

## Dialogicality and imaginings of two 'community' notice boards in post-apartheid Observatory, Cape Town

Amiena Peck and Felix Banda

### Abstract

This article undertakes a poststructuralist multisemiotic analysis of posters and notices found on two 'community' notice boards in the trendy, multicultural neighbourhood of Observatory in Cape Town, South Africa. An analysis of the two notice boards endeavours to reveal different strategic uses of English as well as varying constructions of (transnational) place-making and community in Observatory. The two notice boards reveal voices of transient and permanent groups alike and index new imaginative constructions of this changing neighbourhood. Furthermore, this paper explores the implications of strategic linguistic processes in self-marketisation of transnational and 'local' community members in Observatory. We conclude by expounding on the new perspective of transcultural capital and what it means to the sociolinguistics of a super-diverse neighbourhood in the post-apartheid neighbourhood of Observatory in Cape Town, South Africa.

### Introduction

The article explores identity construction in the notices on two adjacent 'community' notice boards in the trendy, multicultural neighbourhood of Observatory in Cape Town, South Africa. The article also aims to unravel motivations behind the choices in language used in notices representative of the Observatory community.

Under apartheid law, the neighbourhood of Observatory was officially designated as a white-only suburb with very restricted and controlled access for non-whites. However, it was also considered a *de facto* grey area as it was home to many young liberal students and leftist members. The neighbourhood is conveniently located close to the national highway with train, bus and taxi routes. With its century-old Victorian architecture, thriving commercial corridor and close proximity to an elite university, Observatory has become known as a 'cosmopolitan' place which appeals to tourists, immigrants and locals alike. The diverse crowds have left their fingerprints on the landscape, and it is this landscape which indexes the constant reshaping of notions of neighbourhood and community in Observatory. South Africa's 2011 national census results (Statistics South Africa, 2011) affirm that the Western Province has three dominant languages, specifically Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. Afrikaans is the most dominant language with 51 percent (2 820 643), followed by Xhosa with 25 percent (1 403 233) speakers and English with 20 percent (1 149 049) speakers. Unspecified language speakers constitute

the 'Other' category with the remaining 2 percent (127 117) speakers. These results are interesting as the notice boards under study create a microcosm of linguistic place-making with implications for the diverse constituencies of the neighbourhood of Observatory. We need to note here that we are using the 2011 national census data as the previous census was in 2001. In spite of the changes that are taking place in Observatory, Afrikaans, Xhosa and English remain the dominant languages.

Following Modan (2007) this study construes a community held together by social networks as opposed to a neighbourhood which is geographically defined. This means that while one notice board may index a community via social networks, it may also simply index a tie to the geography of the neighbourhood, with a potential mix of both notions of community and neighbourhood also possible. The two noticeboards as a 'site' speak dialogically to one another, allowing the geographical area of Observatory to be examined as a neighbourhood (space) which has become a community (place) wherein social practices are carried out.

A poststructuralist framework (Baxter 2002; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004) is used to analyse the discursive formations (i.e. texts, posters, notices) found on the notice boards in the study and subsequently of individuals and groups in Observatory. Specifically, this study focuses on how identities are constructed in posters, notices and other texts. This means that the study does not focus on any 'truth' of the identity of the author, but rather looks at the resources drawn upon by the author when appropriating a specific identity. A poststructuralist approach allows for notices to be seen as having multiple meanings, with an emphasis on the role of power between the author(s) and audience.

### **Theoretical considerations**

For Landry and Bourhis (1997, 23) ethno-linguistic vitality is depicted by 'the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region'. In this regard, the notice boards in this study are considered as part of the larger linguistic landscape of Observatory. In this vein, linguistic appropriation of space is thought to be important in its capacity to highlight issues surrounding cultural and symbolic value. The poststructuralist paradigm was employed as it refuted any claim to a universalisation of discourse, ideology, or identity emerging from a specific 'truth'. Within this approach, the greater socio-historical context was of utmost importance and for this reason Observatory's current social interaction and linguistic choices are regularly situated within its broader colonial and post-apartheid setting. Pertinently, the poststructuralist approach 'recognises the socio-historically shaped partiality, contestability, instability, and mutability of ways in which language ideologies and identities are linked to relations of power and political arrangements in communities and societies' (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004, 10).

It is clear that context plays an important role in Observatory's current social setting and situates linguistic choices within its broader colonial and post-apartheid setting. Observatory is viewed as a social space wherein people, discourse and space are continuously cast against the background of social, historical and political context. The poststructuralist approach directs its focus to 'the ways in which shifting power relations

between speakers are constantly negotiated through the medium of competing discourses' (Baxter 2002, 829).

Modan (2007) discusses the relationship between people and places as dialectical in nature. She foregrounds different identities as inextricably linked to the way people imagine these spaces. A deep-seated link between imagination, communities and place can be seen in the creation of specific identities. For Modan (2007, 328) 'our notions of people's social identities are often influenced by what we think about the places we associate them with, just as our understandings of certain places are likewise shaped by what we think about the people who populate them'. Following Modan (2007, 326), this study views a neighbourhood as generally perceived within a specific geographical outline, whilst a community is connected via social networks. Modan (2007, 326) elaborates that 'community is defined through social networks; it is possible to be a member of a geographical community without actually living in the geographical terrain. Likewise, it is possible to live in a neighbourhood without being part of the community'.

Identities of transnational groups and their dispersion and settlement in Observatory are analysed through the notion of transcultural capital (cf. Meinhof 2009). Drawing on earlier work by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Meinhof delineates three types of transcultural capital: social, cultural and economic. Social capital 'describes the human resources available to individuals through the social contacts they hold and can rely on', while cultural capital 'describes the cultural resources available to individuals as a result of their upbringing, socialisation, education, and professional development and training' (Meinhof 2009, 151). She explains that it is the sum of both social and cultural capital which results in economic capital for the transnational individual or group. It is the presence of transcultural capital that this study hopes to engender.

## **Methodology**

Images of the two notice boards were captured with a digital camera over the course of 2009. Every three months the researchers captured all the notices on each of the two notice boards. Notice board A remained largely stable or unchanged and had fewer notices (approximately seven notices at a time). Notice board B had approximately 35 handwritten notices per month and was relatively fluid or unstable in that authors would change frequently and notices could be removed at any moment. While all the notices on Notice board A could be analysed at one time, a more systematic approach had to be undertaken to a selection of notices on Notice board B. On Notice board B, all marked notices (i.e. notices with local or transnational references) were selected. Of these notices, a further five notices were selected. Authors were contacted telephonically and asked about their success at seeking jobs in Observatory. However, none were keen to meet for an interview unless an actual job was offered.

## **Notice boards as research sites**

Observatory is not only home for locals, but also a transient space for migrants, refugees and tourists. One place in which voices of some of these groups emerge can be found on two notice boards which are located at the local convenient store in the centre of Observatory. The two very distinct and functionally important 'community' notice boards are found adjacent to each other at the entrance to Observatory's busy

convenient store, Kwikspar. The notices on the two ‘community’ notice boards were analysed using multimodal discourse analysis. In devising what they called a grammar of visual design, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) show how images, sound and linguistic material can be read and analysed as text.

Varying representations of community are considered as textually constructed with signage using different linguistic strategies in its creation of an Observatory community. For each of the two notice boards the notion of place-making and aspirations for the community and the author, as well as readers’ role *within* the community, is foregrounded. An analysis of these two notice boards illuminates tension around place-making and further speaks to notions of community and neighbourhood, as well as possible tension between locality and strangeness. The two ‘community’ notice boards are examined as a delimited space in which notions of ‘community’, ‘locals’, ‘newcomers’ and ‘outsiders’ interplay and contrast constantly and from which insight into Observatory can be garnered. On Notice board A, colour printed, typed, dated and ‘ordered’ English signs conjure an idealised ‘village-like’ (homogenous) image of the neighbourhood. On the Notice board B, handwritten personalised signs suggest a ‘new’ transnational (heterogeneous) community with different resources at their disposal. Notices on these signs have a three-week lifecycle and authors of these signs often employ creative, economical and linguistic ploys to signal issues of foreignness, legitimacy and temporality within the neighbourhood. This article is also interested in the dialogic nature of these signs as well as the different articulations of aspirations for the neighbourhood.

The two notice boards were originally positioned two metres apart in 2009 at the entrance of the supermarket. Since most of the images collected are not suitable for publication, as some of the print and/or handwriting is hardly legible, we have selected relevant text (in most cases whole text) and rendered it into normal MSWord format in the form of examples.

## **The Study**

### ***‘Obz Community Notice Board’ (Notice board A)***

Notice board A is run by the local civic association and draws upon the commonly used abridged name for Observatory i.e. ‘Obz’ to describe their notice board. This notice board mainly functions in an information one way manner with notices generally supplying the reader with information on upcoming civic plans, initiatives, community progress and monthly meetings. With the exception of a short removal for paintwork, this notice board has remained on the left side of the entrance into the Kwikspar. This is important to mention as Notice board B was permanently moved to the opposite wall after the paintwork had been completed. It was replaced with two generic advertising posters. The reason for this move could not be confirmed. However, due to the large number of people (locals, vagrants and tourists alike) observed perusing this notice board; it may be plausible that a redirection of ‘foot traffic’ may have been the impetus for this change.

Notices found on Notice board A were consistent with Ben-Rafael’s (2009, 49) top-down signs, which are characterised as originating from *inter alia* ‘different levels – governmental, municipal, public/government organisation or associative – that produce

signs and LL text to designate agencies or defuse information directly depending on those bodies...(and) ... start off from foci of public authority to reach “common citizens” Examples of top-down signage found on this notice board are emblematic of the Observatory Civic Association’s (OCA) logo found on all their notices. Herein, the logo has the image of a medieval stargazer reminiscent of the first Dutch arrivals to the Cape that wished to establish an Observatory. The OCA, as well as its subsidiaries, draws on the colonial heritage of the neighbourhood.

Intriguingly, the semiotics of this notice board is largely indicative of concerns about ‘local’ affairs (specifically residential). Many of the notices found on this notice board appeared to talk ‘about’ unwanted parties and instructing the reader how to deal with this undesirable populace. The ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ sign fulfils a ‘local-insider’ role of protection of the (legitimate) locals in line with their objective to ‘watch out for the community’. It appears that only one aspect of the community is legitimised and the notion of in-group and out-group status emerges as a clear marker of difference. The notice board points to aspirations of a ‘village-ideal’ as ‘resemiotised’ (Iedema 2003) and encoded in different semiotic artefacts (Observatory; community; newspaper; and pamphlet) and technologies (Observatory websites) in Observatory.

In this regard, the local neighbourhood watch serves to protect the local residents, while the local newspaper is delivered to all residents in the Observatory area and therefore serves an informative and entertainment function. All of these elements construct the inclusive ‘village-like’ feel of Observatory. Signs on this notice board can be read together as informing and forming one another. ‘Reading positions’ can be seen as further illustrating the general stability of the authors and assumed audience. Signage of the ‘neighbourhood watch’ works well with ‘community’ awareness about the problem of lawless and bothersome vagrants. A glance at the various messages on this notice board, shows the audience is at once positioned as being: (a) community orientated signalled by a ‘hand up not a hand out philosophy’; (b) literate (as seen from the presence of a community newspaper) and use of the Standard variety of English; (c) constructed as dutiful Christians drawn out from the ‘fish and loaves’ appeal, which is compounded by the absence of any other visible religious signage; (d) vulnerable and therefore in need of a neighbourhood watch; (e) socio-economically more powerful than other groups as they are affiliated to ‘official’ governmental organisations (Observatory Improvement District); and finally (f) ‘bona fide’ members who are specifically described as property owners within the ObSid footprint.

Ties to the neighbourhood emerged through the assertion of authenticity as stemming from property ownership. This strongly relays the relationship between the author(s) on this notice board and the perceived ‘legitimate’ audience. This categorisation of course excludes a large percentage of Observatory community members, made up by migrants, refugees and even local Capetonians outside of the geography of the immediate Observatory. Therefore restrictions of authenticity can be summarised as derived from the following demographic profiling: (a) socio-economic status; (b) religious preference; (c) level of ‘centre’ English competency; (d) predominated by patriarchal patterning; (e) knowledge of geography and importance of historical setting in Observatory (all AGMs held in the Observatory Community Hall) which has since

become a recipient of the government funds for restoration; as well as (f) accessible to the global world of 'internet'.

A strong sense of in-group and out-group membership emerges from this notice board which signals that the collection of different reading positions still manages to produce a homogenous image, incidentally not unlike the demographic make-up observed at OCA meetings. OCA membership is made up of a largely aging population (late forties to late sixties) and members are largely white and male dominated. Also, the language of use is almost exclusively 'Standard' English.

The perception of in-group inclusion puts forth confluent perceptions of distinct 'Others' as the cause of fear, danger and simply not 'fitting in'. On this notice board it appears that a specific social formation of a 'village-ideal' is created through the positioning of the readers as being part of a very specific neighbourhood identity in which they are overtly positioned as the 'legitimate' locals. Signs on this notice board are consistently written in 'centre' English (Kachru 1985) with an emphasis on social ties linked to shared technologies such as the internet and shared common social practices and interests. It appears that spaces are imagined and discursively constructed (and even contested) as belonging to a specific group of people in Observatory. The co-existence of 'Others' is not viewed as a necessary building block to the community, and thus the erasure of 'unwanted people and practices' embodies this view exactly.

This particular notice board can be seen as a construction of aspiration involving a select (but powerful) few in Observatory. This means that while their social ambitions may not yet have been met, this notice board serves as a site of aspiration from a perceived position of luxury as epitomised by the host of resources which make this notice board functional. Those that fall outside of the projected audience would perhaps be less interested in the exact instruction of how to take care of the welfare of vagrants in the area and may search for a more socially oriented approach, such as permitting the sleeping of vagrants on private property at night or the provision of *ad hoc* gardening and cleaning jobs to 'well-known' vagrants. Readers of this notice board may also feel excluded by the emphasis on 'property-ownership' despite having resided in the neighbourhood for decades through opting for rental. This means that although Notice board A may create a distinct image of the local, it may not be representative of the overwhelming population of homeowners residing in Observatory.

Although the physical space of these signs is constrained, they speak to different spaces in the immediate local and the global arena as well. Meetings are held in the Observatory Community Hall, vagrants are found on street corners, privacy and safety in the home are monitored by the neighbourhood watch and neighbourhood on-goings are reported in the community newspaper and online. Therefore, this notice board appears to be very much tied to a specific geography of Observatory with a collective aspiration for a specific group (related to social practices and artefacts) emergent.

This aspiration of Observatory is shaped as one which is run by the local civic association and protected by the neighbourhood watch. The Observatory envisioned here is 'vagrant-free', clean and sanitised. All these signs together form an *idealised*

vision of a 'village-like' neighbourhood in which the streets are safe and people know each other by name. This vision is reinforced by the local website which operates in a dialogic relationship with the notice board. This means that both the website and the notice board work together to dialogically convey the same message. It becomes clear that this vision of a 'perfect Observatory' discounts other members of the ethnoscape which may also form part of the landscape of the area. Ethnoscape is blanket term coined by Appadurai (1996) to include all members of a community including vagrants, residents, partygoers and all other constituencies. It is interesting that the greater diverse populace and newcomers such as migrants, students or partygoers are completely absent from this notice board. The absence of these groups suggests that these groups may fall outside of the 'idealised' construction of being a 'local' in this socially constructed view of the Observatory 'community'.

### **'Obz Kwikspar' (Notice board B)**

Notice board B consists of handwritten notices on cards the size of a generic postcard, which are freely obtainable from a cashier inside the Kwikspar. Authors only require the use of a pen and the free card to write their advert free of charge.

Notices found on this notice board differed from those found on Notice board A with regard to the textual style of writing, which is indicative of Ben Rafael's (2009, 49) bottom-up signs described as: 'produced and presented by countless actors who – as individuals or corporate bodies – generally sprout from public...'. Needless to say, signage found in this site also constructs discourses of aspiration and the particular strategies used by these authors are proffered here. Signs on this notice board house largely self-promotional notices and can be viewed as 'bottom-up' sales business genre notices. Many of these notices are in fact self-promotion adverts (in the form of job applications). Handwritten notices of jobseekers are clearly marked when identifying the gaining of employment as its communicative purpose. The communicative purpose of a job application, is posited by Bhatia (1993, 59) as follows: 'the main function of a job application letter is also persuasive, in the sense that its writer aims to elicit a specific response from its reader(s), in this case a call for interview.' These types of signs are prevalent on Notice board B where job-wanted notices and notices of other services rendered (DVD repairs and mechanical work) abound. The job seekers in this case are nearly exclusively female black foreigners seeking work as chars or nannies.

Notices such as these can be viewed as self-promotion advertisements attesting to the job seekers' reliability, efficiency and availability to fulfil the job. These signs are invariably written by non-English first language speakers. This type of writing is also referred to as *peripheral normativity* (Blommaert, Huysmans, Muyliaert and Dyers 2005), which they define as grassroots literacy – sub-elite literacy 'characterised by orthographic, syntactic, lexical and pragmatic peculiarities' (Blommaert et al 2005, abstract). For Blommaert et al (2005) these types of notices are typical of English second/third language speakers and can be found the entire world over. However, the analyses below move past this description of 'orthographic and syntactic errors' and explore possible linguistic strategies and success of these authors which surpass mere writing proficiency. Higgins' (2009) work on Tanzanian English suggests that the type of English used here has less to do with the inability to write 'proper' or 'centre' English and

more to do with English being localised by its transnational authors. Such job seekers have learnt that the prospective employer is more interested in the experiences and expertise as chars and domestic workers, than in their proficiency in 'centre' English. In this way the 'norms' typically placed on English use in formal and official contexts in the 'centre' of the world, do not apply here. Instead, the type of English used here has its own peculiarities, but which nevertheless establishes an efficient and easy localised form of communication. Henceforth, we shall use 'grammatical' and 'orthographic errors' with caution, that is, in quotation marks to acknowledge that these are indicative of 'centre' norms rather than the 'periphery' which may have its own norms.

Examples of localised English can be seen from some of the notices written in simple terms with reference only to the communicative purpose of finding employment, as seen in Example 1.

### **Example 1**

I am looking a job as a Domestic worker for Monday, Wednesday and Friday

However, there are also more complex notices in which authors supply additional information in order to better achieve their communicative purpose of gaining employment. Pertinently, these notices are considered effective and do not necessarily need to be typed or professionally printed to be successful in their communicative purpose. These types of notices (with added 'extras') still include many of the 'grammatical' and 'orthographic errors' described by Blommaert et al (2005) as characteristic of 'peripheral normativity', and nonetheless prove to be highly effective. The range of additional information includes personal identity markers such as: age, gender, nationality, languages, and even health. Of particular interest is the positioning of identities through nationality, language and locality. What follows are different notices which fall into this category and host a range of 'extras' which authors include when attempting to make themselves more marketable. In other words, these types of notices may still be regarded as effective, despite not fulfilling the expected typewritten and profession-ally printed finish seen in the former site (Notice board A).

Most of the notices seeking employment are aimed at the higher-end market, specifically middle class Observatory residents seeking reliable and hardworking 'domestic workers', 'chars' or 'child minders'. Here we see that these handwritten notices create (in large part arguably *because* of the 'grammatical' and 'orthographic errors') a highly effective image of a prospective transnational employee. The majority of these types of notices are written by female authors who, when searching for jobs as nannies or chars position themselves in a very particular way so as to market themselves effectively. This means that female authors may eschew traits of being overtly educated or sophisticated in favour of conveying a more innocent and trustworthy impression. This image is often reflected in the simplicity of the language and lack of self-correction in spelling. Our argument therefore is that in the contexts of the job market described here, the so-called 'grammatical' and 'orthographic errors' are ingredients of the writing practices through which job seekers effectively market themselves. Thus, we need to be cautious about applying the notion of 'peripheral normative' in the contexts described here, especially



when grammatical and orthographic features being applied are devised from ‘centre’ norms.

The notices are not only effective as self-promotional notices, they also cleverly engender space through the explicit mention of their gender and name. Consider Example 2.

### **Example 2**

Am a young Malawian Lady looking for a job as a non/house keeping for three days Tuesday Wensday + Thurdsday for stay out and I have good refer – Hellen

In the example above we see the job-seeker using English to advertise herself as a candidate for char work. The author positions herself favourably very early on in the notice by highlighting three very important characteristics, that of age, nationality and gender. Here the jobseeker establishes herself as a favourable candidate by describing herself as ‘young’ which alludes to other traits of her being ‘energetic’, ‘eager’ and ‘hardworking’. It may be argued that being young may also be construed as immature, unreliable and untrustworthy. Clearly, in this case, the author believes that being young is an advantage. Probably the most ubiquitous common denominator found in these types of advertisements, was the explicit marker of nationality – specifically a foreign ‘Other’ black Malawian nationality. The explicit mention of nationality may correlate with the move which suggests the ‘value’ of a service. Notices such as these may be seen as one of necessity borne out of the obvious need for employment. However, the distinct mention of African nationality (specifically other than South African black) indicates that employing a Malawian may also inversely be seen as a ‘necessity’ for the prospective middle class employers. In other words, as it becomes increasingly commonplace for middle class employers to procure ‘foreign’ black women in their employ, the deliberate insertion of this information can be seen as ameliorating the status of both the employee and employer. This can be seen when the job seeker includes her gender even though the char industry in South Africa (as with the rest of the world) still very much falls within the realm of ‘women’s work’.

We see the jobseeker using the term ‘housekeeping’ which alludes to her being a housekeeper as opposed to the more crude and derogatory term ‘maid’. The word ‘maid’ (used synonymously with ‘girl’ or ‘meisie’ [its Afrikaans equivalent] or a more respectable ‘auntie’) was customarily used in South African households, but has over the years become less commonplace. Decidedly more neutral-sounding and connotatively more ‘respectful’ terminology such as ‘char’ or ‘housekeeper’ has found favour in residential homes, a linguistic changeover which may have arrived with the chars themselves!

The author also has conditions or restrictions that the prospective boss is made aware of in the middle section of her notice. The applicant states the quantity of days that she is willing to work (three), the actual days of the week that she is prepared to work, (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) as well as the living arrangements (‘stay out’ here means that the jobseeker does not wish/need to live at the employer’s home). These conditions position the job-seeker as having power to dictate how and when she will be willing to work. She evidently has her own living place and her time is occupied elsewhere during the week, which alludes to the assumption that she is very good at what she does. The

prospective employer is thus positioned weaker and this in turn constructs the job seeker as having competitive and sought after services.

The job seeker confirms her high status by explicitly mentioning that she has good references ('good refer'). Her name is also further confirmation of her 'foreignness', as most Xhosa women in Cape town typically have Xhosa names (such as 'Thandiswa' or 'Nobuhle'). The name Hellen may be accredited to British colonialism of African countries, who invariably gave their children very British names, a trend not found amongst the Xhosa populace in the Western Cape.

What may appear to be simple 'orthographic errors' can be further analysed in terms of 'prosody' and which Cook (2001, 96) refers to as 'the patterning of sound'. Holmes (2005, 9) adds that 'accents, dialects and foreign words have become part of the paralinguistic of advertising discourse' and uncovered that an 'Italian' accent when written in an English text, allows for the reader to 'hear' the accent aurally. She explains that the 'representation of this accent functions as part of the visual texture of the advertisement rather than being part of the content or information contained in it' (Holmes 2005,10). Similarly, words such 'Wednesday' and 'Thursday' allow the readers to 'hear' the author's accent which can also reinforce 'foreignness' and desirability, which not only makes the applicant unique and hence marketable, but is also an enviable feature in the chars and domestic worker job market in the Western Cape. In this idiom, so-called 'grammatical' and 'orthographic errors' can be described as 'accents' or localised English through which these job seekers are able to self-acclaim their post-colonial and globalised/transnational identities and interact with others (Higgins 2009; Blommaert 2008).

Other effective self-promotion adverts use 'country of origin' as a selling point. In Example 3, the author follows the generic convention of jobseekers, (i.e. name, goal (find employment) and contact details) and adds additional information.

### **Example 3**

My name is [name] I am a lady aged 30  
I am looking for chars three days (Mon- Tue- Wed)  
I stay here in Observatory My number is [number]  
I am a Zimbabwean

The author includes other information explicitly, such as: 'I am a lady aged 30', 'I stay here in Observatory' and 'I am a Zimbabwean'. Here the author positions her identity in relation to gender, age, locality and nationality. The end of the notice shows the author positioning herself in relation to both her immediate (micro) environment of Observatory as well as her place of origin – Zimbabwe. The author's use of the adverb 'here' in 'I stay *here* in Observatory' places emphasis on the temporal locality of the author's space, both on the notice board itself and in Observatory. Although the author's intention for the statement could not be confirmed irrefutably, the notion of 'legitimacy' and in-group status may be attributed to the assertion of staying within the geographically-bounded area of the neighbourhood. Another use of the insertion of nationality may be due to its effectiveness as a marketing ploy. In some contexts being Zimbabwean is seen as a

negative attribute, but when seeking work as a domestic, char or nanny, it is a positive attribute (Mawadza 2012). The temporality of the author's stay, as well as the positive connotations of being Zimbabwean, is reinforced here. The statement 'I am a Zimbabwean' at once positions the author as claiming in-group status (through locality) as well as 'out-group' or foreignness through nationality. This author can be seen as using her nationality as an effective self-promotion marketing strategy. The author capitalises on the positive connotations that being Zimbabwean brings her and for this reason states her nationality explicitly. Here we see the author adopting a dual identity as a marketing ploy in which she situates herself within the geography of the Observatory neighbourhood as well as a (reliable) foreigner from elsewhere.

Language on a sign also has a specific communicative effect. Example 4 similarly comprises an author seeking employment; however the notice is written exclusively in Standard Afrikaans and unpacks how South African (local) authors use language choice, locality and legitimacy to position themselves in the job market:

#### **Example 4**

My naam is Amanda.

Ek is bereid om u huis vir u skoon te maak.

Ek kan wasgoed was en stryk en nog vele meer.

As u my nodig het skakel my enige tyd van die dag.

*English translation:*

*My name is Amanda.*

*I am willing to clean your house for you. I can wash and iron and much more.*

*If you have need of me [then] you can phone me any time of the day.*

The notice is written in Standard Afrikaans and unlike many of the other notices analysed; there are no grammatical or orthographic errors from a 'centre' point of view. The formal variety of Afrikaans is used and is signalled by the formal 'u' meaning 'you'. This form is regarded as a respectful way of addressing superiors, as opposed to the informal 'jy' which also means 'you'. The author also follows the proper grammatical structure of Standard Afrikaans, which places the verb at the end of the sentence. The author's deft use of Afrikaans positions her as a 'local' on multiple levels. On the one hand, the author may be South African (presumably due to her proficiency in Afrikaans) or on the other hand, may have asked someone to translate her advert into Afrikaans. The author may have also opted for the formal variety of Afrikaans as a marketing strategy. Incidentally, it is quite common to find blacks and coloured women from outside of Cape Town speaking 'suiwer' or 'pure' Afrikaans. These women are often described by the derogatory term 'up country'. This term refers to someone who is naïve and unfamiliar with urban life. However, the use of Standard or 'pure' Afrikaans may also be affiliated with a stern, reliable and subservient employee. This variety of Afrikaans stands in sharp contrast to the local variety of Afrikaans called 'Kaapse', which is spoken by the majority in Cape Town, but which has in the past often been associated with the 'lower-class' and attributes of 'untrustworthiness' and 'gangsterism' (McCormick 2002). Additionally, there is a possibility that by opting to use 'pure' or 'white' Afrikaans,

this particular jobseeker may have priced herself beyond the majority of the coloured community.

Example 5 is another job seeker's notice and she foregrounds English by not writing in Afrikaans.

### **Example 5**

IM SOUTH AFRICA CITIZEN LOOKING 4 A DOMESTIC JOB I GOT 11 YEARS EXP AND A GOOD REFERENCE. LANGUAGE: AFRIKANS AND ENGL. HEALTH: GOOD.

Unlike previous notices, this notice begins with an explicit mention of the author's South African nationality. Unlike many other authors who add additional personal attributes as a footnote or as 'filler' in the body of the notice, this author positions her South African identity first. She is also the only author to use the word 'citizen' to tie legitimacy in relation to nationhood. The author relies on the social capital which is linguistically signalled through the mention of English and Afrikaans competence.

The author fortifies claims to her South African citizenship through the mention of proficiency of two of the official languages of the country. This type of legitimacy is tied to linguistic proficiency of two of the 11 official languages, specifically English and Afrikaans. The author appears to perpetuate the apartheid ideological construct of the one-to-one relationship between language and ethnicity (or citizenship here). The author's use of the English language reveals 'grammatical errors' as in 'IM SOUTH AFRICA CITIZEN', and basic 'orthographic errors' such as 'AFRIKANS' as opposed to 'AFRIKAANS'. These 'errors' indicate that the author's claim to legitimacy is not necessarily tied to proficiency of English and more to that of latent ties such as their 'birth right' or having been born in the country. Here 'peripheral normativity' is seen as losing much of its punch as it offers no bearing on communicative purpose. Instead, the mention of South African citizenship and English and Afrikaans proficiency may be indicative of the kind of employer envisaged by the author, particularly one that prefers South African citizens as employees.

Continuing with notices which overtly espouse 'foreignness' as an effective marketing tool, the next notice is interesting as it is written in Lingala, a native language and lingua franca of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The aspiration of the author may well speak to 'Otherness' as a necessary addition to the make-up of this aspirational construction of a heterogeneous Observatory. The Lingala notice continues the discussion of a divergence from the 'centre' English to reveal how the employment of Lingala both appropriates space on this notice board as well as reveals the malleability of this space as changeable and not limited. What is interesting here, is that black job seekers/persons (foreign nationals) appear to be engaging more agentively with this newly available space, as seen in Example 6.

### **Example 6**

*ToZali KOFUNGA CRECHE*1/09/09

YAKA NA **BÉBÉ**, TODWANA

AKALI OKOSEPHELA BENGA

English translation:

*We open new creche from 1/09/09 your baby is big you will be happy phone*

The communicative purpose of this notice serves as an advertisement for services rendered, specifically, a newly-established crèche in Observatory. Unlike the other notices discussed, this notice is directed at a target group of Lingala speakers (plausibly based in Observatory) and excludes all others. However, the words 'crèche' and 'bébé' are recognisable and do allude to the gist of the notice. This notice subtly differs from the transnational authors in the job-wanted notices above in that the Lingala notice is directed at other Lingala-speaking people and there is no attempt to use English (whether 'centre' English or localised English) at all. What is interesting here is that in this space, black transnational foreigners seem to be engaging more agentively than their South African counterparts, particularly Xhosa or 'Kaapse' speakers in Cape Town. Nevertheless, it may be argued that these two native groups in Cape Town may use other social networks independent of the notice boards completely.

### **Summary and conclusion**

The analysis of the two 'community' notice boards offers a variety of new understandings of community, wherein issues of locality, transnational flows, self-marketisation, power and linguistic resources have emerged. Delving into these issues signals notice boards as both a communicative and interactive space wherein languages can be used to produce, orient and include or exclude various members of the ethnoscape.

On Notice board B, an image of an innocuous 'normal' community with a clear 'homeless' problem is constructed. Notice board A creates a type of social structuring based on language, but within which greater social implications may be inferred. Most of the notices are written in monoglot Standard English, with no Xhosa or Afrikaans.

The strict adherence to the Standard variety of English severely limits the readers and contributors to an ostensibly English-speaking middle class grouping. Due to these restrictions, it may be argued that this notice board is more exclusive, with Notice board B appearing to be a more 'democratic' space as seen with the appropriation of space by its heterogeneous constituencies. Overall, notices on Notice board A appear to fulfil a directive function wherein community members are instructed how to act and think. These notices, however, do appear to invoke a generally loving community spirit with aspirations of a community which looks after its pensioners, homeless and residents. Additionally, a clear 'English' residential audience is signalled and it is these readers that are encouraged to join the local civic association. The authors of these notices were unknown; however the notice board appears to be speaking with a single civic voice. An analysis of this notice board clearly delineated the boundary between community (as residents within a specific geography of Observatory) and outsiders (as those passing through and unaccustomed to expectations and social networks of locals). Vagrants and foreigners would generally fit into this 'outsider' category.

Notice board B constructs an image of an extremely diverse community membership. Loose and strong social (transnational) groups are signalled on this notice board.

Aspirations of authors on this notice board appear to be consistent with those striving to make a home in the 'new' South Africa. When seeking employment, attributes (being well mannered and quick learners) are constructed as important values which they bring along with them. Power, if construed as tied to 'Standard' English (which it normally is) would definitely place the Notice board A, with its 'Standard English' notices as having more communicative effect. However, 'power' if constructed to a diversity of meaning and communication would certainly place Notice board B, with its 'localised' form of English as the more communicatively successful of the two.

In the study, transnational groups construct their identity through the use of a generic sales promotional genre, but add extra (personal) information regarding attributes as opposed to characteristics as advantages. Nationality is foregrounded as fundamental to gaining employment because of the socio-cultural positive attributes which they have accrued in the neighbourhood and city more generally. In this way, the Obz Kwikspar Notice board B reveals the much wider and complex view of 'locals' in the Observatory 'community' as a necessary addition to the texture of the neighbourhood. Intriguingly, Notice board B also rendered the possibility of both the author and the reader as having power and 'legitimacy' in the community. Community was seen as made up of many different types of foreigners with language not seen as a constraint. Popular understanding of 'peripheral normativity' of English as displaying status of informal economies, is alternatively seen here as a shrewd marketing tool wherein foreigners were legitimised by their particular idiolect and not disadvantaged by them.

Pertinently, it is only on Notice board B that a burgeoning new community was visible as seen with notices relating to employment and childrearing. The authors in this site used their 'accents' and nationalities in Observatory to further create and legitimise ownership of new spaces. This completes their appropriation of the spaces. In addition this practice also shows the mobility of language and texts across national, social and modal boundaries (cf. Appadurai 1996). The belief that 'locals' have the only real ties with the space emerges as a fallacy and it becomes apparent that the 'newcomers' themselves are also not just passive beings, as their identity is a key element of their marketability. Saliently, authors of these notices saw themselves as part of a burgeoning 'new' community in Observatory and not simply occupying its periphery. Ironically, it is Afrikaans and Xhosa, although native and official languages in Cape Town, which occupied limited space in both notice boards.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the notion of 'peripheral normativity' can be said to be 'centre' biased if it undermines and stereotypes 'non-centre' speech forms. This is particularly the case if it frames discourse in heterogeneous communities, such as the ones discussed in this article, as patently imbued with 'orthographic and syntactic errors' which purportedly hold no other value or social mobility. This would effectively fail to recognise the transcultural capital, which includes varied speech forms that migrants may bring along with them into new areas. This paper argues that specific transnational identities (such as Zimbabweans and Malawians) act as 'currency' for upward mobility. In this regard, 'orthographic errors' actually index the foreignness desired by middle-class residents in Observatory. This means they are not errors in the community of practices in which they are embedded. To borrow from Blommaert (2008, 3), to use

‘static and timeless’ centre frames to describe these job seekers’ language practices which ‘belong to a truly global scale-level of events and processes [responding] to postmodernist realities,’ is to (mis)apply rigid traditionalist scales ‘to threads of the fabric of globalisation’. The kinds of writings analysed in this paper call for ‘a sociolinguistics of *speech* and of *resources*, of the real bits and chunks of language... a sociolinguistics...organised... as *mobile speech*, not as static language, and consequently better investigated on the basis of repertoires set against a real historical and spatial background [own emphasis]’ (Blommaert 2008, 18). To this end, the analysis of both notice boards highlights a recurring theme of power, legitimacy and in-group and out-group membership, which emerges as an important issue in the construction of a community in Observatory – an issue which is reflected by the different uses of linguistic space.

Having discussed the creation of two different locals and two divergent views of community, it becomes clear that the ‘Others’ are also viewed as important in contributing to an understanding of the local and what constitutes community in the heterogeneous neighbourhood of Observatory. In many ways, the juxtaposition of these two notice boards speaks to the general heterotopic or dystopic realities of the neighbourhood, city and nation, as it is commonplace to find very poor and very rich as well as very mixed and tightly-bound groups in close proximity of each other. Further research into notice boards may yield deeper understanding of the people using space, and may provide new understandings of particular communities and their challenges.

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