The joke is in the code

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Abstract

The paper explores the relationship between humor circulated via the social media and linguistic marginalization within the Shona language. The Shona language is an amalgamation of five dialects 'unified' by Doke (1931). This unification was however done using Zezuru as the standard. This elevated the status of Zezuru within the language vis-à-vis its dialect counterparts thereby attaining a position of linguistic superiority. Everyday retorts demanding that a person speaks in 'proper' Shona is one of this phenomenon's manifestation in daily interpersonal interactions. Jokes sent via the WhatsApp social media platform reveal a sociolinguist situation in which humor is used to celebrate the superiority of one dialect over its counterparts, which are linguistically marginalised. The jokes revolve around issues of intolerance of allophonic variation, the principle of linguistic economy and proper pronunciation, among others. The study is couched on a conceptual framework the combines the Hostility theory and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

The paper explores how humor can be used as a tool of linguistic marginalization in the Shona dialect cluster. This phenomenon is used as the basis with which to interrogate the extent to which the language question has been resolved in so far as the linguistic status of its dialects, vis-a-viz Zezuru, are concerned. In the process, it raises questions pertaining to what the Shona language is, and, ultimately, what it entails to be 'a genuine' Shona. The general assumption, as reflected in section 6 of the 2013, is that it is a 'unified' entity devoid of any internal linguistic political dynamics. These dynamics, as reflected in otherwise well-intended linguistic practices, which threaten the linguistic and cultural integrity of identities within the Shona linguistic group, are investigated from the perspective of humor circulated via 'groups' on WhatsApp. Humor, in this study, is not only perceived as just an innocent desire for the positive release of emotional, as well as other, tensions but also as a manifestation or the reflection of a de facto language policy that tries to spell out the relationships obtaining between Zezuru and the rest of the Shona dialects. The paper argues that humor is used to create and perpetuate socio-political power by establishing and celebrating the perceived dominance of the Zezuru over its other four Shona

dialect counterparts. In the process, jokes circulated via WhatsApp are used to expose paternalistic tendencies of dominant groups of focusing not on the actual linguistic qualities of varieties of other groups but on perceived qualities associated with the language group who speaks it. These qualities include, among others, intellectual capacity, education level and social background. Thus, it ultimately exposes the rather ironic situation in which the Shona language might not after all be the 'united' linguistic family that Doke (1931) intended. This is in spite of the good-intentioned policy documents aimed at the 'readmission' and recognition of the other dialects in the 'mainstream' Shona language. Ultimately, Avner's (1988) claim that men has always made mockery of fellow men through humor is used to show the thin but crucial line that subsists between 'innocent joking around' and the actual denigration of specific social groups and its subsequent contribution to the discursive construction of social inequity.

Background

Zimbabwe's Shona language policy dates back to the colonial period where it can be understood as having been mainly motivated by missionary needs to translate the bible into indigenous languages for purposes of the conversion of lost African souls, among others. This raises crucial questions pertaining to whose interests that key and decisive exercise sought to address. Given that language planning activities are by their nature intrinsically government authorised long term and sustained conscious efforts to alter a language or group of languages and/or to change their language function in a society for purposes of solving 'communication problems' (Weinstein, 1980; Chimhundu 1993; Wardaugh, 2011), they are therefore taken as intrinsically politically-motivated. This is especially pertinent given the far-reaching socio-economic and political implications of a language policy in any given country. Depending on its socioeconomic and political goals a language policy can either be inclusionary or exclusionary. Mkanganwi (1992) observes how the Rhodesian government generally furthered a separatist development policy. This is a phenomenon which was then extended to inform the development of the various linguistic varieties in the country. The development of the Shona dialect cluster saw the amalgamation of five (5) linguistic codes (Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Ndau and Korekore) into one language subsequently known as Shona (a name whose origins and implications continue to be the subject of academic debate). Significantly, Doke (1931) made Zezuru the 'standard' of the Shona dialects. One of the many socio-political implications being that, over time, Zezuru was then taken as the linguistic Mecca of the Shona linguistic grouping. This inevitably led to the

development linguistic imperialist attitudes as Zezuru gained an assumed superiority over the other codes and the status and privileges that seemingly continue to be associated with it.

Linguistic difference – which in fact must be celebrated for bringing in the much needed diversity that enriches language – is then tragically frowned upon as deviancy from a supposed norm which has to be 'weeded out' of an otherwise 'perfect language'. Zezuru assumed a diglossic high variety status which has ultimately adversely affected the writing of Shona as a language in Zimbabwean primary schools (Chimhenga & Chivhanga, 2013). Shona orthography, which has shaped the development of both grammatical and literary competencies – is mainly based on Zezuru. It is then perceived as a dialect of prestige and power while other dialects such as Karanga, Manyika and Korekore are maintained as mere solidarity codes. Chivhanga (2008) maintains that the diglossic situation that exists between English and Shona as well as among the Shona dialects themselves has significantly shaped attitudes towards the Shona language itself. Chiwome (1992) and Dube (2002) observe how the high variety status of Zezuru is reflected in its use for official government business as well as in higher education. In the process, issues of a (non-)standard variety/dialect are manifested in language through notions of constructed around issues relating 'pure'/'normal'/'acceptable' Shona. This is then conceptualised through 'commonsensical' or 'innocent' statements like *taura chiShona chakanaka*' (speak in correct/pure/standard Shona) or questions such as '*iShona rudziii iyoyo*?' (what kind/type of Shona is that?) which are common retorts/accusations against non-Zezuru dialect speaking-people. In such situations, issues of correctness are measured almost exclusively on the Zezuru. Anything other than Zezuru, is frowned upon as linguistic deviancy that is perceived as having to be addressed to maintain the perceived integrity of the language. Thus, it becomes a situation whereby a dialect becomes transformed into the language (if not a super-language in itself!). It is on this basis that Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2005) argue that the marginalisation and down-grading of African Languages are as a result of colonial language policies. This is further compounded by the fact socio-cultural dynamics entail that it might be difficult to distinguish between the code/dialect and speakers and national geopolitics. This brings in the language-speaker-region dialectic, as signaled in the supposed humor circulated on the WhatsApp social media platform

Conceptualising humor

Humor is an omnipresent phenomenon within everyday interactions and can therefore be regarded as a quintessentially social phenomenon. Just as with every other linguistic elements, humor is both socially and culturally situated and therefore spatially and temporarily specific. The subjects and issues people 'joke' about are generally central to the social, cultural and moral order of society or social group. They are not just practiced in a vacuum. A joke makes much more sense in its contextual situation whereby the people involved in sharing it can both relate to. It involves a lot of information gaps (ellipsis) that can only be filled in by shared background knowledges. Of particular interest to the present study are the ways in which the jokes circulated via WhatsApp are used in the discursive construction of Shona ethnic identities and the kind of power dynamic implicated in them.

From a research perspective, most disciplines had hitherto paid little to no academic attention to the study of humor. It was initially regarded as unserious business of everyday life which did not really warrant any serious academic inquiry. As Kuipers (2008.) explains it has been considered at the micro-level of social reality. It is only until recently that scholars across disciplines have realised that humor plays many important socio-political. From a linguistic perspective, it is a very powerful discursive tool which can be used for both relational and transactional purposes. It is not as innocent as it was assumed.

Functionally, humor falls into the two (2) broad categories of solidarity and the enactment of power relations. Holmes and Marra (2006) conceive humor in relation to the creation of social groupings and the subsequent development of relationships within them. In the process, it enables both the creation and maintenance of social (ethnic and/or cultural) identities. Close and Spurgeon, (1995) generally regard humor as 'innocent', 'pleasant', 'harmless' and therefore aimed toward good tempered amusement; which definitely results in the production of outbursts of laughter. However, it is the reason behind the laughter that needs to be investigated. That is, are we laughing with or at a particular language and/or ethnic group?

From a power dynamics perspective, humor has been considered as a positive and productive means of dealing with face threats in various formal set ups such as the work place. In such set ups, it is seen as a way of lightening up or diffuse atmosphere that could have otherwise been very tense. In this line of research, focus on how humor can be a useful discursive tool of 'informalising' the otherwise very formal work set ups that characterise the work environment. This is especially so especially in boardroom situations. In the process, it creates a certain degree

of camaraderie or intimacy in an environment that was supposed to be defined by dominance and subordination. Willems (2011) studies how jokes and humor formed an informal, but crucial, social movement media (beyond government control/censure) where Zimbabweans debated their fears in politically repressive environment. Rupapa (2013) also explores the liberative potential of humor in political stand-up comedy were comedy performs a liberative function.

Unfortunately, as reflected by the studies above, much research focus has mainly been on the positive social corrective and/or transformative functions of humor – where it is generally regarded as a social imperative in so far as solidarity and development are concerned. It is also seen as both a liberator and equalizer in circumstances that would have otherwise been defined more by relations of dominance than of collegiality. Not much attention has been paid the manner(s) in which humor can function more as a divisive tool than a uniting one. Thus, rather than being discursively employed as a rallying point by a group of people, it is actually used to create and highlight difference of various types. Difference and diversity are discursively dealt with within an assumed 'normalcy' or 'purity' framework. Under such a framework, difference is then automatically equated with unacceptability which must be immediately corrected.

Conceptual framework

Whilst a number of theories have been employed in the analysis of humor, the present study is couched on the Hostility theory of humor as well as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Hostility theories, also known as disparagement theories (Suls 1977), derision theories (MacHovec, 1988), superiority theories (Morreall 1987), or disappointment theories focus on the condescending effect inherent in humor. From this perspective, humor is a means of attaining and perpetuating power and superiority when it is directed against the perceived faults of other people thereby highlighting their inferiority (Shwarz, 2010). It is little wonder that Plato (cited in Morreall, 1987:10) considered amusement to be "a kind of malice toward [powerless] people". Morreall (1987) further notes that laughter seems to always be directed at someone as a kind of scorn. The passion of laughter is therefore perceived as nothing else but the sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others; the feeling of superiority of the person who is laughing at some object (Shwarz, 2010: 48). It emerges that humor is driven by the realisation that people generally laugh at other people's 'infirmities', particularly those of enemies (Ibid. p. 50). Billig (2005) regards humor as a 'social corrective' – closely linked with embarrassment whereby there is a tendency to 'joke down'

aimed at maintaining the social order/status quo in which a particular group of people is kept in their perceived lower position.

Theoretical provisions of Hostility Theory are then combined with those from CDA. It is concerned with "the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs," with the ultimate goal of moving beyond the interpretation of texts and advocating for social change (Fairclough, 2010, p. 8). Critical Theory. Gramsci (1971), Habermas (1984), Foucault (1971) and Hall (1985) have demonstrated that social and/or political power may be created by, reflected in, maintained and resisted through language use. It is possible to establish or uncover relationships between language and social power within the informal semi-organised group (institutional) communicative space offered by WhatsApp. Interest is placed on how linguistic practices that privilege some groups at the expense of others are a common on the social media platform. Seemingly simple 'common-sensical' jokes are then used to discursively create and perpetuate an assumed hegemonic position of Zezuru over its supposedly inferior dialect counterparts. Foucault (1980) argues that discourse, is far from an innocent tool of linguistic expression or reproduction of truth as objective external reality. Rather, it is employed to establish a society's own regime or general politics of truth and the kind of discourses which it then accepts and functions as true. Thus, each social group has its own dialectic relating to discourse, truth and power obtaining in every social institution or interactive situation. Thus, power is regarded to be at the center of all human interactions. Language inherently invested with power dynamics – and at times this might be even be subconscious, subtle or both. It is the responsibility of the critical discourse analyst to expose the way in which language is used to dominate or perpetuate the domination of particular groups.

The study is specifically interested in the notion of naturalization. For Deetz (1992), it is a situation whereby socially constructed notions of reality are treated as if they are in fact transparent renderings of the external world. It occurs when only one view of reality is frozen and presented as the only one available. This is in contrast to conditions of open discourse, in which socio-historical influences are acknowledged and opened to free examination and dialogue. When a specific belief is construed as natural, then that belief is accepted while alternative explanations are effectively quashed. Thus, Deetz (1992) further explains, naturalism always at the center in the privileging and marginalizing of discourses‖. It is therefore likened to all the other processes of discursive closure whose major function is to reinforce the social power

held by those in authority or privileged social positions. The positions could be either earned, bestowed or perceived.

Methods

The researcher used a participant observation method in collecting data for the research. Calhoun (2002) defines and characterises participant observation as qualitative research method originating from the discipline of Anthropology which enables researchers to immerse themselves in particular cultures and to participate in the study population's day-to-day activities. For Iacono, Brown and Holtman (2009), this research method "involves participating in a situation, while, at the same time, recording what is being observed" (39). The researcher, at the time of study, was a member of five (5) different WhatsApp groups. These groups offered a range of different social variables and interactive dimensions in that one was sport-related (a basketball group), another was familial (a group for the Mangeya extended family) whilst another was a church one. This presented enabled the researcher to appreciate how the posting of the jokes on the social media is not really constrained by any social or moral boundaries. Bryant (n.d.) reiterates how this approach to the study of social phenomena, such as linguistic practices, allows the researcher to both capture 'routine things' that might have otherwise escaped their attention and to get information that they might not have able to source from participants had they used the interview method. A case in point is how the researcher, by virtue of participation on the WhatsApp groups, was able to take not of participants' reactions to the jokes that were posted. The researcher was also able to easily establish the saturation point of the data, as indicated by the repeated circulation of the same joke(s) after a certain period of time. The jokes were then thematically categorised dependent on the linguistic aspect they were targeted on.

The research may see things that routinely escape awareness of the participant using a different method It provides a chance to learn things that people may be unwilling to discuss in an interview

Analysis

The jokes circulated on the various WhatsApp groups reveal a tendency to poke fun at three major Shona dialects. These are Karanga, Manyika (whose speakers are popularly referred to as *Wasu*) as well as those from Gokwe. Due to the fact that the reference to Gokwe presents a theoretical problem pertaining to the specification of which dialect they could be, attention is placed only on the other two – the Karanga and Manyika. Analysis of the jokes reveals a number

of issues related to notions of normalcy and purity, especially those linked to logicality, economy and intellectual capabilities of the speakers, among others. The jokes are motivated by the desire to set and maintain a perceived standard of normalcy in the Shona language. Normalcy, as revealed by the jokes, is defined on the basis of Zezuru/Harare paradigm. Implicated in the jokes are social and geo-political issues relating both to the dialect and the people who speak it.

The first issue pertains to the apparent illogicalness of the Karanga dialect. This is based on the sound equivalences between Zezuru and Karanga. Example (1), below, illustrates this phenomenon:

1. Nhai imi vanhu vekuMasvingo...Tsoka munoti shoka. Tsoko munoti shoko.Tsuro moti shuro Ko tsotsi munotii..? Tikuda kudzidzawo

   This one murdered me woo 🤦🤦🤦🤦☺😂☺😂

   (You people from Masvingo … [for] ***ts****oka* (‘foot/feet’) you say (have it as) ***sh****oka*. **Ts**oko (‘monkey’) you say ***sh****oko*. ***Ts****uro* (‘rabbit/hare’) you say ***sh****uro*. What do you say for *tsotsi* (‘crook’)? We just need to know.

   This one just murdered me woo

Although, no dialect has been explicitly stated, it is imperative to appreciate that the phrase *vanhu vekuMasvingo* (people [who come] from Masvingo) is in this case discursively used to refer to the Karanga-speaking people. This is implicit in the reference to the sounds that they use. The bolded sounds in example (1) highlights the use of the fricative **/ʃ/** (represented by the grapheme *sh*-) to correspond to where Zezuru uses the affricate **/ts/** is a defining phonological characteristic of the Karanga dialect cluster. Perceived in that light, the punch line *ko tsotsi munotii*? (what do you say for crook?) is aimed at underlining the seeming illogicalness of the Karanga dialect as direct substitution of the Zezuru affricate /ts/ for its fricative counterpart /ʃ/ in Karanga would result in the linguistically ‘deviant’ (as defined by the Zezuru themselves) item *shoshi*. This lexical gap is then made to highlight the supposed nonsensical/irrationality of the language as a whole. Value judgments about the Karanga dialect are then made on the basis of that 1 linguistic form. This phenomenon conveniently ignores the conventional and arbitrary nature of language where there must not necessarily be a one-on-one relationship between sound correspondences between sounds in Zezuru words and their Karanga equivalences. The question to we should ask ourselves is what is so ‘rational’ about *tsoka* and having a corresponding shoka in Karanga which would then make *tsotsi* not have a direct and ‘predictable’ one so ‘irrational’.

Simply put, there is no reason why Karanga linguistic forms must be forced to reflect/mirror their Zezuru counterparts. The differences must not be read beyond that of simple free allophonic variation. That is, speakers of the Shona dialect cluster are free to use any sound as long as it does not compromise the semantic integrity of the lexical item(s). This is to be taken just as in the pronunciation of the word 'butter' whose last consonant sound can either be realised as the alveolar stop [t], the trill [r] or glottal stop [ʔ]. This does not by any means imply that only of them is then supposed to be the normal or acceptable way of pronouncing it.

The choice of pronouns in (1) above highlights an interesting power dynamic implicated in the joke. Sharndama (2016) asserts that pronouns do much more than to serve the purpose of making reference. They are in fact also used in the discursive construction of identity and presentation of principles, ideological perspectives and the overt marking of solidarity. The use of the pronouns 'you' (in ***imi*** *vanhu vekuMasvingo* – you people from Masvingo), as juxtaposed with the pronoun 'we' (***ti****noda kudzidzawo* – we [just] want to learn/know) is meant to both linguistically emphasise and widen the social difference between the Zezuru-speaking people (who supposedely come from Harare) and the Karanga-speaking people. It becomes a discursive act of declaring Zezuru linguistic phenomenon as the correct way of speaking and scorning any other forms that deviate from that perceived standard. Thus, for Wirth-Koliba (2016):

> the 'us' and 'them' opposition is indispensable for the concept of power and dominance to exist: one having power entails another person's lack of it. Someone's superiority and dominance over others implies the latter's inferiority, thus the 'us' and 'them' polarization is clearly visible … power and dominance are the primary aspects establishing and maintaining a more or less legitimate and stable hierarchy (p. 23).

This is one of the various dimensions in which pronouns are used to signal notions of power, inclusion, exclusion and solidarity, among others. The Zezuru dialect is being signaled as linguistically dominant to the other dialects, which in this case is Karanga. It is meant to highlight the 'fact' that the Karanga are not really part of the Shona-speaking people, which the Zezuru dialect has been equated to, as they are not really part of the 'we'. The 'you' is tantamount to the bracketing off of the Karanga dialect from mainstream Shona.

Another aspect coming from the jokes relates to notions of linguistic economy. The linguistic economy principle is considered as one that is at the core of both biological and linguistic evolution. For Vicentini (2003) it is may also "referred to as the principle of least effort, which

consists in tending towards the minimum amount of effort that is necessary to achieve the maximum result, so that nothing is wasted" (p.37). It operates on various linguistic levels. These include the phonetics/phonology, morphology, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic levels. Kobayashi (2015) observes how "the history of linguistics indicates the avoidance of excessive syllables and words in normal speech" (p.51). For Wit and Gillette (1999:1), the mental lexicon efficiently processes language in a non-redundant fashion. Kobayashi underscores the belief that the essence of linguistic economy lies in the desire by both speakers and hearers to make linguistic expressions easily accessible. Speakers are especially compelled to ensure that they reduce the mental burden on the addressee's part in the accessing and interpretation of utterances they convey to them. This is then meant to ensure a speedy and seamless interpersonal interaction. Example (2) seems to be formulated on the basis of the hearers' expectations of the principle of economy:

2. *Longest shona word*
   Mugozonyatsotitsananguririrawozve
   31 letters longer than e alphabet 😳😳��
   From Masvingo

If Grice's co-operative principle is anything to go by, language must, of necessity, be characterised by economy and perspicuity. Interlocutors, especially speakers, are expected to observe the maxim of manner which stipulates that information must be presented in such a way that it does not confuse the addressee. Thus, one is expected to be clear, orderly and avoid ambiguity. The length of linguistic elements is therefore crucial in ensuring that linguistic forms are as clear as possible. The longer they are the more likely they are to cause confusion as they are likely to cause attention-related problems. The source of the 'problem' in the example above is the perceived length of the word *mugozonyatsotitsananguririrawozve* ('will you explain to us in great detail'). The punchline of this joke lies in the fact that the words has 5 more letters than the whole alphabet itself. One gets the feeling that the people from Masvingo (as declared on the last line in (2) above) have no sense of economy. The bottom line being that they cannot express themselves properly. This is possibly why they find themselves in a situation whereby they have to employ a ridiculously long word to express a simple idea. They therefor have to suffer the ignominy of having the longest Shona word). The way the joke is put suggests that this is not a record to be proud of. This becomes a case of prescriptive, as opposed to descriptive, redundancy

where notions relating to the length of acceptable linguistic forms are constructed on the basis of an equally supposed linguistic.

3. ***WASU ACHINAMATA***

```Mwari imwimwi diko mune favour. Ingawani Abraham musharukwa hake wakakumbire mupwere imwimwi mwechoomupa.```

```Uyuwo onini Jonah wakaitwe swallow ngeshark,digestive system yechooite malfunction kwakuitwe vomit.```

```Mukoma Dan akaitwa throw mu pity remahungry lions,imwimwi mwechoidziite kuti dzi lose appetite.```

```Wonini, Moses hatimboreketiba,wakachaye mvura ngendonga yechoobva yaita separate ngepamiddle kuzoti ari Erijah haaaaaa, kubva mwaite wekusenda kuheaven ngerocket.```

```Asi inini hangu wasu ndiri kuda pondo basi yekunere Zed imwimwi mwaakundiite deny...ngenyi Mwari mwechidaro.```

*```**Tumire anhani eshe usaseka wega`** 😂😂😂

A Manyika Praying

God you practice favoritism. You gave Abraham, a very old man, a son after he [Abraham] had asked for him [the son].

Then what-his-name Jonah was swallowed by a shark but its digestive system had a malfunction.

Brother Dan[iel] was thrown in a pit of lions and you made them lose their appetite.

[As for] Whats-his-name Moses we won't even begin talking about it. He beat water with a stick and it separated through the middle.

When it comes to Elijah, you actually sent him to Heaven on a rocket.

But for me Wasu, I just want $2 to buy Zed but you deny me.

Why do you do you do that?

The label *Wasu* in the Zimbabwean sociolinguistic landscape. It represents a group of Manyika-speaking people mainly from the Eastern Highlands (Manicaland Province) of Zimbabwe. Interestingly, there are cases whereby the Ndau are also mistaken/confused as Manyika due to their almost similar apparently phonological (accent). This is not however the focus of this presentation. *Wasu* is not an innocent or endearment term. Phonology has been used as a running

punchline form many a joke. 'Talking funny' has been the running theme for many a joke, especially those where Blacks are generally accused of failing to properly pronounce the more serious Western languages. The Manyikas have long been ridiculed on the basis of their phonological patterns, especially their pronunciation of both Shona (which in fact is Zezuru) and English. They are forced to conform to a particular form of pronunciation and are laughed at for failing to adhere to it. Whereas the Westerners can get away with proverbial linguistic murder in so far as the pronunciation and associated bastardisation of indigenous languages is concerned, the Blacks are not afforded or accorded this luxury. Ironically, native Black speakers are more often than not elated the 'White' people (*varungu*) are making an attempt to speak their 'lowly' languages. They are applauded for their desire and efforts in speaking our native African languages. The *Mafata* (Roman Catholic Priests) jokes are a case in point. Implicit in these you-talk-funny-type of jokes is the link between ability to pronounce and educational as well as intellectual levels. The issue becomes different regarding attitudes about our pronunciation of the languages of the former colonisers (which are regarded as the epitome of intellectual and/or prowess).

The last line in the joke serves to underscore the lack of (social) intelligence. For most African former colonies, the language of the coloniser is a prestigious code which shows much more than linguistic competence. Invested in the perfect fluency and proficiency in the former colonisers linguistic codes are social, economic and political rewards. From a social perspective, there is a high status, often from the assumed high level of education and therefore intelligence, that go along with it. In the Zimbabwean sociolinguistic terrain "English is synonymous with the sound education whilst education through African languages is given second class rating" Kamwendo (1999: 229). Coupled with the fact that there is neither a reward nor sanction for obtaining passes in local languages, such as Shona, (Chivhanga & Chimwendo, 2013) this phenomenon might partly explain why most Africans are willing to invest fortunes in paying fees in high-end-schools just to have their children acquire a native-like competencies (which is actually pronunciation in most cases) in the languages of the former colonisers. This results in the tendency to judge a person's social background, level of education and intellectual capacity mostly on the basis of their ability to speak/pronounce proper English. It is therefore an absolute abomination to be caught out 'breaking' the English language in Zimbabwe. The Manyikas have since been punished for their perceived 'phony' English-like accent which ironically (as far as

the humor is concerned) does not translate to a high level competent in the English. This brings to mind the joke about a Manyika child who was travelling with her mother by bus from Mutare to Harare. It states that people were impressed by how she shouted "Mummy, mummy" in a deceptively 'English' manner only for people to be disappointed when she followed it up with "Ndoda kuuya ikweyo" ('I want to come there/where you are'). It has the same motif where what is perceived as an 'English accent' is not backed up by the requisite/expected high linguistic competence. They are therefore discursively constructed just as 'wannabes' who do not really deserve to be taken seriously.

The Karanga, or 'people from Masvingo', have also not been spared of this 'accusation' of having a very low linguistic competence in English. Example (4) below highlioghts this phenomenon:

4. Boy👨‍👨‍👦‍👦💻: which bank do u use cwty so that I can transfer yo money to yo account?

   Girl👩: power bank hun 😂😂😂😂😂💦💦💦 vasikana veMasvingo vakuda intensive care coz havaketi chinhu 🏃‍♀️🏃‍♀️🏃‍♀️🏃‍♀️🏃‍♀️💪

   Boy: Which bank do you use sweety so that I can transfer your money to your account?

   Girl: Power bank honey.

   Girls from Masvingo need intensive care because they know [absolutely] nothing.

The joke in (4) above revolves around the issues of lexical ambiguity brought about by homography. The source of 'confusion', on the girl's part, arises on the meaning of the the word 'bank'. However, the inclusion of the "so that I can transfer your money your account?" is meant to disambiguate it so that it becomes obvious that it refers to the monetory institution. The girl's confusion is then perceived as evidence of how 'girls from Masvingo' not only have suspect levels of English linguistic competences but also levels of intelligence. The girl was supposed to use both the linguistic context and general knowledge of the world to disambiguate the word 'bank'. Her failure to do so is then used as evidence of how the Karanga, girls in this case, are incapable of attaining expected high levels of requisite communicative competence in English.

Such humor has utilized incongruity/disappointment to reveal this supposed imbalance. Their errant accent is the 'linguistic infirmity' that is being disparaged in by the humor in this particular instance. As a result of their (the *Wasu*) 'phony accent' and ironic failure to speak

English properly is regarded as some sort of a sin against the Queen, her unfortunate beautiful language and the Zimbabwean nation (which is believed to be amongst the best English-speaking countries in Africa). In the process, not only do we end up relegating our African languages to a second-class status in comparison to English, but we also end up doing the same to our fellow 'tribesmen'. The Manyika end up being constructed as lesser Shona people not because of what they are saying but simply because they are thought of not being good enough in English.

A close analysis of the jokes actually reveal that there might actually be very little to laugh about in the linguistic sense of humor. What seems to be central to them is their association with a particular group of people and their linguistic varieties (dialects). There is a tendency at not speaking at the quality of the joke itself, but the manner in which a particular group of people speak (phonology), the fact that their language is not similar to ours (which is basically grammatical differences). There is something inherently wrong at laughing at someone simply because simply as a result of a refusal to appreciate allophonic variation and the length of their lexical items, for instance. When these kind of jokes are repeated often enough, they may potentially end cultivating negative subconscious attitudes about the suitability of a group's dialect. The dialect-speaker-region dialectic could be used to account for how speakers of other Shona dialects may be perceived as inferior to Zezuru speakers.

The issue of dialectal intolerance can be appreciated in light of the many years of formal education in Shona where students where taught to internalize (though rather subtly) that to speak correct Shona is to speak Zezuru. This results in a case where there can only be one linguistic form to the exclusion of others. On the jokes' surface value alone, they can be regarded as pragmatically functioning as the enforcement of a somewhat supremacist language policy which sought to underscore a bestowed linguistic supremacy on the Zezuru linguistic code over its perceived lesser counterparts through humor/jokes through the propagation and perpetuation of an idealistic/purist linguistic 'ideologies'. The other dialects are not perceived as 'fit for human consumption' and as a result must not be used even in informal interactive situations such as the spaces offered on WhatsApp. The 'propagators'/producers of the jokes seem to be intent on enlightening Shona speakers on the apparent 'wrongs'/evils of the lesser dialects and, in the process, convert their speakers to the 'proper' way of speaking. Thus, it resonates with Avner's (1988) observation of how humor is employed to reform humanity by presenting them with a specific set of ideals which they then advance so as to effect behavioural change on the part of

the errant group. Bergson (1975) had earlier posited that, "Laughter is a social reaction which punishes and puts down deviant elements in man's behavior and in various events (76).

Undoubtedly, it is hoped that the study has exposed how the jokes are inherently underlain by both paternalistic and condescending attitudes, if not responsibilities of self-importance on the part of their presenters (or those who perpetuate their circulation on social media platforms such as WhatsApp). Central to the expectation of the jokes is the presupposition that the social group that is the stock of the laughter will have to take care in future not to repeat the behavior that has evoked social punishment. The humor is therefore be read as some form of punitive action that is discursively meant to be a preventative measure in so far as preventing the commission of unwanted linguistic behaviours on the part of the target group. For instance, one can therefore 'learn' that they have to talk in 'a normal Shona accent' for them not to be the laughing stock of the group. Social control is therefore seen as the main motivation of these jokes. Whether this happens consciously or unconsciously is definitely the subject of another research – which in itself, given the gravity of the situation, must be a sociolinguistic imperative. At the end of it all, linguistic diversity within the Shona dialect cluster not seen as resource but a problem that needs to be urgently solved. This is reflective of a de facto language policy has the potential of perpetuating linguistic superiority tendencies on the basis of perceived dominance or primacy of the Zezuru dialect over its regional counterparts. If Mtukudzi's (1999) exhortation that "*dada nerudzi rwako, chimiro chako nedzinza rako, pembedza rurimi pwere dzikotevera*" ('Be proud of your heritage, your physical appearance and your clan, celebrate your language for the young[er] generation to emulate') is anything to go by, there is still a lot to be done to ensure the equal treatment of all linguistic varieties within the Shona language. The jokes are attacking a people's non-tangible cultural heritage. It is little wonder why Romaine (2009) asserts that linguistic diversity in itself does not present much sociolinguistic problems. Most, if not all, of the problems associated with multilingualism actually stem from problems caused by political attitudes brought to interactive situations by individual speakers. There is therefor need to rethink and reformulate a Shona language policy which promotes treatment of all linguistic within it so as to realise a truly 'unified' language.

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