity 2004). Examining language use in Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' plays from these conceptual perspectives will allow the scrutiny of invisible ideological systems that influence and are influenced by the urban language practice (Kroskrity 2004). Further, reading and examining language ideologies permits an analysis of the ways in which Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' language use implicates and resists dominant discourses at the level of both individual and community.

The use of the linguistic lens is critical in viewing political, social, ideological and cultural dimensions of the society as it resists, challenges and transforms power relations, colonial residual hegemony, dominance, and cultural subjugation. However, cultural, performance and linguistic studies have under-theorised the use of resistive linguistic dialects, such as pidgins, in theatre performances in post-independence Africa and Zimbabwe, specifically. This study employed an interpretive approach to examine how Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions used code-switching and language mixing in their performances to create syncretic *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* dialects, respectively, as resistive performance strategies and new linguistic frameworks conversant with postcolonial Zimbabwean socio-economic and political landscape. Flora Viet-Wild (2009) examines code-switching as strategy of inventing an urban lingo that characterises the creative mindscape of Zimbabwean musicians and literary writers. Her arguments hold true, at least in respect of this article, as they provide a departure point for engaging with code-switching in Zimbabwean contemporary theatre practice.

Ndenglish and *Shonglish* refer to syncretic dialects that arise when indigenous Zimbabwean languages (Ndebele or Shona) are mixed with English (Chivandikwa 2004). The contamination of the English language breaks and subverts all the morphological, phonetical and morphosyntaxical rules. Sibanda (2003) in Chivandikwa (2004, 95) observes that

> [t]he (township plays) hardly uses proper English but always change into the language of the society they perform to. In Bulawayo plays are either done in a mixture of English and Ndebele that is known as *Ndenglish*. They are also done in slang, pure Ndebele or in a mixture of all these languages.

The contamination of the English language breaks and subverts all the morphological, phonetical and morphosyntaxical rules which reframe the meaning-making process. *Ndenglish* or *Shonglish* is used to in these contexts because they are "authentic to the situation or context" (Chivandikwa 2004, 96) in which the plays are performed. Chivandikwa further observes that this kind of language can be considered as a carrier and expression of the Zimbabwean contemporary urban culture and reflects "more than everyday conversation in order to have an appeal among the audience" (2004, 96). Veit-Wild (2009, 686) is of the view that "among professionals and particularly among the urban youth, it is a habit – whether conscious or unconscious – to impress other people through a high level of sophistication, being 'hip', by switching from Shona to English; code-switching thus becomes part of a 'social dialect.'" This contemporary urban context can be characterised as a hybrid space; a "third space" (Bhabha 1994). Homi Bhabha's (1994, 211) "third Space" enables "other positions to emerge […] displaces histories that constitute it and sets up structures of authority, new political initiatives." To Awam Amkpa (2003, 53), the "third space" opens up "new forms of identification that may confuse the continuity of historical temporalities, confound ordering of cultural symbols and traumatise tradition." I will return to examine how these syncretic dialects become a "third space" in theatre performances.

The reality represented through these syncretic dialects is analogous to the ideological structure of the source communities. Language use and choice thus becomes political as Gilbert and Tompkins (1996, 181) observes that

> when playwrights interfere with received discursive codes and/ or introduce the rhetorical devices of other languages into English, they diminish the power invested in the coloniser's language and re-establish local/indigenous modes of expression for theatrical representation

This appropriation and abrogation of the English (and dominant indigenous languages) is a weapon that alternative theatre practitioners can use to decentre dominant and hegemonic performative linguistic trends. This strategic use of language in postcolonial theatre performances helps reenergise the experiences of the postcolonial populace and its distinct modes of communication with agency and claim a position of power on the literal and metaphoric stage.

Postcolonial (alternative) theatre provides an occasion for a vocal expression of solidarity, resistance or even presence (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 194). Alternative theatre is a problematic emergent genre dealing with a complex incorporation of imported practices and languages of the coloniser with indigenous culture and languages. Postcolonial alternative theatre thus offers a hybrid space—a free space for developing new frames of communication, verbal and non-verbal, devoid of the constraints and limits of convention. I have defined alternative theatre elsewhere as "committed to telling the stories of its respective communities through contextually relevant cultural performative frames that challenge domination and exclusion" (Sibanda 2019, 3). It, therefore, emerges as a coalescence of all various theatre-on-the-margins committed to socio-political and cultural change, aesthetic and stylistic transformation of performance traditions (Sibanda 2019). Duncombe (2008, 193) observes that postcolonial theatre allows postcolonial subjects to use the cultural tools of their [former] masters, carefully reshaped to dismantle the [former] master's own voice or power constructs." I submit that Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' use of code-switching and language mixing grant a distinct identity to their work and audiences respectively.

The Context: Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions

Amakhosi Theatre Productions was formed by members of the Dragons Karate Club in 1980. The Dragons Karate Club was made up of young people from Makokoba Township in Bulawayo. Among the notable members of the karate club were Cont Mhlanga, Thokozani Masha, Sihlangu Dlodlo and the late Mickey Tickays. Amakhosi Theatre Productions emerged as a communication strategy by the young creative talent in Bulawayo that aspired to express their dreams, fears, and experiences through the performing arts. According to Cont Mhlanga, the liberation struggle provided material for theatre groups to develop their plays while Radio and Television Mthwakazi motivated the desire to communicate these local stories (Mhlanga 2016). Yet, only a few households had access to radio and television sets which meant that even though these local stories were broadcast, they only reached a few elite individuals. The only major performance spaces where Amakhosi Theatre Productions could reach a large spectrum of audiences were streets, beer halls, community halls in Makokoba and Barbourfields Stadium. These spaces, as will be discussed later, determined the kind of language and aesthetics to be used by Amakhosi Theatre Productions in performance.

Rooftop Promotions was formed in the mid-1980s and operated under the name Rooftop Players. During the 1980s, Rooftop Players used Harare Repertory Theatre and Alliance Française as their performance spaces of choice where they performed plays from Britain and South Africa. It was in 1993 that Rooftop Players changed its name to Rooftop Promotions and transformed its focus to an organic and endogenous approach inspired by Zimbabwean urban experiences. This transformation positioned Rooftop Promotions as an urban, middle-class organisation. In 1996, Rooftop Promotions opened the Theatre-in-the-Park as a Zimbabwean alternative performance space: a space for performances by Zimbabweans, for Zimbabweans and with Zimbabweans (Guzha 2015).

I chose these two theatre production houses for specific reasons. Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Productions were members of the National Theatre Organisation, a colonial Rhodesian residual theatre association, which controlled and administered colonial residual purpose-built theatres and independent funding, which furthered and protected the purist interest of Zimbabwe's erstwhile colonisers. Contesting NTO's hold and power consolidation was the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre groups (ZACT). ZACT, created and developed as a para-governmental project by Kenyan development communication experts Ngugi wa Mirii and Kimani Gecau, sought to mobilise community theatre groups and create a counter-structure/movement to the NTO. This countermovement was modelled around indigenous performance practices, language use included.

In many respects, the political and ideological standoff between ZACT and NTO was about determining and consolidating new performance conventions to guide the industry in the new Zimbabwe. On the one hand, the NTO demanded that proper and

professional theatre was supposed to be presented in English and follow the Aristotelian story model. This was evident and enforced through the WinterFest/CABS playwright and theatre competition which demanded that entries must be in English only. On the other hand, ZACT believed that the use of English detached the stories from the communities and communicated a totally different aesthetic and message. As such, ZACT argued that Zimbabwean (alternative) theatre needed to use the language of the people so that theatre practitioners would tell their stories and share their experiences without the hindrance of borrowed conventions. Nevertheless, Amakhosi Theatre Productions managed to create a working framework, through the NTO, with Christopher Weare, then Rhodes University Lecturer and Christopher Hurst,[1] a Central School of Speech and Drama graduate. The relationship between Christopher Hurst and Amakhosi Theatre Productions resulted in the creation and performance of *Workshop Negative* (1986) which deployed code-switching and language mixing as a deconstructive mechanism of theatre conventions in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

In working with the NTO and producing alternative theatre productions, which challenged the linguistic and stylistic dominancy of English language inspired plays, Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions created a "third space." Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' decision to withdraw from a restricting mainstream theatre practice created an alternative marketplace resistance through syncretic linguistic frames and performative acts. These strategies of resistance come in the form of code-switching, translanguaging and language mixing (Jonsson 2009; Jonsson 2014; Schildkret 2017). In this paper, I argue that *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish*, as new syncretic dialects that restore the lost dignity and sense of autonomy to Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions, also allow them to communicate literal, metaphorical and political meanings latent in their productions and experiences contextually.

Although Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions operate from and within distinct theatre frameworks and styles, the locatedness of their work in the Zimbabwean (and the African man's) experiences and methods of working provides for similarities that can be examined. While Amakhosi Theatre Productions rose to prominence in the late 1980s through the 1990s until the early years of the millennium, Rooftop Promotions extended and built on the foundation laid by Amakhosi Theatre Productions, albeit on a commercial basis. I contend that Rooftop Promotions' work since the turn of the millennium borrowed from and was anchored on an aesthetic established by Amakhosi Theatre Productions' two decades of experimentation and

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1   Christopher Hurst is a Zimbabwean-born theatre practitioner, who trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London and worked for about 11 years on Broadway and in the Royal Shakespeare Company in England as well as Reps Theatre in Harare before returning joining Amakhosi Theatre Productions in 1986. He was influential in Amakhosi's development in terms of practice and development (Hurst 2015).

diligence. To this end, the use of syncretic language is both a key stylistic characteristic employed by both theatre organisations and resistive strategy.

Methodologically, I use Amakhosi Theatre Productions' *Workshop Negative* (1986) and Rooftop Promotions' *Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous* (2011) as case study productions. While my case choices fall into different time periods, which affect their context and reception, what I am interested in this paper is to engage with Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' aesthetic and textual use of *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* in these productions and the effect thereof vis-à-vis the objective of the productions. It is important to note that the performance scripts I use in textually analysing the use of these syncretic dialects emerged as a record of performance. As such, the analysis and engagement of the use of *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* will sometimes traverse into performance analysis and reconstruction through video playback as it reflects the influence of space, performance style and ideological underpinnings on the choice or emergence of dialect in the productions. I make use of recordings of both case study productions as my basis or scripts for analysis.

Language as an Identity Index in Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' Plays.

Identity is a contested concept with a number of researchers characterising it from different and varied perspectives (Dag 1995; Hall 1989; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Jenkins 1996; Kowert and Legro 1996; Wendt 1992). These scholars conceptualise identity from varied perspectives ranging from social, cultural, sociological, spatial and psychological states. In this paper, I adopt Fearon's (1999) characterisation of identity. First, I use it to define social categories and, secondly, to characterise identity as a source of an individual's self-respect (Fearon 1999). Frantz Fanon (1963, 53) observes that (cultural) identity reflects the

> common experience and shared cultural values which provide us as "one people" with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of actual history.

Theatre practice becomes a site of identity contestation in postcolonial Africa in this regard. In most cases, the role of the theatre practitioner becomes directly linked to the identities that emerge out of his/her work. Christopher Kamlongera (1989) provides valuable insights into the understanding of the role of the alternative theatre practitioner in postcolonial Africa. He observes two central tenets to the work of the African alternative theatre practitioner:

> (a) The practitioner is re-educating himself into understanding theatre language and material relevant for the community, (b) the theatre practitioner is opening up dialogue with the community in order for them to join hands in creating a true African theatre. (Kamlongera 1989, 83)

What Kamlongera is advocating here is an "unlearning" that is necessary for African theatre practitioners who have undergone colonial education. An education that not only privileges Western knowledge and Western theatrical paradigms but relegates indigenous performance to primitive ritual. Kamlongera is advocating for a syncretic theatre that is relevant and responsive to the African populace both materially and conceptually, in the context of this paper, that uses language in its richness to express their and their people's experiences (Crow 1983).

Consequently, alternative performances provided the space for a new theatre language to be used defining a relevant contemporary African aesthetic interpretive model. Just as *tsotsitaal* developed in Soweto (Coplan 1983) and pidgin/ creole in Nigeria (Soyinka 1983), at Amakhosi Theatre Productions in Bulawayo *Ndenglish* and *isilapalapa*[2] developed while *Shonglish* was extensively used at Rooftop Promotions in Harare. *Isilapalapa/Fanakalo* is a pidgin bridging language of communication in a multinational and multilingual setting (Mesthrie 1989). In the South African context, it is considered simplified Zulu, constituted by about seventy per cent (70%) Nguni (mainly Zulu) lexis, twenty-four per cent (24%) English and six per cent (6%) Afrikaans (Mesthrie and Surek-Clark 2013, 39). This pidgin was mainly used as a shared means of communication between a work community speaking a different language, employer and employee as well as on instructional media (Jourdan 2006; Mesthrie 1989). Emerging in the places of work especially in the mines in Johannesburg and plantations in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, Mesthrie (1989, 212) observes that *Fanakalo* is largely based on a master-servant relationship. As such, pidgins are complicit with power and hegemonic connotations emerging from their association with colonial racism, cheap labour, and economic power attached to the use of language (Hurst 2018). In the Zimbabwean context, the material, conceptual and political theatrical shift that took place at independence involved the use of pidgins in theatre performances—thus, a new theatre language also involved a new language of the theatre.

The fact that alternative theatre is embedded in the community creates a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state (wa Thiongo 1997, 11). In other terms, these enactments of power are a fight to control popular cultural modes of expression and connections that exist between the status quo and alternative theatre practitioners (Sibanda 2019). The struggle between these two contending spheres of influence observed by wa Thiongo and Sibanda is about validating and bestowing recognition and prestige (Huggan 1997) on the choice of language(s) used in alternative performances and locality of the speaker. This speaks to the second order indexicality which identifies a layered appreciation of reflexivity to language. Halliday (2004) observes that this form of indexicality enables linguistic forms to carry social meanings and can be used to perform social functions such as indicating where the speaker grew up, class or political persuasion. In Amakhosi Theatre

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2   *Isilapalapa* is also spelled *Fanikalo/Fanigalo/Fanagalo/Funigalore/isilolo/isikula* in South Africa and
    other southern African countries (Hurst 2018; Mesthrie 1989; Mesthrie and Surek-Clark 2013).

Productions' play *Workshop Negative*,[3] Mkhize's choice of socialist and propagandist, but corrupted English interspersed with Ndebele speaks to an emerging class of businesspeople who are "socialist by day and capitalists by night" (Mhlanga 1986). This code-switching is used to tape into the emotional memory of the community at rallies and enable the hypocritical elite liberation leaders to consolidate power and accumulate wealth.

This connects to Paul Kroskrity's (2004) first level of language ideologies. He notes that language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific or cultural group. In the context of Amakhosi Theatre Productions, *Ndenglish* is used in this case to further the interests of elite liberation leaders at the expense of the general populace. Code switching in this context is viewed as a strategy of exposing material struggle, symbolic power, and resistance against and between disciplines of authorship, authenticity, and legitimacy discharged in the interconnected levels of mediation with the political Zimbabwean state. For example, in *Workshop Negative*, Mkhize calls Zulu "umtanomnyanga" [son of a poor man] (Mhlanga 1996, 28) to discredit him from challenging him and exposing the dangerous working conditions in Mkhize's workshop. Mkhize further calls Ray a "pig," and "grandson of a coloniser" (Mhlanga 1996, 44–45) while Zulu calls him "*inja*" [dog] (Mhlanga 1996, 48). These are derogatory terms that are used to prop up Mkhize as the ideal Zimbabwean fit for a new Zimbabwe and Ray as a colonising foreigner who must not gain anything from the new Zimbabwe because his grandparents stole from the locals. Thus, his presence is of no consequence in the new Zimbabwe, just like a dog.

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3   *Workshop Negative* (1986) is a political satire, set in a tool-making factory owned by former liberation socialist commissar Mkhize (Thokozani Masha), that overtly interrogates and caricatures Zimbabwean politics through performance as a means of engaging government and/or exposing politicians. Mkhize has two employees: Zulu, a black ex-guerrilla (Mackay Tickeys) and Ray, a white ex-Rhodie (Christopher John). *Workshop Negative* attempts to situate its satiric subjects (Zimbabweans) within a particular time (post-independence Zimbabwe) and place (Zimbabwe) and within identifiable ideologies (socialism and capitalism). As a political satire, the play addresses challenges of corruption, nepotism and cronyism and its effects on the Zimbabwean social fabric. The play ends when Ray and Zulu are standing by the symbolic line drawn on the stage floor. This symbolic line, according to Mhlanga (2016), must be "crossed" by political leadership if post-independence Zimbabwe is to rid herself of corruption, cronyism and capitalism.

This can be further illustrated using Rooftop Promotions' *Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous*[4] (2011). In this play, we are introduced to Comrade Tlotlo, and we immediately get to know that he is Khoisan because he speaks Tjwao. It is only when there is a breakdown of communication with the Shona speaking Mutemas that he (and the Mutemas) code-switch to English. The reason is that he wants the Mutemas to clearly understand what has brought him to the farmhouse as well as confirm his locational historicity. To the Mutemas, code-switching to English can be interpreted as a show of elitism, power, and elegance (Richardson 2018) as they boast of being educated and decorated members of the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) Central Committee.[5]

When Tlou is asked by Naledi Mutema what his name is, he responds "*qiqiqimu qiqiqi qimqiqiqim Tlou! Tlou! Inqaqiliqaqaqula!*" (Chifunyise 04:54). Tlotlo's untranslatable speech (from the perspective of the Mutemas, representative of the Shona dominating group in Zimbabwe) in the heart of Harare (Theatre-in-the-Park) is a yearning for a "third space" where minority languages are respected and used without fear of ostracism. Bhabha's (1994, 7) "third space" provides a "space for intervention in the here and now" that enables Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions an opportunity to reflect and use their productions as marginal spaces of production and reception, facilitating the emergence of fluid identities and meanings in the new Zimbabwe (Mistry 2001, 3). Further, the use of untranslatable speeches such as Tlotlo's and syncretic dialects that challenge the linguistic hegemonic domination of English language "provide a terrain for elaborating strategies of [contemporary Zimbabwean] selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1994, 1–2). Secondly, this "third space," that is characterised by syncretic linguistic dialects, as it shall be seen in the discussion that follows, provides a site for the "social articulation of difference." This site is critical especially in postliberation states as it allows for a "complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 1994, 2).

Carla Jonsson (2014, 120) observes that language can be used to construct character identities. In respect to Tlotlo, on the one hand, his identity is tied and determined by

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4   *Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous* (2011) interrogates the abuse of minority ethnic groups' land rights a decade after the government-led fast-tracked land reform programme. The play is set at Van Royen Estate farm house, recently allocated to a Harare family—the Mutemas. Before Mr Van Royen occupied and partitioned the land into his estate farm, it was occupied by the Khoisan clan. After the farm was allocated to the Mutema family, it was diversified into a commercial game ranch and quarry production site. The operation of these two businesses infringes on the cultural, political and economic rights of the surrounding Khoisan community. The cast of the play included Zenzo Nyathi (Footpot Tlotlo), Nothando Lobhengula (Naledi Mutema), Silvanos Mudzova (Mr Mutema), Chipo Bizure (Mrs Mutema) and Sebastian Maramba (Comrade Dabula).

5   The ZANU-PF Central Committee is the Party's decision-making body in-between conferences and congresses.

his "untranslatable" Tjwao language. On the other hand, his Tjwao language is a marker of difference in the play. This kind of textuality latent in the "untranslatable" Tjwao language "is not simply a second order ideological or verbal symptom of a pro-given political subject" but creates "discursive conditions for the circulation and recognition of a politicised subject and a public 'truth'" (Bhabha 1994 , 23). By virtue of speaking a historical language that ties and fits well with the history of the farm, Tlotlo becomes a political subject. Most of the characters in the play are first-language Shona speakers with the exception of Tlotlo and Comrade Dabula, who is an Ndebele local although he can speak Shona fluently. As such, Tlotlo, as the only non-Shona speaking character, is differently marked and represented as the outsider in line with Quinonez's (2002, 142) observations that untranslated functions of language can be used to mark difference; in this case it is a maker of non-Shona speaker as the "other." While this act marked Tlotlo as the "other," it was a political act by Rooftop Promotions to challenge the monologic tendencies where Shona is elevated to a position of linguistic dominance even if the play is set in Tsholotsho, a predominantly Ndebele-speaking area. Whereas Veit-Wild (2009, 691) observes that code-switching is a "deliberate political act to defamiliarize English speakers"; in this context, it is used to challenge the imposition of Shona on minority groups such as the Tjwao.

Rooftop Promotions' brave act of introducing Tlotlo in Tjwao language is closely associated with dismantling the notion of silence. The notion of silence is a strategy by the dominant group deployed to disempower the minorities through taking away their power latent in their language and speech acts. Within the postcolonial Zimbabwean theatre practice, theatre practitioners are silenced by different forces such as the deployment of purist language ideologies. Anzaldua (1990, xvii) observes that one of the silencing strategies employed by the privileged groups are through repressing the voices of the minority by denying them space to speak their language and practice their culture. However, through bringing the Tjwao language from the margins to the centre, literally and metaphorically, Rooftop Promotions challenges these silencing techniques by privileging the "othered" language. In Bhabha's language, Rooftop Promotions' action of centring Tjwao language "initiates a contradictory process of reading between the lines" (1994, 24) that foster negotiation. This kind of negotiation makes us aware

> that our political references prioritises the people, the community, class struggle, anti-racism, gender difference, the assertion of an anti-imperialist, black or third perspective—are not there in some primordial, naturalistic sense. Nor do they reflect a unitary or homogeneous political object. (Bhabha 1994, 38)

This attachment of a symbolic power to Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' use of language and/or choice of dialects makes the plays performed political. The alternative practitioner's adoption of everyday street language demonstrates a counter-hegemonic popular resistance and radically alters the residual colonial semiotic appreciation of verbal and non-verbal communication. To this end, Preban Kaarsholm (1999, 272) concedes that "performances of *Workshop Negative*

brought about a liveliness of discussion and controversy over culture and politics in Zimbabwe that had not been experienced before" on the Stanley Hall stage. It is for this reason that *Workshop Negative,* which made use of *Ndenglish*, is considered one of the sincerest commentaries of the postcolonial Zimbabwean landscape. Thus, Gal (1988) concludes that considering code-switching as symbolic response to domination highlights the function of language as a means of resistance. For example, in *Workshop Negative*, code-switching is used to resist Ray's domination:

> Mkhize: I do not pay you to spend the whole day fighting and bickering.
> Zulu: Sorry baas. But *inja leyi kumele izikhuze* [he must restrain himself]
> Ray: What did he say? I didn't understand the language.
> Zulu: *Kumele ufunde ilanguage yabantu wena*. [you must learn the language]
> (Workshop Negative 06:48)

Linked to the concept of identity is Silverstein's (2003) third order indexicality which involves the creation of sociolinguistic "stereotypes" which can be used for reflexive identity work and recognised by people outside of a particular context. The third order linguistic forms go beyond the social work, create and reinforce complicated systems of belonging (Silverstein 2003). In *Indegenous Indigenous Indigenous*, Naledi's stereotypical characterisation of Tlotlo as a speaker of an archaic unknown language is rattled when she discovers that Tlotlo can speak five Matabeleland North native languages. Furthermore, Mr Mutema is rattled when he discovers that Tlotlo understands and speaks Shona:

> Mutema: *Yini wena funa lapha*, *he*! *Yini wena funa* [what do you want here]
> Naledi: Daddy, he speaks fluent English!
> Mutema: Ha! He is a bushman?
> Naledi: No daddy, he is not a threat please!
> Tlotlo: *Nyararai baba*. *Ndauuya murunyararo* [Please be calm, sir. I come in peace]
> Mutema: You can speak Shona?
> Tlotlo: *Yebo ngiyataura* [yes, I speak Shona]
> Mutema: And Ndebele?
> Tlotlo: And Kalanga. *AchiTonga alimu*! [and Tonga too]
> Mutema: And Tonga?
> Tlotlo: And Nambya—ndiriyo munyika yeyino [I am on this, our land] (*Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous* 11:09)

The dismantling of cultural and linguistic stereotypes where Tlotlo, because of his physical outlook, is judged to belong to an archaic history that is not in touch with modernity emerges as a shock to the dominant group: Shona. Mutema's initial question to Tlotlo is reminiscent of the Rhodesian colonialists' brutalisation of the Ndebele language into a derogatory derivative *isilapalapa*. In speaking to Tlotlo in *isilapalapa*, Mutema expresses the deep lying linguistic violence and contempt of other ethnicities which was instigated and fermented by the colonialists in Africa during the period of colonisation. However, these resistive strategies highlight that Amakhosi Theatre

Productions and Rooftop Promotions are not "content simple to identify and deconstruct the hegemonic tropes of imperial cartography; [these organisations] also attempt to find a different spatial logic through which to interpret history/ geography" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 147). This geographic logic manifests as locational identity.

It is interesting to note as well that in the above dialogue, Tlotlo introduces a different dimension to the type of code-switching that has been discussed in this article. Tlotlo shocks the Mutema family further by confirming that he can also speak Shona—however by mixing Ndebele and Shona. He affirms by saying "*Yebo ngiyataura*" [Yes, I can speak Shona]. This Ndebele accent-spoken Shona challenges a belief held by Shona first-language speakers that every Zimbabwean should speak Shona easily. In adopting a Ndebele accent to confirm that he can hear and speak Shona, Tlotlo disrupts this view and posits that what matters is that one can communicate effectively over and above the efficiency of pronunciation and delivery. This also locates Tlotlo as a hybrid Zimbabwean, floating seamlessly in-between the dominating Ndebele and Shona languages. Floating in-between these hegemonic languages, Tlotlo is able to engage everyone without respecting or following linguistic rules governing the use of the languages.

Language as a Marker of Geographic/Locational Identity

Postcolonial alternative theatre plays are "not written with an Anglo audience in mind because to do so would mean writing in translation" (Jonsson 2014, 120). These plays are written for the township and the villages. What this means is that anyone who is not from the village or township will need to make an effort and attempt to learn these emerging dialects such as *Ndenglish*/*Shonglish* in Zimbabwe and *tsotsitaal* in South Africa in order to understand the complexity of these plays. Language choices in the selected case study plays by Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions, thus, delineate locational identities of characters.

In *Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous* (2001), the concept of locational identity is contested from the perspective of nativity determined by language. Since the play is set at Van Royen Estate farm house, located in the Tsholotsho area largely populated by the Khoisan community, the native- indigenous are the Tjwao speaking peoples; the debate, therefore, between Tlotlo and the Mutemas on who is more indigenous than the other invokes dynamics of locational identity. This conflict manifests when Tlotlo challenges the Mutemas to prove how they can call themselves Tsholotsho's "indigenous indigenous" when they are Shona speaking. For his argument to be well-understood Tlotlo mixes Tjwao and English and explains that he is more native—*indigenous indigenous indigenous* (indigenous to the power of three) because he is Tjwao first language speaker and historically, Tsholotsho is his ancestral place. Kroskrity (2004) observes that when a person terms themselves a "native" speaker—in this case indigenous—they assume that a particular language belongs to a particular

community. They, thus, draw an invisible boundary between people who speak that language and belong, and people who do not speak that language and thus do not belong and identify (Kroskrity 2004). In the words of Edward Said (1978), those that do not belong to the community are thus profiled as the "Other."

With regard to *Workshop Negative* (1986/1996), Ray is considered an outsider in the factory because he is white and therefore an English first-language speaker. The factory workshops in Bulawayo had, since the colonial era, become a "location" for indigenous languages, specifically Ndebele. Zulu keeps complaining that Ray must either learn Ndebele or go and join his own kind in running businesses and exploiting black people. On another level, this differentiation of Ray as an outsider through language offers evidence of social, political, and cultural conflicts within groups and communities (Kroskrity 2004). The conflict between Ray on one hand and Zulu and Mkhize on the other hand, though premised on language, is largely a residue of colonisation and neo-colonialism. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) assert that colonial rule destroyed the traditional system of cultural and textual productions of identity and meaning of life. This traditional system of cultural and textual identification largely hinged on the language as a repository of the community's ways of experiencing, seeing and living. Thus, Zulu and Mkhize find fault with Ray who speaks English with them—the language of the coloniser—who banned native languages in postcolonial Zimbabwe and nationalist Mkhize's factory.

The loss of language leads to the likelihood of loss of names, oral history and a connection with the land. Gilbert and Tompkins (2004) observe that there is a correlation between the geography of a place and the psychography of the people's experiences. While language was the most powerful maker of colonial authority, cultural displacement, and identity dismemberment, postcolonial theatre groups such as Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' strategic alteration of its style, structure, and usage emerges as a subversion of this once-dominant linguistic practice. Wole Soyinka, in Gilbert and Tompkins (1996, 4), observes that, as a form of cultural resistance, postcolonial theatre practitioners should "stress such a language, stretch it, impact and compact, fragment and reassemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden." This grants the practitioners a sense of power that helps reinvest the experiences of the subjugated communities.

Code-Switching and Language Mixing as Sites of Resistance and Agency

Lo and Gilbert (2002, 48) define agency as the

> potential to act or perform an action autonomously; it registers degrees of power and knowledge combined, since to act autonomously is to understand the ideological systems in which one is implicated.

This potential to create, to act (speak, challenge, and demonstrate) sits at the centre of Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' decision to use code-switching and language mixing as strategies of liberating the community from the linguistic straitjacket and puritanism. Ravengai (2011, 14–15) sees agency as a "descriptor of the state or capability of an individual or collective to determine their own actions." Agency denotes a

> state of being present, active, or self-actualised in the performance of political, ideological, philosophical selfhood or community despite any system which infringes upon or precludes this ability. (Ravengai 2011, 5)

The concept of agency resonates with the alternative theatre practitioner's desire to self-define and identify through a linguistic format that is contemporary to his/her experience and geography, albeit within a political, ideological and cultural environment that is limiting. As the term agency denotes conscious and purposeful freedom to choose linguistic dialects, thus, framed as an objective choice. This objectivity manifests normally through the use of dominant cultural tools, which are mastered and carefully reshaped to dismantle the dominating voice or linguistic constructs.

Based on Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' ability to liberally choose and develop new linguistic styles that integrate both the African and British forms, their performances gain resistive agency especially when these new styles challenge domineering performance conventions and standards. Lo and Gilbert (2002, 35) contend that the discourses of resistance speak "primarily to the colonizing projects of British imperial centres and/or local to the neo-colonial pressures of local/regional post-independence regimes." This resistance is expressed through linguistic dialects that break essentialist African and residual British (Rhodesian) language structures in a manner that avoids censorship by the ruling class; as Ashcroft et al. (1995, 283) observe that language is a "system of values—its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distribution—becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded." To achieve this, Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions appropriated "words or forms of English and employ[ed] them to a different purpose in an indigenous or creolised language, again to make the language articulate a different authority" (Ashcroft 1989, 38). This falls within Gilbert and Tompkins' (1996, 168) observation that "the strategic

use of languages in post-colonial plays helps to re-invest colonised peoples and their characteristic systems of communication with a sense of power and an active place on the stage."

Resistance is thus a motivating factor in the development of (alternative) linguistic dialects in post-independence Zimbabwean theatre practice. Alternative theatre's resistive agency is located in the ambivalent nature of their created linguistic dialects. It sits comfortably in the crevices of colonial residual and indigenous linguistic structures. These crevices present the emerging linguistic dialects such as *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* as incomplete, evolving and/or "empty" in the frames of the hegemonic Rhodesian/postcolonial Zimbabwean language practice. Yet, they uncover the oppositional nature of linguistic practice in terms of meaning, function, and value within the post-independence Zimbabwean alternative theatre performance by localising and attracting value away from homogenising norms eventually displacing the hegemonic centrality of the idea of "norm" itself (Ashcroft et al. 1989).

Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions employ the politics of thinking about power and resistance which uses a social and existential crisis as ingredients for social transformation (Dirks 1992, 10). The manner in which Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions explore history, culture, and ideology through emerging linguistic dialects depicts a nation in need of revolutionary change and communal alliances against neo-colonial linguistic practices. *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish*, thus, are deployed as a suitable language of resistance and portrayal of a linguistic aesthetic empowering local communities and a young nation. Language, like performance, only acquires meaning through "earlier experiences of the participants and because of their ability to cite other similar performances" (Leach 2008, 4). Within the performance enterprise, linguistic conventions develop out of the repetition of style, which becomes the reference point of engagement and analysis by performers and audience members. Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' repetitive style of code-switching and language mixing in other productions that followed *Workshop Negative* and *Indigenous Indigenous Indigenous* made the emerging *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* linguistic dialects negate aesthetic metaphors of hegemonic wholeness and completeness. These linguistic conventions highlight and subvert the dominant attitudes and present an overall picture of historical, economic and cultural forces that may be operating at any given period (Leach 2008; Smith and Parker 2002).

Arthur Berger (1998, 32) observes that "the code that a child learns becomes a matrix through which his/her thought is filtered." As secret structures that reflect the people's minds, attitudes and value systems (Berger 1998), linguistic codes expose the socialised understanding of the relationship between the community and its people. Most of the actors that perform alternative theatre plays grew up during the early postcolonial Zimbabwean period where English was enforced as the lingua franca in official communication and business. This spiralled into the private lives of citizens where English became a measure of sophistication and civilisation. In theatre practice, the

Anglo linguistic domination manifested in language-based drama, mostly performances of scripts imported from England. However, after national independence in 1980, the English language-based residual Rhodesian theatre practice could not succinctly define the evolution and confirmation of the new cultural identity emerging, thus alternative theatre practitioners began to develop a new linguistic aesthetic compatible with the postcolonial experience. This new aesthetic, according to Patrice Pavis (1981, 38), was a result of the constant interaction and mediation between cultures. Alternative theatre groups such as Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions developed an endogenous style defined by contemporary and everyday languages and practices. In so doing, they created a space for radical construction of postcolonial subjectivity which performed

> the simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or irrelevance in contemporary world reality. (Soyinka 1976, x–xi)

Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions' work, therefore, exploited this overlapping of power structures latent in English and Zimbabwean indigenous languages to develop a decolonising ethic toward residual and emergent linguistic autocracies and all forms of domination in the society. At this point, Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop promotions operated at the fourth level of language ideologies. According to Kroskrity (2004), at this level, members reflexively connect their language usage to their belief systems and their sociocultural experience. He further notes that members intentionally (or unintentionally) link experience of social systems and participation in discourse with their selection of linguistic features. The deployment of *Ndenglish* and *Shonglish* in performance is, therefore, a response by the postcolonial young generation to the conflicted experiences where they are forced to learn, speak and live English at school while at home and in their private lives, they are expected to master a cultural identity embossed in indigenous languages. By developing new pidgin dialects, Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions, as representatives of subordinate groups, are caught up in this linguistic tug-of-war created by alternative marketplaces (Heller 1995, 169). In these alternative marketplaces, the new dialects such as *Ndenglish*, *Shonglish* and *tsotsitaal* gain resistive agency as they are used to constantly imagine a universe in a perpetual state of becoming and alternative theatre in a constant state of polysemiosis (Amkpa 2003, 75).

The new pidgin dialects consolidated and extensively used in postcolonial African theatre practice are thus used as a political strategy for developing agency in heterogeneous communities which also allow people and communities to define themselves as subjects of politically fluid societies (Amkpa 2003). Language, therefore, is used in these plays to construct contemporary identities, recreate representation and meaning-making models as well generate resistive agency against linguistic puritanism. Jonsson (2009, 130) observes that due to its historical role as political theatre,

(alternative) theatre constitutes a valuable site where code-switching and language mixing can be used to empower subjugated and disenfranchised communities.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined how code-switching and language mixing plays a dynamic role in establishing, affirming or shifting social, cultural and political identities and agency. By connecting language production with systematic concepts of belonging and resistance, alternative theatre illustrates the postcolonial subject's quest for social equity and decolonising linguistic aesthetic. I have further highlighted how Amakhosi Theatre Productions and Rooftop Promotions deployed code-switching and language mixing as an anticolonial aesthetic that contested the social and symbolic identities of postcolonial subjects. To borrow from Schildkret (2017, 26), by connecting language with systematic concepts of belonging and ideological systems, I have shown that language functions as a system of meaning-making that implicates identity.

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