

Hurst-Harosh, Ellen. 2020. Tsotsitaal in South Africa: Style and metaphor in youth language practices. (Language Contact in Africa 6). Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

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During the last three decades, African Youth Languages (AYL) have become an established field of research in linguistics. Detailed descriptions abound, not only about individual examples such as Sheng & Engsh in Kenya (Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997, Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005), Camfranglais in Cameroon (Kießling 2005, de Féral 2006, Stein 2022), Nouchi in Côte d’Ivoire (Kouadio 1990, Kube 2005), Yanké in DR Congo (Nassenstein 2014) or Lughya Ya Mitaani in Tanzania (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006), but also about the general research area (Kießling & Mous 2004, Mesthrie et al. 2021). For the South African variety Tsotsitaal, Ellen Hurst (now Hurst-Harosh) has established herself as leading expert, having studied diverse aspects of the linguistic phenomenon (Hurst 2008, 2009, 2016, Hurst-Harosh 2019).

With “Tsotsitaal in South Africa: Style and metaphor in Youth Language practices”, she now presents a monograph that sums up previous research, contributes new material and initiates novel directions of thinking, making it the most comprehensive treatment of Tsotsitaal, a non-standard linguistic variety using material from different languages that has been in use in South Africa since the 1940s, to date. The author herself describes the book as “(...) an attempt to map a field and to describe a linguistic phenomenon” (p. 1), and she approaches the subject from different perspectives to do so (socio-historically, grammatically, lexically, stylistically as well as concerning the attitudes and perceptions of its speakers).

Divided in seven chapters, the reader gets a good overview of what to expect when looking at the directory, and a total of eleven tables and eight figures illustrate the content, even depicting Tsotsitaal speakers in action – a rarity in sociolinguistic research. This hands-on approach prevails throughout the book, which presents many examples of conversation transcripts and in-depth analyses of spoken interaction.

The introduction (Chapter 1) first embeds Tsotsitaal studies in the wider context of African (urban) Youth Language research, discussing both theoretical tools and the state of the art. This discus-

sion includes important excursions into the field of denominations and “semiotic meaning making systems” (p. 6) such as gestures and clothing, which are an essential but as yet neglected part of Youth Language studies. The author then describes the data foundation of her own work, including different research projects from 2005 onwards with fieldwork in Mdantsane (East London), Gugulethu, and Khayelitsha (Cape Town), Kwamashu (Durban) as well as Springs and Soweto (Johannesburg).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to an overview of “Tsotsitaal history and background” (p. 27), covering the first emergence of a novel slang among South African gangs in prison and mining compounds in the mid 1940s, its spread to Sophiatown and Soweto as well as its connection to crime and gangsterism, and how it came to be called Tsotsitaal: by expanding the denomination “tsotsi”, which described members of a Sophiatown street gang who were notorious in wearing so-called “zoot-suits” (p. 35), to the slang they spoke (*taal* means “language” in Afrikaans, p. 38). The last part of the chapter sums up the current state and spread of this “language style” (p. 44) to new domains and functions, such as usage in non-criminal peer groups, “by older people and women” as well as “in many forms of popular media” (p. 45), slowly shedding its hitherto negative image.

Turning to the linguistic structure of Tsotsitaal, Chapter 3 presents the grammatical framework of the variety. From a more general summary of the different base languages from which various versions of Tsotsitaals developed (e.g. Setswana, Sesotho, isiZulu, isiXhosa or Afrikaans, p. 47) to a discussion of its morphosyntactic features, the reader learns a lot about how this linguistic phenomenon works. In subchapters 3.3 and 3.4, the author presents a detailed analysis of Cape Town Tsotsitaal, which is based mainly on urban isiXhosa, including 50 examples with interlinear glosses and translations. Hurst-Harosh here comes to the conclusion that Tsotsitaal “is dependent on the urban vernacular to provide the grammatical frame” (p. 69) into which lexical material from other African languages, Afrikaans and English is embedded. Other interesting outcomes of this chapter are the concept of “light” and “deep” varieties of Tsotsitaal, something that has been discussed for other Urban African Youth Languages as well (e.g. Stein 2022 for Camfranglais), as well as the statement that Tsotsitaal is neither the result of code-switching nor a mixed language.

The following three chapters represent the heart of the monograph. Here, Hurst-Harosh goes well beyond traditional structural descriptions of languages and varieties to include questions of attitudes, functions and style. She underlines the importance of Tsotsitaal for the construction of a young, urban, in most cases male and black South African identity, describing the various subcultures that have developed in the younger generation. Also, she explains why the association between Tsotsitaal and criminal activities is still active in the attitudes of the people (p. 85). To do so, the author analyses interviews both with speakers and non-speakers of the variety, quoting the informants in 49 instances to present their views on Tsotsitaal and its users. Chapter 4 further subdivides in discussions about generational identity (p. 93 ff.), urban vs. rural identity (p. 98 ff.), street-wise style (p. 112 ff.), and peer groups (p. 120 ff.), thus painting a comprehensive picture about Tsotsitaal's contemporary functions, the main of which are:

- indexing “youth, rather than middle aged and married” (p. 92)
- expressing “an urban, western modernity identity rather than rural and African traditional” (ibid.)
- indexing “a streetwise knowledge rather than formal education, and hustling [...] rather than formal employment” (ibid.)
- portraying “a black masculinity linked to particular forms of music [...] and cultural artefacts such as clothing styles” (ibid.) and
- “having fun, making jokes, and trying to make each other laugh”, which is the most important function according to the author (p. 120)

Having established the importance of Tsotsitaal for its speakers and its functions, Chapter 5 analyses the semiotic resources used to express social and individual identity by “performed discursive practice” (p. 124). Hurst-Harosh has proposed the term “stylect” in earlier works (e.g. Hurst 2008, 2009) to define Tsotsitaal (and, in extension, similar Youth Language practices), and introduces it again here to explain what is happening in Tsotsitaal interactions. After a short literature review about style, register and gender, the author describes how certain terms can be used to mark a conversation as informal (or “Tsotsi”) and then turns to other semiotic modes used, such as gestures, body language, clothing and music preferences

(p. 132 ff.). She also discusses the issue of gender in Tsotsitaal usage, paying special attention to the emerging discourses in online spaces (p. 149 ff.). She concludes that “[...] women who speak Tsotsitaal are interpreted and represented as less feminine, and their Tsotsitaal as less authentic despite very similar practices of use” (p. 158), but that it “[...] can be utilized by women to gain power in township spaces” (ibid.).

Focusing on questions of relexicalization and metaphor, Chapter 6 again turns to the linguistic characteristics of Tsotsitaal, more specifically to its lexicon. The theoretical discussion of the terms “antilanguage” and “metaphor” in the beginning of the chapter could have been integrated in the introduction, but the remaining sections about domains and topics of Tsotsitaal use, including many examples and word etymologies, are highly revealing. Especially the discovery of a “national core lexicon of Tsotsitaal”, i.e. “(...) some lexical items [that] have become relatively stable and appear across many if not all of the varieties of Tsotsitaal around the country” (p. 166 ff.) is an exciting contribution to the field and might inspire similar comparative works in other contexts.

The final Chapter 7 summarizes the preceding sections as follows: “The book has argued that Tsotsitaal is a stylized register of South African urban varieties, and that it distinguishes itself through relexicalization including metaphor, and through stylisation, not only of the linguistic performance but also other semiotic systems including gesture, body language and consumer artefacts.” (p. 194). The author then painstakingly describes the questions still open for investigation in Tsotsitaal and other African Youth Languages, including:

- ambiguity, and whether it can be “considered a driver for borrowing and language alternation” (p. 195)
- games, metaphor and creativity: “[H]ow linguistic performances lead to fun, and in turn, what impact fun and humour has on language change”? (p. 196)
- taboo, avoidance and respect: “[H]ow [is] language [...] used in social processes to signal respect”? (p. 197)
- poetics and phonology: investigating “the interface between AYLS, poetry, music, and related youth cultural forms” (p. 198)

- Tsotsitaal as decolonial: understanding “why and how youth language practices emerge, and why Africa has become such an interesting site of focus for youth language researchers” (p. 199)

Hurst-Harosh closes her monograph with the observation that describing Tsotsitaal and similar linguistic forms as registers “can provide us with a way to break out of traditional classifications” (p. 200), and that their function of expressing identity and establishing power relations should be central to future research.

Overall, this work is written in easily understandable wording, renouncing complicated constructions without losing scientific appeal, thus making it accessible to laypersons as well as both academic beginners and advanced scholars. The book comes in a handy hard-back in shiny dark red including a slightly blurred cover picture of two young men walking down a street, and although an index is missing, the compact size of 203 pages (plus references and appendix) and a well-structured chapter division makes it easy to find individual readers’ special interests. A great contribution to African Urban Youth Language and especially Tsotsitaal studies!

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