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# Style, Structure and Function in Cape Town

Tsotsitaal

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## **Abstract**

The thesis applies a social constructionist framework and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to demonstrate that while Tsotsitaal was perceived by many respondents as a language of gangsters and criminals, evidence suggests that it is actually part of an ongoing identity construction for young, black, primarily male urban township residents in South Africa, which is performed through a subcultural style.

By applying Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model to questionnaire and interview data collected in two Cape Town townships, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha, the thesis identifies the syntactic framework of Cape Town Tsotsitaal as Xhosa. This contrasts with previous studies of Tsotsitaal in other regions of South Africa in which the syntactic framework has been identified as Afrikaans or Zulu. The thesis argues that the lack of a consistent grammatical framework suggests the code cannot be described as a 'language' in the ordinary sense. The term 'stylect' is proposed to distinguish Tsotsitaal as a code which is style-related and linked to extra-linguistic markers: a style-lexicon.

The style is argued to be a performed discursive practice, linking in to historical narratives yet surpassing these through ongoing generic negotiation to provide a range of identity alignments which are reflected in the linguistic range. While the thesis has a sociological emphasis, the basic linguistic analysis interacts with and supports the hypothesis that Tsotsitaal involves the construction of identity through difference.

*'The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.'*

Michel Foucault (1995: 68)

University of Cape Town

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## Transcription and glossing key

### Transcription key

[ ]	translator/ transcriber comments
( )	uncertain term
...	pause or gap
<i>At least</i>	italicised words indicate borrowing or code-switching.
<b><u>Ek sê</u></b>	Bold and underlined words, indicate the use (or probable use) of Tsotsitaal.
Q1; Q2 etc.	interviewer(s)

### Glossing key

The following is an adapted and simplified version of the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel 2007).

Source languages:

(T)	Tsotsitaal
(X)	Xhosa
(Z)	Zulu
(A)	Afrikaans
(E)	English

Category labels:

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
9	class prefix marker
2S	2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular

AUX	auxiliary
FV	finite verb
HORT	hortative
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
OBJ	object
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PP	prepositional phrase
PRES	present
PST	past
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative
S	sentence
SBJ	subject
SBJV	subjunctive

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## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

To begin this thesis, I could start the introduction by saying that Tsotsitaal is a 'language' that is mainly spoken in black townships around South Africa. However, this is both true and false, and obstructs the purpose of the thesis, which is to identify exactly what it is, and how and where it operates.

Three years ago when I began this research I had a rather narrow conception of Tsotsitaal as a 'language' (albeit a language which constitutes and reproduces certain identities) which I was trying to pin down and define. That language has consistently eluded me. Now, three years later, I still see Tsotsitaal constituting and reproducing identities, but I no longer conceive of it as a language. Tsotsitaal is both less, and more than that. This thesis argues that the term 'stylect' is a suitable way to qualify what Tsotsitaal *is* and *does* – its structures and functions.

While Tsotsitaal has traditionally been linked to a negative identity construction, that of the 'Tsotsi', or gangster, in South Africa, I want to make it clear at the outset that this thesis will not reproduce negative stereotypes of black males in South Africa. While the Tsotsi identity construct has been historically conflated with that of young black urban male township residents, this group is multifaceted, with complex alignments across a range of available identity 'types'. The aim of the thesis is to show how this stereotype of the Tsotsi has been historically constructed, and how the social function of Tsotsitaal is actually rooted in subcultural identity construction, and the marking of difference through style.

As will be shown below, previous research has left some gaps which this thesis attempts to fill. The primary gap in relation to this research is that no previous study has considered the variety of Tsotsitaal spoken in and around Cape Town,

and the research is very much centred on identification of this particular geographical example. However, its manifestation in a particular community of use is inseparable from the wider context of the Tsotsitaal speech community and the 'style' that accompanies it. Nikolas Coupland (2007) in his book *Style: Language Variation and Identity*, calls for in-depth studies of language *in use* and a transition from sociolinguistics to discourse analysis in studies of language. This thesis combines a linguistic approach with a social constructionist approach in order to consider Tsotsitaal in context, and ultimately to try to define Tsotsitaal not just linguistically, but holistically – as a variety, a style, and the expression of an identity.

### **1.1.1 Structure of the Thesis**

This opening chapter combines the introduction with a review of previous literature in the field, and serves the double purpose of defining the tensions, or gaps, in previous research, and giving an overview of the history and development of Tsotsitaal. Chapter two discusses the methods of data collection, including limitations, and goes on to explain the theoretical framework which informs the thesis, particularly the discourse analysis approach.

The bulk of the thesis attempts to consider in-depth the three aspects of the title: *Style*, *Structure*, and *Function* in Tsotsitaal. Chapter three considers the identity construct of 'Tsotsi' and the way it has been historically shaped and reproduced. It aligns the Tsotsi construct with Foucault's (1979) concept of 'delinquency', and illustrates its production in dialogue with flows of power. Chapter four contrasts the Tsotsi concept with the evidence in the data that Tsotsitaal is used by a broad, multifaceted subculture which constructs identity through various differentiating social practices.

Structure is the focus of chapter five, which presents the data from a series of questionnaires, exploring the grammar base and lexicon of the variety of Tsotsitaal found in Cape Town. This chapter makes the argument that Tsotsitaal

does not constitute a 'language', and that it therefore must be understood through considerations other than linguistic structure.

Chapter six presents the concept of 'style', both in linguistics (with a focus on the work of Nikolas Coupland) and in relation to Tsotsitaal more specifically. I argue that 'style' in terms of Tsotsitaal, has to incorporate the 'common-sense', extra-linguistic nuances of the term. The term 'stylect' is presented as a suitable way to explain the Tsotsitaal phenomenon.

Chapter seven summarises the findings of the thesis and suggests areas for future research.

### **1.1.2 Aims of the Research**

As mentioned above, the primary aim of the research is to attempt to identify what Tsotsitaal *does* and *is*. These questions are addressed through the two main approaches, respectively: discourse analysis; and linguistic analysis, and relate to respectively: function (or 'purpose'); and structure.

The aims of the discourse analysis are:

- To illustrate the conceptual gap between the limited identity construct of Tsotsi and the reality of Tsotsitaal in use.
- To describe current trends in identity construction relating to the use of Tsotsitaal.

The aims of the linguistic analysis are:

- To identify the 'matrix language' – the language that provides the syntactic framework – for the Cape Town variety of Tsotsitaal.

- To analyse the lexicon to determine whether it is primarily lexical items which constitute the Tsotsitaal phenomenon.

The two approaches, linguistic and discursive, are combined in the penultimate chapter, in the proposal of the term ‘stylect’.

## **1.2 Review of Literature: The History of Tsotsis and Tsotsitaal**

This section surveys the literature and highlights the linguistic, social and geographical history of the variety or varieties known collectively today as Tsotsitaal. The section will do this in three stages: firstly, pre-variety influences will be considered in order to establish historical links between Tsotsitaal and criminal varieties. Secondly, the early development of Tsotsitaal in Sophiatown will be examined, alongside a discussion of how this variety has influenced perceptions of Tsotsitaal in the literature. Thirdly, some contemporary descriptions of Tsotsitaal (and related codes) in use in communities are examined. This includes the work of Gerald Stone (1991; 1995; 2002) on the broader linguistic environment of Cape Town’s townships, particularly his concept of ‘antilanguages’ within the Cape Coloured community.

The chapter is intended to circumscribe the problems not fully dealt with in existing literature on Tsotsitaal and which will be addressed in the body of the thesis. These problems, or tensions, are summarised at the end of this chapter.

### **1.2.1 Pre-Tsotsi Origins: Witwatersrand 1890s**

*‘Able men are frustrated by the lack of opportunity in their lives: soon they find that they can make more money by crime than by honest means.’*

Henry Nxumalo (Tsotsi Films (Pty) Ltd 2006)

Prison and mine compounds are both examples of the ‘complete and austere

institutions' of which Michel Foucault (1979: 235 [from Baltard 1829]) writes, and are methods of social control which produce social subjects through 'mechanisms of domination' (Foucault 1979: 272). Prisons in Foucault are not 'correctional' – they do not produce social subjects which conform to the societal norms. Rather, prisons are actually reiterative – they 'produce the objects of which they speak' – they do, in fact, discursively<sup>1</sup> produce 'criminality'. The prison and mine compounds of South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century formed the backdrop for a wave of gang activity which continues to have repercussions in the discursive production of criminality in South Africa today.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a 'band of robbers' formed south of Johannesburg, led by an individual known variously as Nongoloza, Mzuzephi Mathebula, or Jan Note (Van Onselen 1984). The life of this individual has been well documented due to his own testimony to prison authorities (Department of Justice 1913), and has been discussed by researchers such as Van Onselen (1984; 2001), Steinberg (2004a; 2004b) and Haysom (1981). Zulu-born Nongoloza travelled to the mines of the Witwatersrand around the year 1886. He quickly became involved in illegal activities, and around 1892 became leader of a gang of disillusioned black Africans who were involved in stealing wages from workers returning home from the mines, breaking into houses and highway robbery. He called the gang '*Umkhosi Wezintaba* – the Regiment of the Hills' and later, the Ninevites<sup>2</sup> (Van Onselen 2001: 369).

The prisons and the mine compounds of the time produced similarly disempowered subjects, and often an individual would have experience of both types of institution. Many mine labourers spent time in prison for petty crime; an increase in prison population around the turn of the century was a result of workers breaking labour contracts and pass laws. Crime became an attractive

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<sup>1</sup> Discourse is fully defined in section 2.3.2

<sup>2</sup> Nongoloza chose the name 'Ninevites' in reference to a farm he worked on in his youth, but it also had an anti-colonial edge: the term originates from the Old Testament book of *Nahum* which describes how 'the state of Nineveh had rebelled against the Lord'. Nongoloza saw his own gang as rebels against government law (Van Onselen 1994).

alternative: Nongoloza's gang permeated the prisons, recruiting miners and 'houseboys'<sup>3</sup>, and teaching the new recruits the organisational structure, which was loosely based on that of a colonial army. Even during various prison sentences, Nongoloza was able to command his 'army' due to the double nature of the organisation, both inside and outside the prison (Van Onselen 2001: 381-82). Gangs organised under the name of Nongoloza were prominent both in disused mines and the black townships during the depression years 1906-1908 and afterwards, and despite being confined in the Johannesburg prison, 'Nongoloza ... remained in fairly close contact with an expanding criminal army which, by 1912, was estimated to have close on 1,000 Zulu, Shangaan, Swazi, Xhosa and Basuto adherents in the industrial heartland of South Africa' (Van Onselen 1984).

The criminal activities of the gang necessitated secrecy in communications. Van Onselen (2001: 384) states: 'In the sub-culture of *Nongoloza* the 'troops' used their own distinctive slang: a 'bird' was an ignorant person, a 'buck' was a victim, the gang was the 'stone' and a person who 'came with the horses' was not to be trusted since he was either a spy or a policeman'<sup>4</sup>. It is possible that Tsotsitaal has its foundations in this Ninevite slang, which is likely to have influenced related and subsequent gang varieties, although it is impossible to say to what extent.

It was around the height of Ninevite activity that the Amalaita gangs first emerged on the Witwatersrand, influenced directly by the structures of the Ninevite organization (Van Onselen 2001: 268-74). They were to continue gang operations on the Witwatersrand long after the Ninevites had been confined to the prison system<sup>5</sup>. Around the 1890s the Ninevites were known to have worked

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<sup>3</sup> Van Onselen (2001) uses this term as period terminology used to describe black male domestic workers employed by Europeans.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately it is not clear if these are English translations or not – Van Onselen cites the source as 'Rex vs Mkosi Mkemeseni and 15 others', Archbishop Carter's Papers, Archives of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

<sup>5</sup> Following a series of murders and attempted murders, the authorities cracked down on the Ninevite factions both within prison and outside prison. Nongoloza himself was persuaded to renounce his leadership and began to work for the prison authorities, although his career was plagued by recidivism. Nongoloza died in 1948 at the age of 81 (Van Onselen 1984). The prison factions of the Ninevites survive

with, or on behalf of, houseboys around Johannesburg in protecting them or exacting revenge on unfair employers. When members of the Ninevites, and houseboys were forced back to Natal due to war in 1899, gangs quickly formed in the suburbs of Durban. Here they got the name *Olaita*:

...from the fact that when they 'hold up' anyone, they ask him to 'light' or '*kanyisa*' ... by putting his whole purse at their disposal ... If he succeeds in paying up he is said to have 'lighted' his way and is allowed to pass on unmolested. (Ipepa lo Hlanga in Van Onselen 2001: 269)

During the depression years of 1906-1908, there was a rapid increase in Amalaita gangs in Natal. Van Onselen (2001: 272) describes how houseboys again formed a core part of the membership. When the Amalaita gangs were first observed on the Witwatersrand around 1912, they did not contain many Zulu members, presumably because, Van Onselen suggests, Zulus tended to return to the Ninevite gangs. Instead, Amalaita gangs were composed of firstly Sothos, and later, Pedis. This resulted in gang leaders increasingly speaking Sesotho (Van Onselen 2001: 271). Sesotho may therefore have had an impact on early gang 'slang' varieties.

Ntshangase (1995: 292) states that the Amalaita spoke 'Shalambombo'. Shalambombo, according to Glaser (2000: 50), comes from '...two Zulu words: *shala* meaning "shunning" and *mbo-mbo* meaning "covering over" or "turning upside down"', which could relate to the secrecy function of criminal gang slang<sup>6</sup>. Glaser (2000: 50) furthermore reports that the Funani youth gangs of Pretoria used Shalambombo, which was a precursor to Flaaitaal, '...an embryonic form of *tsotsitaal*' (Glaser 2000: 49). He argues that the Funanis were later incorporated under the term Tsotsi (Glaser 2000: 49; Ntshangase 1993: 56). Shalambombo is also the name of the variety which is used by the infamous '26' and '28' prison

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to this day as the '26' and '28' 'number gangs', who speak a linguistic variety called 'Shalambombo' (Stone 1995: 283).

<sup>6</sup> Although Stone (2002: 389) cites it as 'S(h)alombom' and gives the origin as Zulu for 'outcast, hermit or vagrant'.

gangs today, gangs which are directly descended from the original Ninevites (Steinberg 2004a). It seems possible therefore, that the slang spoken by the Ninevites, the Funanis and the Amalaita, may all have been referred to as Shalambombo, and may have had some features in common.

At this stage however, accounts of the historical development of South African criminal varieties suffer from some confusion in the literature. This stems partly from the focus in recent studies on a comparison between Tsotsitaal and another variety, Iscamtho. Ntshangase (2002) for example, argues that Tsotsitaal has an Afrikaans syntactic framework, while Iscamtho has a Zulu/Sotho syntactic framework. This, he argues, is because Iscamtho developed from the Amalaita Shalambombo, while Tsotsitaal developed from an Afrikaans slang spoken by Western areas gangs. However, Van Onselen (personal communication) suggests that the Afrikaans component which had the greater impact on early forms of Tsotsitaal was a later development on the Witwatersrand (around the 1920s-40s). Perhaps therefore both Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho had a common ancestry in these early gang varieties such as Shalambombo (Calteaux 1994: 207), and only later became relatively influenced by languages such as Zulu, Sotho, and Afrikaans in an increasingly stratified urban environment.

### **1.2.2 The Tsotsitaal Naming Debate: Johannesburg 1940s**

Tsotsitaal was first observed in Sophiatown in the 1940s (Glaser 2000: 50). The second root, *taal*, means 'language' in Afrikaans, and the full word *Tsotsitaal* simply means 'Tsotsi language'. A well grounded account for the emergence of the term Tsotsi is that of Clive Glaser in his book *Bo-Tsotsi* (2000: 50), who states that it was first coined around 1943-44 in reference to the *style* of a particular group of urban youths.

The origin of the word *tsotsi* has been contested<sup>7</sup>. This thesis, however, tentatively supports Glaser's (2000: 50) claim that the term refers to a style of narrow-bottomed trousers, and came from the American gang slang term 'zoot-suits'. This seems the most persuasive origin due to the heavy influence of American gangster movies in Sophiatown at the time of the Tsotsi gangs. Glaser (2000: 51) describes how: '[t]o be "in fashion", township boys had to wear *tsotsis*; these became a crucial symbol of urban sophistication'<sup>8</sup>. Tsotsi trousers were worn by a range of style-conscious youths in the townships (Glaser 2000: 51). The Tsotsi style was not implicitly criminal from the outset, and Glaser (2000: 53) reports that: '[i]n the *Bantu World* Readers' Forum *tsotsi* debate, between May and July 1945, several of the readers defended *tsotsis* as being harmless adherents to fashion'<sup>9</sup>. However, the term gradually shed its 'trouser-connection', and became linked instead with the most notorious segment of the fashion adherents – members of street gangs (Glaser 2000: 107)<sup>10</sup>.

These street gangs utilised slang, and slang became central to the style, to the point that the developing township slang became named after the style – hence 'Tsotsi-taal'. Glaser describes the composition of this early variety:

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<sup>7</sup> Some other claims of origin include: Sotho *go tsotsa* meaning 'to rob' (Ntshangase 2002: 413) or 'to trick' (Calteaux 1994: 202); South Sotho *ho tsotsa* meaning 'to sharpen', which according to C.V.Bothma (in Glaser 2000: 50) could conceivably link to the sharp-bottomed trousers of Glaser's description. However, Sotho may have adopted these terms *from* Tsotsitaal, and for this reason these etymologies are treated with caution.

<sup>8</sup> Van Onselen in his book *New Babylon New Nineveh* (2001) refers to the style of members of the earlier Nongoloza gang which draws interesting comparison to the Tsotsi style of narrow-bottomed trousers (Glaser 2000: 50): 'Up until about 1910 the most distinctive part of the Ninevite uniform was apparently the hat, which was later discarded and by 1912 *mgusas* [flashily dressed members of a drinking society, used to denote members of Nongoloza's army] could most easily be recognized by the way in which they kept their trousers closely pinned to their ankles by means of bicycle clips or string' (Van Onselen 2001: 384).

<sup>9</sup> In Glaser the term *clever* predates the term *tsotsi* to denote 'streetwise city-slickers' defined by 'dress, language, and style codes'. He goes on to say that the *tsotsi* style was originally a sub-'clever' style, but it's connotations had become almost identical to those of 'clever' by the 1950s (Glaser 2000: 107). *Clever* was a more generic term, which was, and still is, used to describe a particular style of urban individual 'without the criminal and gang connotations' of Tsotsi (Glaser 2000: 50). Historically 'Gangsters were invariably "clevers" but non-gangsters often aspired to the same style' (Glaser 2000: 107). The semantics of the term *clever* appear to have changed little over time.

<sup>10</sup> Although it is worth noting Glaser's (2000: 53) point that 'even when the criminal gang connotation had become widespread, the term *tsotsi* continued to embrace young "city-slickers" who were neither in gangs nor involved in criminal activity'.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the *tsotsi* subculture was its own language, *tsotsitaal*. The language was an urban hybrid based largely on Afrikaans but with large Xhosa/Zulu and English inputs. The meanings of many of the words were shifted from those of the original language and the syntax was inconsistent, generally oscillating between that of Afrikaans and that of Xhosa/Zulu. (Glaser 2000: 70)

While Glaser does not provide any empirical data, this fluctuation may have been a result of code-switching, dependent on the fluency of the Afrikaans/Xhosa/Zulu of the speakers. It is interesting in relation to Ntshangase's (2002) claim that Tsotsitaal has an Afrikaans syntax, and that Bantu-based varieties have a discrete offshoot, Iscamtho. This statement of Glaser's suggests that even in Sophiatown the varieties were not so clear-cut.

It is worth considering where the Afrikaans component may have come from, when the majority of speakers of Tsotsitaal were African language speakers (Molamu 1995). One explanation for the Afrikaans content is that it was a pidginised version of Afrikaans which originated in domestic employment of Africans: Molamu (1995) cites Mattera's (1987: 14) claim that Tsotsitaal 'derived principally from a brand of Afrikaans which was spoken mainly by black domestic workers'. This may have connections to the criminal Amalaita gangs and their recruitment of houseboys; black domestic servants who spoke a variety of Afrikaans. However, according to Van Onselen (2001), the Afrikaans spoken by these houseboys was called 'Kitchen Kaffir' or 'Kombuistaal'. Kitchen Kaffir is also known by another name: Fanagalo, which only contains a small proportion of Afrikaans, and has no links to Tsotsitaal (Mesthrie 1989). An alternative theory is that the Afrikaans came from the coloured residents of 'crucial style-generating townships such as Sophiatown and Marabastad (in Pretoria)' (Glaser 2000: 70). The use of Afrikaans certainly appears to be linked to the urban context – Tsotsitaal gained a linguistic identity in this environment. Importantly, the literature on Tsotsitaal makes no persuasive claims that it was ever a medium of communication between Africans and Europeans; rather it is associated with

urban youth, to the exclusion of Europeans. In the 1940s, very few white people spoke or understood Tsotsitaal (Molamu 1995). This rules out the possibility that Tsotsitaal may be considered a kind of contact-induced 'pidgin'.

Molamu (1995) argues that the Afrikaans base of Tsotsitaal in Sophiatown held symbolic power for its speakers due to the dominant position of white Afrikaners, although it seems more likely that in a subculture, the convergence towards the 'prestige' language of the dominant societal strata (in this case, Afrikaners) would be reversed, resulting in a divergence (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977). This preference for Afrikaans may have more to do with the creation of urban identities and the rejection of 'old-fashioned' rural identities. Molamu (1995) demonstrates how a rural/urban divide was reflected in Tsotsitaal terms such as '...*moegoe* or *dzao* for rural folk and *autie* and *clever* for urbanite males who spoke [Afrikaans-based] Tsotsitaal'. This tendency in the urban environment to denigrate rural accents was to be perpetuated in the townships which were populated by the forced removals of Sophiatown in the 1950s.

Glaser (2000: 108) describes the relationship between two styles or varieties in the urban setting of Soweto. The Zulu variety was aligned with rurality, and its speakers were derogatively termed *kalkoene* meaning 'turkeys' in Afrikaans, while the *ndofaya* were from Sophiatown and the Western Areas and spoke Afrikaans-based Tsotsitaal. There were also subtle differences in the clothing styles of the two groups. The Sowetan *kalkoene* ultimately adopted the term themselves, thereby signaling a rejection of Afrikaans-based Tsotsitaal. However, during the removals, the *ndofaya* were often re-settled in *kalkoen* neighbourhoods where there may have been some cross-pollination between the varieties, especially at a lexical level. It seems that the Zulu-based variety may have later evolved into Iscamtho (Glaser 2000: 108). The distinction in varieties therefore, may have more to do with urban dynamics and identities than linguistic concerns.

However, the arguments over origins of the variety of Tsotsitaal from Sophiatown have influenced perceptions among scholars of what constitutes Tsotsitaal. Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 325), for example, support Ntshangase's distinction between Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, and classify these two varieties as independent 'code-switching patterns' which have 'fossilised', meaning that the Matrix Language<sup>11</sup> can be predicted. They state that they are different varieties based on Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model, and identify Iscamtho's matrix language as Zulu (or another Bantu language) and Tsotsitaal's matrix language as Afrikaans, arguing that a language is best classified according to its grammatical frame. However, they admit to ambiguities surrounding the naming of these varieties, saying that: '...the names are not always the same across speakers (e.g. Tsotsitaal is also called Flaaitaal), nor are the names consistent from a structural point of view' (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 326). They cite Karen Calteaux's work in the township Tembisa, between Johannesburg and Pretoria, which found a variety of Tsotsitaal with a Zulu base, and a variety of Iscamtho with an Afrikaans base (Calteaux 1994: 213-14). The picture is further complicated by varieties such as isiTsotsi in Umlazi, a township just outside central Durban in KwaZulu-Natal province (Rudwick 2005), which has a Zulu base. Recent work such as that of Bembe (2006) from Pretoria, upholds some of these naming irregularities. It is difficult, in the light of these inconsistencies, to agree that Tsotsitaal has an Afrikaans matrix language which constitutes the variety as separate from Iscamtho. It seems more sensible to argue that Tsotsitaal has an inconsistent grammar base, which we will characterise in this thesis.

Despite his argument that they are discrete varieties, Ntshangase suggests that Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho have 'similar functional parallels' and proposes that Iscamtho:

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<sup>11</sup> Matrix language refers to the base language that provides the main grammatical elements in code-switching; in contrast to the embedded language which provides mainly lexical items (Myers-Scotton 2002).

... is a language that is used 'through' another language – a basilect – yet it retains *its own defining features* [my emphasis]; that is, it has no structure of its own since it relies heavily on the language structures from which it operates. This means that it has not yet developed its own linguistic base that would make it linguistically independent of the base languages. (Ntshangase 1995: 291)

This account appears to be equally applicable to Tsotsitaal, and in fact may explain why the matrix language alters across regions/ townships – because it relies on the language available in a particular region/ social group. We need to reconsider in this case, what are the 'defining features' of Tsotsitaal?

In a great deal of online content relating to kwaito<sup>12</sup> and related township music styles which utilise these codes, Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho are generally conflated. Even if they were at one time discrete varieties, today the distinctions seem little more than naming choices in a particular community of use. For the purposes of this thesis, Tsotsitaal will be considered as an overarching term for a number of varieties, including Iscamtho, which do not necessarily have a grammar base in common. Calteaux (1994: 224) describes Tsotsitaal as '...an umbrella term for various regional and social subvarieties which overlap to form a linguistic variety'. In the following chapters, it will be determined whether Tsotsitaal can even be considered a *linguistic* variety, or if in fact other factors, such as the lexicon, or the 'style' that appears to have typified the use of Tsotsitaal since its earliest manifestations, can be more useful markers of the phenomenon.

### **1.2.3 The Tsotsitaal Continuum**

*Tsotsi* is a word used across South Africa today more or less synonymously with 'gangster', due to a link between the aforementioned 'style', and criminal activity in the townships in the 1940s/ 1950s. Street gangs were pervasive in the freehold townships of Johannesburg at that time, and were involved in the territorial control of illegal activities.

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<sup>12</sup> A form of South African township music correlated with rap and hip hop. See also section 4.2.4



Tsotsi in action. A white pocket being picked. Whites are angered if touched by anyone black, but a black hand under the chin is engaging. This man, distracted by his fury, does not realize his back pocket is being rifled.

Figure 1: Tsotsis were both a result of, and a justification for, apartheid policies of segregation (Photograph by Ernest Cole *House of Bondage* 1967 [1940]).

Glaser (2000: 38) argues that apartheid regulations such as the pass laws had a direct influence on the growth of gang membership, driving youths underground and forcing them to seek non-legal forms of employment<sup>13</sup>. He identifies five themes within the urban context that relate to the socio-economic context within which the gangs operated: '...urban family instability and the breakdown of generational hierarchy; inadequate schooling; youth unemployment; poverty, overcrowding, and the shortage of social facilities; pass laws and urban illegality' (Glaser 2000: 22). He therefore characterises the Tsotsis of what he terms the 'Tsotsi Era' as being, *inter alia*:

(a) An urban response to a breakdown in traditional African community structures in relation to new challenges for African male 'youth' in the urban context. The gangs, he argues, became a replacement for rural socialization practices including sexual socialization; they were an expression of masculinity in the urban environment (Glaser 2000: 4).

<sup>13</sup> The relations between apartheid and the Tsotsi identity will be returned to in chapter three.

them, and that is how it is spread. One respondent, who claimed to have no knowledge of this gangster language, was asked “Awukaze uboshwe mfowethu?” (Have you never been to jail brother?). (Calteaux 1994: 114)

Calteaux (1996: 58-59) states that it is clear from her data that Tsotsitaal was heavily influenced by prison language and contains lexical items which originate from prison gangs: ‘Criminal varieties are often brought into the townships by prisoners who have been released from jail and who bring with them the type of language which they learnt whilst incarcerated’ (Calteaux 1996: 55). She describes hand-signals and steps which the prison language incorporates being used in the townships, and goes on to suggest that once prison language is taken to the townships, it develops further, becoming specific to discrete street gangs (Calteaux 1994: 154). However, due to a lack of examples of criminal varieties in Calteaux’s sample, it is not clear to what extent, and in what way (whether lexicon or base language), prison and street varieties interrelate and she concludes that more research needs to be done in the area (Calteaux 1994: 115).

At the other end of the spectrum, she argues that the general variety of Tsotsitaal functions as a ‘medium of communication’ (Calteaux 1994: 156) or a ‘lingua franca’ within the township and states it is understood by most township residents, including the older generation, and non-criminals. Calteaux concludes that Tsotsitaal can be seen to work on a continuum, with very secret, slang terms at one end (sometimes originating in the jails, sometimes as secret words in specific gangs) and with common, everyday terms at the other end (Calteaux 1996: 57-58).

This continuum is a useful way of understanding how Tsotsitaal is used within a community, yet there are problems with a continuum model – Tsotsitaal *in use* is much more complex than merely a scale of common to secret terms. While nearly everyone in a township may have access to it, township residents speak deeper or lighter forms of Tsotsitaal depending on (a) factors such as age, gender, place of birth (for example whether they are born in the city or in a rural town/village),

education etc. and (b) the context in which they are speaking. Furthermore, terms from Tsotsitaal may be incorporated into the neighbourhood language but do not constitute Tsotsitaal in isolation. A speaker may have knowledge of a range of the continuum, and may shift between their home or neighbourhood language, general Tsotsitaal, and criminal Tsotsitaal, to varying degrees, and depending on the situation in which (s)he finds her/himself.

Calteaux addresses this variation by utilising Giles, Bourhis & Taylor's (1977) accommodation theory model. Coupland (2007: 209) suggests this is a better model of actual language in use than linear scales of variation. Rather than focusing on the speaker as the speech producer making choices from a repertoire, speech accommodation (and the similar audience design model) looks at factors such as audience influence on variation. Giles's concept of speech accommodation consists of the theory that people change their language usage depending on who they are speaking to: 'In its simplest terms, accommodation theory suggests that people are continually modifying their speech with others so as to reduce or accentuate the linguistic (and hence social) differences between them depending on their perceptions of the interactive situation' (Giles et al. 1977: 324). This results in convergence or divergence, speech tactics which involve choice of language in order to move towards or away from the speech of the person with whom you are communicating in order to signify approval or disapproval (Giles et al. 1977: 321).

Calteaux refers to the 'unifying' and 'separatist' functions of Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, where 'separatist' marks speakers as urban, non-rural, hip, and sophisticated, while 'unifying' provides a sense of ingroup identity. She correlates these functions with Giles et al's 'convergence' and 'divergence' in accommodation theory (Calteaux 1996: 61). A major way of achieving convergence or divergence is through secret terms which mark difference between different 'ingroups' along a scale of social interaction from normal social contact to criminal activities (Calteaux 1996: 63).

The concept of Tsotsitaal being employed to mark difference has been widely taken up in recent research. In Slabbert and Myers-Scotton for example, ‘...both Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho developed not so much to facilitate communication between groups, as to exclude non-group members’ (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 321). However, speech in use is not just concerned with ‘marking difference’, nor necessarily concerned with convergence. Coupland (2007: 80) argues that the speech accommodation/ audience design models do not recognise self-identity formation, or the process which is described in this thesis as the construction of identity through language. He posits that discourse analysis may help in sociolinguistic interpretations of language variation (Coupland 2007: 9).

As shown, Calteaux’s (1994; 1996) research highlights two of the more common claims about the Tsotsitaal lexicon: firstly, that words are developed for the purposes of secrecy, in order to obscure criminal activities<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, that words may enter Tsotsitaal from other secret varieties, such as those spoken in prisons (Calteaux 1996: 58). The impact of highly criminal varieties, or prison varieties, would be seen primarily in the lexicon. There is, however, little hard empirical evidence showing known prison lexical items making an appearance in street varieties. It is difficult to obtain data from prisoners, and community respondents, including Tsotsitaal speakers, may have little idea about the sources of the slang terms they use. Some useful research, however, has been done by Gerald Stone (1991; 1995; 2002) regarding the impact of prison varieties on the language of the Cape Coloured community in Cape Town.

While Stone’s research sheds some light on the impact of prison varieties on a vernacular, and therefore has some implications for the Tsotsitaal in this study, the linguistic topography in Cape Town is complex, and the relationships between Cape Coloured Afrikaans varieties and Tsotsitaal need to be illustrated in order to delineate the scope of the thesis.

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<sup>14</sup> The role of Tsotsitaal in its social context and its connection to crime will be considered in chapters three and four.

#### 1.2.4 The Cape Town Situation

During high apartheid, Cape Town's inner-city mixed districts such as District Six were cleared and residents were moved out to newly-built townships in the area known as the Cape Flats, to the east of Table Mountain (Rickett 2007). Following the inner-city removals, the large proportion of Cape Flats residents were coloured<sup>15</sup> Afrikaans speakers. However, since the end of apartheid, many Africans from areas such as the Eastern Cape have migrated to Cape Town. According to a report compiled by the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) in 2006:

The highest net migration for the period 2001-2006 was in the African population group, while there was relatively low net migration for the other population groups. The abolition of restriction of movement has resulted in movement of African people to the City in search of improved prospects, i.e. employment, basic services and education. (PGWC 2006)

Most of these migrants are moving to townships in the Cape Flats such as Khayelitsha and Gugulethu, the primary research sites in this thesis (Information and Knowledge Management 2005a). In-migration has furthermore contributed to a changing linguistic profile in the city. While in 1996 there were 1,159,253 Afrikaans first language speakers, and only 593,161 Xhosa speakers, in 2001 the figures were 1,198,734 Afrikaans and 831,609 Xhosa speakers. Xhosa had in 2001 overtaken English as the second most common first language, and the increase was projected to continue (Strategic Development Information & Geographic Information System (SDI & GIS) 2007a; SDI & GIS 2007b).

In townships such as Khayelitsha and Gugulethu, 96.54% (Khayelitsha) and 94.59% (Gugulethu) of residents spoke Xhosa as their first language in 2001 and in-migration from the Xhosa-speaking Eastern Cape had increased since the 1996

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<sup>15</sup> 'Coloured' is a term used today in South Africa to refer (and self-refer) to people whose ancestry derives from a mixture of Khoisan, African and Asian slaves and European settlers. In Cape Town the majority of coloured people speak a distinct variety of Afrikaans.

census (Information and Knowledge Management 2005a). In a historically coloured township such as Mitchell's Plain where 84.2% of residents identify themselves as coloured, 50% spoke Afrikaans, and 36.7% spoke English as their first language, with only 12.4% of residents speaking Xhosa. Furthermore, in Mitchell's Plain, in-migration had decreased during the period since the prior census so this linguistic profile is unlikely to have changed dramatically (Information and Knowledge Management 2005b).

Despite the persistence of 'racial' segregation (partly determined by factors such as migrants gravitating to townships where friends and family already stay, decreasing the tendency to eclecticism within a given township), borders between historically coloured and black African townships have 'blurred' to an extent, due to factors such as schools shared across formerly coloured and black African township borders (Haferburg 2007). Another 'blurring' is likely to take place through gangs operating across these same township borders: gangs have a strong presence across the Flats (Kinnes 2000; Standing 2003; 2005; Steinberg 2004a; 2004b). While a substantial amount of research has been conducted into the coloured gangs, mainly due to the violent gang wars that have erupted in several of these coloured townships and the presence of 'vigilante' anti-gang groups such as PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs) (Dixon 2001; Standing 2005), the more recent phenomenon of gang presence in African townships such as Gugulethu and Khayelitsha has thus far been under-researched. According to Glaser (2000: 9), gangs take time to form as they need neighbourhood cohesion in order to develop territorial claims. He states that 'defensive' gangs only started to emerge in the coloured townships of the Cape Flats in the 1980s, after a period of dislocation and non-cohesion in the communities caused by the removals from District Six. Expansion and rapid shift in Gugulethu and Khayelitsha since the end of apartheid may have delayed the process of gang formation in these areas. Today however, gangs have a presence in these townships, and are generally affiliated with the 'numbers' gangs (Steinberg 2004a).

The numbers gangs, of which the 26s, 27s, and 28s are the most notorious branches, are a legacy of the Witwatersrand Ninevites (see footnote 2, this chapter). The gang structures of Nongoloza's original Witwatersrand gang, based on the structure of a colonial army, and accompanied by a mythological history of Nongoloza with heavily ritualised customs and litany are core features of a country-wide prison gang system which has been mostly confined to the prisons since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Pinnock & Douglas-Hamilton 1997; Haysom 1981; Steinberg 2004a; 2004b). However, in Cape Town, some charismatic coloured gang bosses, after joining the prison gangs whilst incarcerated, adopted the terminology and rituals of the prison gangs to provide an organisational structure to street gangs<sup>16</sup>. Steinberg argues that millionaire gang leaders like Colin Stansfield and Ernie Lastig used prison terminology to ideologically 'police' rapidly expanding criminal networks (Steinberg 2004a). The numbers gangs therefore have increasingly had a presence on the street in the coloured townships since the 1980s.

Like the prison and mine compounds of the Witwatersrand Ninevite era, prisons and reformatories in Cape Town served as fertile regions for the development of gang allegiances:

The government of the early and mid apartheid eras locked itself ... into a welfare relationship with Cape Town's coloureds. There was an obsession with families, with kids growing up among lazy, drunken men. The women of the Flats were bombarded with advice and child welfare cheques; scores of young boys were taken from their homes to reformatories, industrial schools and places of shelter; many young men were imprisoned. Reading through the figures of incarceration rates in the 1960s and 70s is an astonishing experience; coloureds were incarcerated at twice the rate of Africans.

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<sup>16</sup> There have historically been tentative relationships between prison and street gangs in South Africa. Some gangs during the Tsotsi Era were known to have branches in jail, and Glaser (2000: 63) describes how, during the 1940s-1950s, many Tsotsis saw a stint in jail as a status symbol. However, he states that, in contrast to the numbers gangs, while many of these street gangs had branches in jail their power was not based there (Glaser 2000: 143).

And so a whole generation of youngsters was touched by a collective experience of institutionalised care...The government's project to save young men by putting them in institutions backfired spectacularly... If the kids of the new ghettos were stranded in their isolated pockets, the one thing that brought them together, that created allegiances crossing ghetto boundaries, highways and deserted scrublands, was the magical tales and exotic initiation rites of the reformatories and the jails. (Steinberg 2004b: 130-31)

Stone (1991) describes the coloured language spectrum in the Cape Flats, in his thesis which undertakes 'An Ethnographic and Socio-semantic Analysis of Lexis among Working-class Afrikaans-speaking Coloured Adolescent and Young Adult Males in the Cape Peninsula, 1963-1990'. The Cape Coloured dialect is a variety of Afrikaans which is linked to the historical dialect of District Six. Stone (1991) distinguishes four particular strata of the coloured community in Cape Town: respectable, disreputable, delinquent and outcast. He advises that each of these categories has its own lexicon; some lexical items are acceptable to 'respectable' speakers, while others are only acceptable to those identities which can be considered part of the 'delinquent' or 'outcast' categories. Outcast identity in Stone is '*in* the community but not socially *of* it'. It includes recidivists, particularly murderers, as well as vagrants, and those (presumably from the community) who are in institutions, including prisons. He describes how the 'outcast' lexicon is linked to the prison language 'Shalambom' or 'sabela', (the name of which has an obvious relationship to early criminal varieties in South Africa). It is heavily influenced by Zulu, which is perhaps a legacy of its origins in the Witwatersrand where Zulu speakers were prominent. It hinges on metaphor and rituals. Stone gives the following description:

From the outset the prison gangs had their own dialect, mainly antilinguistic Zulu... with a small proportion of Afrikaans and English lexis. The data suggest that the full dialect runs to nearly a thousand lexical items. It is partly incomprehensible to speakers of standard Zulu, not only because of the antilinguistic transformations, but also because lexis, grammar and discourse are highly cryptic, elliptical, condensed

and metaphoric, and many mythic constructs have mystic religious connotations. (Stone 2002: 389)

One example of the use of this variety by inmates is the repetition of a 'litany' termed *sabela* (which is also used as a verb, e.g. 'will you *sabela* with me'). It is accompanied by gestures, telling the story (a heavily mythologised version) of Nongoloza and the origin of the gangs. The litany involves memorising and repeating metaphors from the myth of the gang origins, utilising imaginary uniforms, signs, tattoos, rituals and ranking titles to recall the narrative of Nongoloza's life (for a full description of the myth of origin see Steinberg 2004a). The standing, and role, of a gang member depends on how much or little of this litany he has been taught and is able to remember (Steinberg 2004a).

The need for secrecy is one of the primary explanations for the litany and language of the prison gangs. In contemporary number lore, Po, a mythical character who may be based on the figure of Nohlopa who originally ran the band of brigands spent 'the first weeks in his retreat inventing a secret language, for he knows that if the young men are to be saved, the whites must not understand the talk between the men who are to become his followers' (Steinberg 2004a). The litany is not only used to exclude non-gang members, but also members of other numbers branches. According to Haysom (1981), the different numbers gangs have different dialects: 'As each gang has developed its own mythical uniforms, they have also developed their own languages ['languages' here is used in a loose, non-technical sense] which are variants of the prison slang, an Afrikaans-Zulu hybrid'.

The oral narrative may to an extent prevent variation in the prison lexicon to the same extreme as that found in street varieties. The literal construction of identity within a gang based on knowledge of the language puts a great deal of weight on 'correct' retention of the language itself. As Stone writes:

All prison-gang subculture, including language, was maintained with rigorous conservatism and potentially murderous authority by senior members through the instrument of *Die Boek* ('The Book', modelled on the Bible); the oral, putatively secret language, myth of origin, cosmography and religiomilitary and ethical codes of the 26, 27 and 28 prison gangs. (Stone 2002: 389)

Stone (1991) describes the impact of prison slang on the language of the Cape Coloured community in terms of a continuum of use, where lexical terms from the prison lexis enter the outcast lexis and sometimes spread to the delinquent lexis. Stone (2002: 389) claims that while, therefore, lexical items from prison have an impact on street gang lexicon, only senior coloured gang members can converse fluently in the prison variety.

There appears to have been little influence from prison varieties on Cape Coloured language varieties until the 1980s, the time around when Steinberg claims the prison gangs became affiliated with the street gangs. Stone (2002: 382) describes '...the sudden emergence in 1980 of the lexis of prison gangs into the lexis of delinquent gangs outside prison' and states that '[p]rior to emergence outside prison into the Delinquent Lexicon in 1980, the prison-gang lexicon constituted the only outcast lexicon of the speech community' (Stone 2002: 389). Therefore in Stone, prison lexis constitutes the difference between the 'common' Cape Coloured dialect, and a township slang variety of the same. This suggests the distinction can be compared with that of Calteaux (see section 1.2.3), in that there is a three-way division between: the neighbourhood Cape Coloured dialect (featuring some slang terms); a 'general' slang register; and a prison register. However, while the distinctions, in this sense, are similar to that of Tsotsitaal, the name Tsotsitaal is not used to refer to any of the varieties of the Cape Coloured dialect in Stone's study. The criminal gangs of the coloured townships do not appear to have a discrete dialect called by the term Tsotsitaal or any alternative<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The term 'Gamaal' has lost favour in recent years due to its 'self-stigmatising' connotations, which reference the cursed dark-skinned children of the biblical 'Ham' (Stone 1995: 280). Furthermore, it referred broadly to the working-class dialect of the Peninsula Afrikaans coloured community, rather than to a specific lexicon such as the delinquent lexicon.

There is only a gang variety of Cape Coloured Afrikaans, and Shalambom/ sabela. The only link between Tsotsitaal and Cape Coloured dialects appears to be in items originating in Shalambom. Furthermore, this link only exists in the Delinquent/ Outcast lexicon of Stone's study - the 'deepest' varieties of Cape Coloured Afrikaans, and the deepest varieties of Tsotsitaal – returning to Calteaux's continuum, those varieties spoken by gang members or people who have been to prison<sup>18</sup>.

Tsotsitaal in Cape Town is only prominent in the African townships<sup>19</sup>. Today however, it appears that most gangs, both in historically coloured and historically African townships, are subsumed under one of the 'supergangs', often through affiliation with the prison numbers gangs: as Steinberg writes, '[t]he inspiration of prison has permeated the most parochial street corners' (Steinberg 2004a); therefore we may begin to see further cross-pollination between the deeper varieties of the Cape Coloured lexicon and Tsotsitaal.

### **1.2.5 Antilanguages**

Stone uses Halliday's (1978: 164) term 'antilanguage' to illustrate the outcast lexicon. The concept of antilanguage is a useful one in descriptions of Tsotsitaal, as it incorporates a consideration of 'subculture', or 'antisociety', and it has been applied to Tsotsitaal firstly by Stone (1991), and subsequently by researchers such as Ntshangase (1993), Makhudu (2002) and Kiessling and Mous (2004). Halliday defines an antilanguage as parallel to, and generated by, an antisociety. 'An antisociety is a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form

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<sup>18</sup> Two Cape Coloured respondents in the data for this thesis did independently claim in interviews that Tsotsitaal was coloured criminal gang slang. However, this contradicts the majority of the data, and it seems as though in these cases the respondents were using the name 'Tsotsitaal' as an overarching term for these *types* of township slang, rather than in reference to a specific variety used in the coloured community.

<sup>19</sup> It is uncertain when Tsotsitaal first made an appearance in the African townships of Cape Town. The researcher has been unable to find any data or reference to this in the literature.

either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction' (Halliday 1978: 164).

Two of the main linguistic features of an antilanguage according to Halliday are relexicalisation and metaphor. He (1978: 171) states that the opposition to the norm is done through metaphor: that the antisociety is a 'metaphorical variant' of society, and that 'antilanguage is a metaphor for an everyday language ... this metaphorical quality appears all the way up and down the system' (Halliday 1978: 175).

Metaphor in Tsotsitaal and related varieties is drawn on by a number of researchers as a strategy or feature of these antilanguages and antisocieties (Stone 1991; Makhudu 2002; Kiessling & Mous 2004; Steinberg 2004a). Makhudu (2002) gives specific examples of metaphorical manipulations in Flaaitaal. Ntshangase (2002: 412) illustrates how metaphor depicts political awareness in Iscamtho: 'The word for house in Iscamtho is *i-dladla*, which is a traditional Zulu storehouse. The fact that under apartheid Africans were housed in small dwellings and were legally regarded as temporary sojourners in urban areas is expressed in the use of this word'. Stone (2002: 390) describes the increase in metaphorical content along the continuum from standard to outcast lexis in the Cape Coloured community. He illustrates how, as it progresses along the continuum from standard, to slang and what he calls 'dialect', which he equates to both a progression from respectable to outcast, and a progression from middle to working class, it becomes 'increasingly metaphoric, hinted, allusive, elliptical, condensed, cryptic and mystic'. Kiessling and Mous (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324) similarly discuss the use of metaphor in urban youth languages, suggesting that meanings are changed 'with the function of insult, ridicule, exaggeration, or simple enjoyment and play' and that this takes place through the extensive use of 'metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, euphemism and dysphemism'.

According to Halliday (1978: 165), relexicalisation in antilanguages happens as a result of secrecy and differentiation, and for this reason vocabulary differences are most noticeable in areas relating to the subculture, for example regarding criminal activities, police, and prisons. Halliday (1978: 165) states additionally that the language 'is not merely *relexicalized* in these areas; it is *overlexicalized*'. Makhudu (2002), following Stone, gives examples of areas of overlexicalisation in Tsotsitaal to show its correlation to Halliday's antilanguage description, and while some areas of overlexicalisation correspond to those of Halliday's model, he argues that it also takes place in areas such as friendship, food, drink, and entertainment. The tension between criminality and camaraderie in Tsotsitaal is one of the implicit considerations of this thesis, and will be returned to in chapter five in terms of areas of relexicalisation.

#### **1.2.6 Conclusion of Literature Review**

This overview of previous literature on the background and current status of Tsotsitaal has revealed a number of tensions.

##### **(a) Afrikaans/ Bantu**

Firstly, there is a question over the Afrikaans/Bantu source of syntactic structure in Tsotsitaal, which needs to be answered in respect of the Cape Town variety. This may also begin to shed light on what it is that typifies Tsotsitaal, and therefore what constitutes the phenomenon.

##### **(b) Criminality/ camaraderie**

Secondly, there is a tension identified in the literature between the way Tsotsitaal is perceived and the way it is understood by its speakers. On the one hand, it is closely aligned with crime. On the other, there is a more complex alignment with camaraderie, subculture and style. This also relates to descriptions of the continuum in Tsotsitaal from 'criminal' varieties, to a 'common' form. This tension will be explored in chapters three and four.

(c) Rural/ urban, traditional/ modern, local/ global

The final tension I would like to draw out of the literature survey centres on the binaries of rural/ urban, traditional/ modern, and which also relates to the local/ global tensions of contemporary life in South Africa. This thesis will consider the following question: what is the work of identity that is being undertaken through the use of Tsotsitaal?

As this review of the literature has shown, the identity of a 'Tsotsi' has a long history, one which is consistently informed by the inequalities of the colonial and apartheid eras. The concept of 'Tsotsi' is exemplified by a 2005 film of the same name. Based on the book written by Athol Fugard (1989), *Tsotsi* won director Gavin Hood an Oscar in 2006 with his film adaptation (Hood 2005). Hood updated Fugard's story to a contemporary setting, yet the character of the title 'Tsotsi' remained unchanged. A young black man from a large township, Tsotsi supports himself through crime and initially has little or no compassion for his victims. The film engages with a particular identity construction which Bloke Modisane (1986: 67) alluded to when he wrote of the Tsotsis of Sophiatown: 'The tsotsis were violent men, the force of violence was the only voice they respected'. The relevance today of this identity type which was originally described by Fugard in the 1950s, speaks of a steady and unchanging identity construction over a period of 50 years.

*Tsotsi* was filmed mainly in contemporary Sowetan Tsotsitaal with English subtitles. The links between Tsotsitaal and crime are in this way made explicit and explain the negative stance many people hold towards the style and language. This thesis attempts to bring up-to-date our understanding of Tsotsitaal, in order to challenge the negative perspectives by engaging with what Tsotsitaal *is* and *does* in use in South Africa today.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- Is Tsotsitaal a language of criminals?
- What kinds of identities have been and are being historically and culturally produced through the use of Tsotsitaal?
- What typifies Tsotsitaal? (e.g. grammar, lexicon, 'style')

University of Cape Town

## **Chapter 2      RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As mentioned in section 1.2.2, various research has already been conducted on Tsotsitaal varieties in other parts of South Africa (Ntshangase 1993; Calteaux 1994; Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997; Rudwick 2005; Bembe 2006) which shows that the language which lends the syntactic framework is variable across the country. However, no research up to this point has identified the syntactic framework of the Cape Town variety. The intention in this thesis is firstly to determine the linguistic framework of the Cape Town township varieties under discussion, where the home language of speakers is Xhosa. The data for this thesis was gathered in three main ways, two of which relate to this first purpose: questionnaires and interviews which exhibit Tsotsitaal data. Additionally, a description of the code historically and contextually is also a part of this thesis, and therefore the semi-structured interviews, alongside a large number of informal interviews, were deployed to meet the second purpose of the thesis – to identify the functions of Tsotsitaal in its social context in Cape Town.

The theoretical framework which underpins the thesis is social constructionism (Gergen 1994; 1999; Potter 1996; Burr 2003). Social constructionists consider language to be central to social identity formation; therefore social constructionism binds together the analysis of the linguistic data with discourse analysis. This chapter will firstly discuss the data collection in depth, and will then go on to define how social constructionism frames the different methodologies.

## 2.2 The Data

This thesis uses qualitative methods. As Coupland (2007: 209) argues, quantitative methods are more suited to studies of speech features in common such as dialect markers, than in looking at stylistic shifts and dynamism, and therefore would be inadequate to decipher what sets Tsotsitaal apart as a phenomenon. A quantitative study would without doubt evidence variation in the extreme, not only in dialogue with a 'standard' vernacular in the townships of the study, but also within the townships. A good indication of this is in the questionnaire responses, where very few responses are identical. A huge amount of data would need to be elicited to get a clear picture of the linguistic features across the townships. This would be difficult to achieve, not least because respondents in township communities are often reticent about speaking Tsotsitaal.

Instead, this thesis has taken a qualitative approach, to try to understand what Tsotsitaal symbolises within a community and to individuals. This section will describe the different methods in depth, and consider the limitations of the data.

### 2.2.1 Questionnaires

A central aim of the thesis, to discover the base language of the Cape Town variety, was addressed through a questionnaire jointly developed with Professor Raj Mesthrie (supervisor) modifying and selecting from a questionnaire by Comrie and Smith (1977), which was published in the journal *Lingua* as a framework for syntacticians with a descriptive bent. Additionally, a descriptive grammar model used for *Tamil* in the Croom Helm Descriptive Grammar series (Asher 1985) influenced the questionnaire in this thesis. The adapted questionnaire comprised 50 sentences and 50 lexical items (see appendix 1). Particular grammatical formations were sought in the structure of the questionnaire, which would elicit certain data (to be discussed in chapter five).

Responses from this questionnaire constitute the primary corpus data (see section 2.2.6). The questionnaire was distributed to a group of 18-19 year old students in Khayelitsha during a school volunteer program. Permission was requested from the head master overseeing the holiday program before the students were approached. Eight questionnaires were distributed in the school, and four responses were received. An unknown number were given to personal contacts, mainly through acquaintances at University with friends in the townships. No responses were gained through this process. The questionnaires were complex, and this may have meant that people without a good familiarity with Tsotsitaal were unable to complete them. An advertisement was put up in the University Writing Centre, but generated only two responses, one of which was from a Namibian, and had to be set aside as being outside the area of study. One was gathered from a domestic employee of a friend – the only female respondent in the primary corpus.

Other methods of generating responses to the questionnaire were considered, but there were several problems attached, the first being identification of Tsotsitaal speakers. Tsotsitaal has an ambiguous status in many communities due to its associations with crime, and it is easy to offend people by asking them if they speak Tsotsitaal. Entering a township with outsider status and approaching people is therefore unsuitable. Furthermore, community members may claim to speak Tsotsitaal but have only a limited fluency in the code. Interestingly, despite the wide net cast for responses (with the added incentive of an honorarium) only one township is represented in the questionnaire sample: Khayelitsha (although 4 of the 6 respondents were not actually born in Khayelitsha – see primary corpus table below).

Questionnaires were written in English and the respondent translated directly into written form. Spelling is faithful aside from any obvious spelling mistakes, which have been corrected. While a Xhosa version of the questionnaire was considered, none of the respondents requested this option when the questionnaire was initially discussed. All respondents spoke English. Where

(b) A subcultural style: a 'withdrawal of social consent' relating to inequality or disempowerment, and incorporating 'clothing tastes, social values, leisure activities, and street argot' (Glaser 2000: 6).

(c) A new community reality, in that '... distinctive gangs emerge once neighbourhood peers develop a sense of identity based on an overlapping personal and territorial familiarity' (Glaser 2000: 9).

The concept of Tsotsi therefore, historically describes *young African urbanised male members of street gangs*. In conjunction with the use of Tsotsitaal, distinctive fashions, or a 'style', have historically been linked to this concept of Tsotsi. This style evokes criminality and gangsterism. But historically, and also in contemporary South African society, many of the adherents to the style, and speakers of the lingo, are *not* gangsters (Molamu 1995; Glaser 2000).

A concept of 'light' and 'deep' varieties of Tsotsitaal was posited by Calteaux (1994) in her doctoral thesis, which provides the best description to date of how Tsotsitaal operates within a community. She looked at the multilingual community of Tembisa, focusing on the entire language situation rather than a particular variety. By doing this, she uncovered a number of different varieties covered by the term 'Tsotsitaal' (or Iscamtho).

The two main varieties of Tsotsitaal she identified were a 'criminal' variety and a 'general' variety (Calteaux 1994: 152). The criminal variety, which she describes as a 'deep' variety, functions to obscure meaning: 'Secrecy is an important facet of Tsotsitaal, as many of the activities in which tsotsis are involved, are unlawful and require secrecy' (Calteaux 1994: 164). Criminals will use a criminal variety when involved in crime, and the general variety when not. She furthermore describes another variety related to the criminal variety, but not called Tsotsitaal, which originates in the prisons and may be 'Shalambombo':

... it is spoken by prison gangs such as the Big Five and the "26". When the members of this gang are released from prison, they bring the language into the township with

necessary for comparison purposes, standard Xhosa sentences and lexical items were acquired from translators on the project team. Translation from English by the respondent of course brings its own problems – it is possible that the English original has an impact on the translation, although the data does not evidence high English content.

The research questions ensured that the limitations of the sample do not impact on the conclusions. The sample is small, but the objective was not statistical representation of features of Tsotsitaal or its speakers; rather the objective in data collection was to show that the base language of Tsotsitaal is not Afrikaans as suggested previously (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997). There is no ‘standard’ Tsotsitaal. It is by its nature variable, and this thesis evidences both grammatical and lexical variation across different manifestations of Tsotsitaal. Despite the small sample, the findings were unequivocal, and were supported by information gathered through the complementary interviews.

### **2.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The second method of data gathering was through a series of interviews conducted in Gugulethu and Imizamo Yethu in association with a research project headed by Professor Raj Mesthrie and Associate Professor Ana Deumert. The project is funded by the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) and the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) and focuses on the sociolinguistic consequences of rural-urban migration in South Africa. Data collection mainly took place during 2006. The data gathered in Gugulethu is particularly focused on Xhosa-speaking migrants from the Eastern Cape, although data was additionally gathered from some respondents who were born in Cape Town. The data from Imizamo Yethu also includes international migrants from other Southern African countries. The Imizamo Yethu data consists of opinions on Tsotsitaal and Tsotsis; no examples of Tsotsitaal were gathered there. The interviews generally lasted around one hour, and the topics related to a number of different research avenues of the

project (see appendix 2). As a research assistant on the project I was able to contribute questions to the semi-structured interviews which solicited information about Tsotsitaal, and, on occasion, respondents spoke in Tsotsitaal for the interviewer. These interviews were recorded electronically, and transcribed and translated by other members of the research team.

The respondents were chosen randomly. A group of between two and four researchers, including Xhosa speakers, would go to a chosen area and approach people for interview. The interviews were undertaken in either Xhosa or English, depending on the preference of the respondent. The respondents were paid for their time. 16 interviews, in which 46 total respondents took part, were conducted and transcribed between March 2006 and March 2007 which contained information in and about Tsotsitaal and have been included in this thesis. These data were used both in the discourse analysis and analyses of the grammatical structure.

In Gugulethu, two areas were chosen for data collection. Furthermore, additional interviews were conducted in Imizamo Yethu, a township 20km from Cape Town. These three areas offered a contrast in terms of socio-economic characteristics, allowing for a broader range of respondents, and hence perspectives, regarding the use of Tsotsitaal.

#### *Mzoli's Place*

Mzoli originally opened his butchery in 2003, and later provided braai (barbeque) services for the meat and a café area where people can sit and eat. The business has become a thriving meeting point in the township and is famous for its busy Sunday afternoons. Township tourism and a wide reputation has meant that the clientele is increasingly cosmopolitan, yet it is still frequented by many people from the local township of Gugulethu. Alcohol is sold nearby, and customers are free to bring their own drinks, while there is table service for the meat and accompaniments. There is also an ATM next to the premises, and

several other small businesses in the area. Potential respondents were usually approached as they sat at the tables in the café (Deumert et al. 2006).

#### *Gugulethu Central Meat Market*

Called *Tshatshalaza*, meaning 'busy place', the central meat market in Gugulethu is a thriving shopping point in the township. As well as meat vendors, there are a number of shops in the main building. Respondents were mostly approached outside their houses and shacks in the nearby area, or at the shops in the market. This area was characterised by less affluence than Mzoli's (Deumert et al. 2006).

#### *Imizamo Yethu*

Imizamo Yethu is a township in Hout Bay, 20km south of Cape Town. Data was gathered by approaching residents at their houses or shacks, or at the shebeen (local bar) in the centre of the township. Hout Bay has a high proportion of residents from Southern African countries other than South Africa, and opinions of Tsotsitaal were solicited from a Tanzanian, and a Malawian (amongst other language related questions) (Deumert et al. 2006).

#### **2.2.2.1 Transcription/ Translation**

Collection, transcription and translation of Xhosa data was undertaken by members of the NRF/SANPAD project research team. The team comprised of University of Cape Town linguistics department postgraduates and staff who spoke a number of languages including Xhosa, Zulu and English. The transcribers/translators also understood a number of Tsotsitaal terms, although they were unfamiliar with 'deep' varieties. They therefore indicated where possible, what their understanding was of the meaning of Tsotsitaal data. I also examined the audio data to cross-check with other data. Because of the nature of Tsotsitaal as a primarily oral medium<sup>20</sup>, with constant variation and integration

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<sup>20</sup> Tsotsitaal has been incorporated on occasion into written form, for example in the work of the Botsotso Jesters (1996). Molamu (2003) attempted the first Tsotsitaal dictionary, and there have been some recent updates in a variety of media. Motshegoa (2005) for example, wrote a 'Township Lingo' A-Z, and writes a

of new terms, spelling and meaning are contestable. In this thesis, only examples which are defensible will be used, and the spelling of the transcriber may have been altered when clarified by new knowledge.

### **2.2.2.2 Limitations of Semi-Structured Interviews**

It was often difficult to gather core information during semi-structured interviews. Although effort was made to gather basic data such as place of birth, length of stay in Cape Town, and age of the respondents, this was not always achieved in the interviews, or was sometimes lost in the recording. Younger interviewers felt it was not polite to ask some personal information – for example, the age of older respondents. It was rarely possible to perform follow-up interviews, as the respondents did not always have a way of being contacted, and were often interviewed in a public spaces rather than their homes. The secondary corpus table in section 2.2.6 states the basic captured information, and extra information is included in the analysis where possible and necessary.

A further complication in the semi-structured interviews was that not all respondents were able to speak Tsotsitaal with great fluency. However, all except one of the respondents knew a number of the more common terms (what I later describe as ‘core’ terms), and all respondents were able to offer opinions of Tsotsitaal and its speakers. The only respondents to claim any fluency in Tsotsitaal were males; therefore aside from the single questionnaire response by a female (described above), none of the examples of phrases in Tsotsitaal are spoken by women. Female respondents instead contributed to the perception data, and on occasion would cite common terms which they knew to be Tsotsitaal. This results in the focus of this thesis being on the male speakers: the use of Tsotsitaal by females is outside the scope of the research.

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column in Iscamtho in the Daily Sun newspaper. Furthermore, ‘Translate SA’ (2006) have recently produced a Tsotsitaal dictionary on fridge magnets called ‘Traditional Township Slang’.

The interviewers were perceived to be speakers of 'correct' Xhosa. As one respondent said:

M: When I am with him, this *buti* [referring to the interviewer] I must speak isiXhosa because he is an old man to me né, I must speak real Xhosa not Tsotsitaal because if I speak iTsotsitaal he is gonna say *kwedini* [young man] *undixelel' ikaka* [you are telling me shit]

The above extract suggests that respondents changed their speech to accommodate the 'correct' Xhosa of the interviewers. It is worth bearing in mind that speech differentiation is endemic to Tsotsitaal. There is not *one* version of the code, there is no 'standard' Tsotsitaal. Therefore, although a group of respondents may for example cut out some swear words or become 'stilted' when speaking Tsotsitaal in front of a university audience, this does not make the data invalid, but another example of variation, or 'styling' within the code. The 'observer's paradox': 'needing to observe speech data of the sort that is produced when *not* being observed' (Labov 1972: 209) is less important in the case of this thesis, where a broader 'style' attached to a linguistic production was being observed.

Furthermore, in several interviews, a group of respondents were asked to speak to each other in Tsotsitaal, without the participation of the interviewers, which may have reduced accommodation somewhat. On some occasions the data seemed close to 'naturalistic' (for example in the interview with two slightly drunk ex-gangsters who had no qualms about swearing!). In interviews, respondents would often only offer lexical items rather than sentences which exhibited the grammatical structures. In data analysis, the context of the whole sentence was considered, in order to avoid misrepresenting this kind of data.

### 2.2.3 Informal Interviews

In addition to the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, a large number of informal interviews and information gathering was done throughout 2005, 2006 and 2007. In 2005 I undertook an extended research trip to the Eastern Cape where I interviewed a number of self-proclaimed gangsters, ex-prisoners, and members of several communities in the old Ciskei and Transkei regions, to ascertain the impact (if any) of Tsotsitaal on the speech of rural communities and to frame attitudes towards the code.

In Cape Town itself throughout the course of the research, conversations took place with, among others, fellow students (from around South Africa), taxi drivers, car guards and security guards, friends, and friends of colleagues. The level of interest shown in my project was surprising and I am indebted to everyone for their perspectives, narratives, and opinions. Few of these contacts claimed to be able to speak the code, yet everyone supplied valuable information for the progress of the research.

The information was recorded through note-taking, either during the conversation, or immediately afterwards, so opinions were represented as accurately as possible. This information frames the entire thesis, even when not directly quoted, as it provides the context of what Tsotsitaal *is* and *does*. It also contributed valuable detail, such as ascertaining that the language spoken in coloured communities is *not* called Tsotsitaal (this is backed up in the literature – see Stone 1991), thereby reducing the amount of fieldwork needed. All opinions offered in these informal interviews were supported by research in existing literature or in interviews at a later stage, and the informal interview data will not be cited unless it is defensible.

#### **2.2.4 Analysis and Limitations of the Data**

The responses from the questionnaires were analysed in order to determine the language which provides the morpho-syntactic framework. The analysis was based on Myers-Scotton's (2002) Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model (explained in chapter five). This analysis was fully assisted by a member of the SANPAD/ NRF research team, Zukile Jama, who spoke both Xhosa and Zulu, as well as some Tsotsitaal. Professor Raj Mesthrie provided insights from his own comprehensive research into township varieties in South Africa.

Despite this assistance, the linguistic analysis only extends to identification of elements of the grammar base and lexicon, as the researcher's background is not in formal linguistics. It is hoped that the research may provide a platform for more in-depth linguistic analyses by South African researchers. A Tsotsitaal speaker, conducting research within a 'familiar ecosystem' (Coupland 2007: 27), would be better placed than this author to conduct an in-depth linguistic analysis.

Identification of lexical items distinctive to the code was undertaken by comparing the data gathered in questionnaires and interviews with data from previous literature on lexical items such as that of Ntshangase (1993) and Calteaux (1994). It also, to a certain extent, responds to claims made by respondents in relation to the source of lexical items, although these claims are not presented as factual, but rather are tested in relation to the data to see if they can be considered valid. The lexical items in Tsotsitaal are continually evolving, new words are being invented, and old words are becoming common terminology. Respondents may have no knowledge of a source language such as Afrikaans, and often claim etymologies which are entirely subjective. There is also a huge amount of cross-fertilisation between urban codes in Cape Town (for example, Gamtaal, Shalambombo, urban Xhosa) and it is therefore often impossible to identify whether a term originated in Tsotsitaal or elsewhere. For this reason, not a great deal of space is given over to etymologies.

The lexicon was also analysed by means of an indexical score system, which is fully explained in chapter five.

An analysis of the linguistic data in isolation would document an incomplete picture of Tsotsitaal, as the language is never used without accompanying textual markers such as clothes, body language, and attitudes. Some of this was identified from notes taken during field work, while other impressions were gathered through questions addressed in the qualitative interviews, which attempted to gauge respondent's attitudes, whether towards their own, or others' use of Tsotsitaal and the accompanying 'style'. The semi-structured and informal interview questions therefore included discussion of respondents' perceptions of people who speak Tsotsitaal, what they think the code *is* and *does*, if they use it, what circumstances they use it in, questions around the gender of speakers, and so forth.

These are subjective 'opinions' but feed into the analysis of the 'discourse' of Tsotsi (see chapter three). Perceptions of Tsotsitaal gathered during the full course of the research varied drastically, due to individual perception, age, gender, rural/urban affiliations, and so on. The different standpoint of each respondent is taken into consideration in the analysis. All that can be achieved in this thesis is an indication of the different ways in which Tsotsitaal is viewed. Rather than pinning down what Tsotsitaal is, therefore, a space in which Tsotsitaal can be seen to operate can be circumscribed.

As mentioned above, female speakers of Tsotsitaal are not represented in this thesis. Only one female responded to the questionnaires, and she had limited fluency in the variety. The interviews mainly garnered opinions of the variety from women who claimed not to speak Tsotsitaal, although they were familiar with, and even used, some of the lexicon. Women who spoke Tsotsitaal were sometimes alluded to in negative terms (for example, insinuating promiscuity) by respondents. On the other hand, one male respondent stated that he had female

friends who spoke Tsotsitaal. However, none of these women are interviewed in the data presented in this thesis.

It is also advisable to note that by no means all perceptions of Tsotsitaal have been identified in the data collection. In Cape Town it is a rapidly changing urban code, connected to a rapidly evolving urban identity, and it will only be possible to identify themes and broad trends in the style, identity and functions within this thesis.

### **2.2.5 Ethics and Faithfulness of the Data**

In all interviews, respondents were asked for their permission to record the data. The data uses anonymization – all names have been replaced by names that contextually match the original name where possible, and preserve gender, or by initials unrelated to the name of the speaker.

As previously mentioned, the translators and transcribers were familiar with many but not all of the Tsotsitaal terms. Notes by the transcribers on Tsotsitaal terms are included where they are illuminating. Many Tsotsitaal terms are spelt phonetically in the transcriptions. A full explanation of interview excerpts is given on page eight in the transcription and glossing key.

### 2.2.6 Respondents

	Primary corpus	Secondary corpus
Type of data	Questionnaires	Interviews
Form of data	Written by respondent	Spoken/recorded/transcribed/translated
Single or multiple respondents in each example	Single	Single/ Multiple (number of respondents ranged from 1 – 5 in each interview)
Size in number of words	2000 words approx (in Tsotsitaal)	200,000 words approx (in Xhosa/ English/ Tsotsitaal)
Number of respondents	6	46
Main criteria for inclusion of data	Respondent claims to speak Tsotsitaal	Respondent(s) claim(s) to know Tsotsitaal
Orthography normalized?	No	No
Names and private information anonymized?	Yes	Yes

PRIMARY CORPUS

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F
Education	Unknown	Matric	Matric	Matric	Matric	Unknown
Place of Birth	Unknown	East London	Eastern Cape	Langa, CT	Gauteng	Unknown
Place of residence	Khay-elitsha	Khay-elitsha	Khay-elitsha	Khay-elitsha	Khay-elitsha	Khay-elitsha
Years in CT	Unknown	3	9	18	11	Unknown
Male/Female	F	M	M	M	M	M
Age	Unknown	19	18	18	18	Unknown
Employment	P/T	(School)	(School)	(School)	(School)	Unknown
Languages	Xhosa, English, Unknown	Xhosa, English, Zulu	Xhosa, English, Zulu	Xhosa, English, Afrikaans, Zulu	Xhosa, English, Zulu	Xhosa, English

SECONDARY CORPUS

INTERVIEW 1	5 female	Eastern Cape
INTERVIEW 2	5 male	Eastern Cape (East London)/ Cape Town
INTERVIEW 3	5 female	Eastern Cape/ Gauteng
INTERVIEW 4	6 female	Eastern Cape /Gauteng
INTERVIEW 5	4 female	Eastern Cape / Cape Town
INTERVIEW 6	1 male	Tanzania
INTERVIEW 7	2 male	Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth)/ Johannesburg (Soweto)
INTERVIEW 8	2 male	Eastern Cape
INTERVIEW 9	1 female	Eastern Cape (King Williamstown)
INTERVIEW 10	1 male	Eastern Cape (Umtata)
INTERVIEW 11	2 male	Malawi
INTERVIEW 12	1 male 1 female	Eastern Cape
INTERVIEW 13	2 male	Cape Town
INTERVIEW 14	2 female	Eastern Cape
INTERVIEW 15	2 male	Eastern Cape
INTERVIEW 16	4 female	Eastern Cape

### 2.3 Theoretical framework

Sociolinguistics has traditionally approached language variation through the analysis of sets of quantitative data to describe particular trends in language use in relation to social factors (Coupland 2007: xii). As a result of the quantitative approach, identity was treated early on in sociolinguistics in a static, essentialist sense. For example, early Labovian research on language variation, due to a lack of emphasis on identity, treated it as ‘a combination of a very small number of parameters: age, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and very little else’ (Hinrichs 2006: 29-30).

According to Coupland (2007: 3), sociolinguistics needs to look at particular moments and contexts of use, and ‘the creative, design-oriented processes through which social styles are activated in talk and, in that process, remade or reshaped’. In his book on style and variation, he argues that style is a vital concern for sociolinguistics as it moves into the locale of discourse analysis and detailed, qualitative studies of language in use. He further argues that social constructionism recognises the ‘*constitutive* power of language’, provides an approach which encompasses the ‘cultural, personal, historical and sequential’ strata of social meaning (Coupland 2007: 19), and thus ensures a more complex understanding of the place of identity in language use.

This thesis adopts a social constructionist theoretical framework to attempt to provide a fuller account of Tsotsitaal in its speech communities. Discourse analysis is a methodological approach which falls within the social constructionist paradigm. There are a number of different approaches to discourse analysis, involving both micro and macro analyses of language. This thesis does not undertake a stylistic analysis as such; it attempts to define a particular context in which meaning is styled<sup>21</sup> rather than analysing the

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<sup>21</sup> Coupland calls for ‘local analyses of styling *in situ*...’ (Coupland 2007: 27). Despite the lack of analysis of styling *per se*, the data provides prime examples of the ways in which meaning is styled in Tsotsitaal (see in particular section 6.2).

linguistic moves that constitute it. This approach dictates that the focus of the discourse analysis is at the macro level: discursive construction between participants in conversation is not discussed, but rather the discourse underlying the use of this particular variety is unpacked.

The combination of linguistic questionnaire data and semi-structured and informal interviews allows the research to bridge a gap between sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, using qualitative and interpretive methods alongside empirical data (Coupland 2007: 27). The linguistic data provides evidence of how difference is enacted in the use of language; the sociological analysis considers the social phenomena which have informed this enactment of difference. Social constructionism provides the link between the two methods: language in social constructionism is where meaning is fashioned for *all* social phenomena.

In this section there will initially be a brief synopsis of the main concepts of social constructionism which impact on this research. Following this, the approach of the thesis in relation to discourse analysis more specifically will be described, particularly the 'macro' approach of Michel Foucault.

### **2.3.1 Social Constructionism**

Postmodernism questions the very concept of 'truth'. The reason and rationality of the enlightenment has come under question, as previously hidden subjectivities are exposed, and new voices are heard (Burr 2003: 12). This has led to a new conception of identity. From notions of an 'essential' individual identity, theorists such as Berger and Luckmann (1967) posited that identities and social reality itself are constructed through social interaction (Burr 2003: 13).

Social constructionism grew from this paradigm, and began to engage with how this construction of a social reality takes place. Traditionally, explanations for social behaviour were rooted in the person, for example, 'attitudes' of individuals were held to be responsible for delinquency or sexual behaviour (Foucault 1978;

1979). Sociology on the other hand, cites social structures such as the economy, or institutions such as marriage as responsible for social behaviour. Social constructionism instead began to focus on the 'social practices engaged in by people, and their interactions with each other' as the primary constitutive power in society (Burr 2003: 9).

These engagements take place primarily through language, and discourse theory began to work with language as a constructive force. Discursive psychology treats language not as a vehicle for identity but as the central topic. Identities are not pre-existent things that language only describes, they are performances that come into existence in the enactment, and can shift from one context to another. Our language changes depending upon who we are speaking with and what we are trying to achieve from an interaction. In this way we enact different identities in different contexts (although we may experience ourselves as consistent)<sup>22</sup>. Attitudes are constituted in the course of social interaction, in the space between people, not in the space between our ears. We are nothing more than the stories we tell – we have no extra discursive qualities - and our identities are constructed in the telling (Edley & Wetherell 1996; Edwards 1997; Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter 1996). The result of this constitution of the self by language is a self in flux. Burr (2003: 54) states that 'the constructive force of language in social interaction ensures a fragmented, shifting and temporary identity for all of us'.

Stuart Hall (1992) described three phases of identity conceptualisation: the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the post-modern subject. The progression through these concepts has taken us further away from the idea of an essential unchanging self, something internal and fixed, towards a shifting changing unfixd self, where identities are never quite 'achieved'. We are constantly in the process of creating, refining and defining ourselves, and we shift our personal narratives depending on the context and to 'formulate a story in

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<sup>22</sup> Some of this is also implicit in traditional sociolinguistics, although with a greater emphasis on interactional variation (to be discussed in greater detail in chapter six) as the cause of key differences. Labovian sociolinguistics believes that the vernacular style is basic (Labov 1977), but does not ignore subsequent variation of style and identity.

which life events are systematically related' (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 248). The post-modern subject is...

...conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us... The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (Hall 1992: 276-77)

As Patricia J. Williams wrote: 'While being black has been the powerful social attribution in my life, it is only one of a number of *governing narratives* or *presiding fictions* by which I am constantly reconfiguring myself in the world' (in Somers & Gibson 1994: 37). As described above, in social constructionism, identities are 'accomplished' in interactional or relational settings. They involve others linguistically and communicatively, socially and physically. Because of this, identities can be conceptualised as being produced through difference, or constructed in dialogue with 'other'; they are constituted through conflict, through identifying what one is *not*. Hall continues: 'If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves' (Hall 1992: 277). Conversely, others also construct narratives about us. However, these narratives, both our own and those of others, are composed in conditions not of our making. These conditions include all the conditions of our lives and the society/culture in which we live, what phenomenologists call our 'world' or our 'horizon'. These conditions include the socially available cultural forms, e.g. the storylines we use to narrate ourselves which are items in larger social repertoires of the larger cultural formation. Identity can therefore be seen as a process that is influenced by societal structures, and by hegemonic processes that are in place before we are born.

We are born into a set of social identities that pre-exist us. The individual is not important in social constructionist theory, and this results in a de-centring of the subject in social constructionist research. The emphasis is ultimately not on the individual, but on 'social accounting or public discourse' (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 249). To analyse discourse therefore we must look to social interaction.

### **2.3.2 Language and Discourse**

Primarily in social constructionism, 'language speaks the subject'. This means that the subject is not the font of ideas but is actually constituted through language. According to Burr (2003: 53), our experience, identities and personalities are all consequences of language, and we are only able to represent ourselves, both to other people, and even to ourselves, through language. Therefore the concepts available in our language both constitute and constrain us. Language gives us parameters within which we can perform our narratives, and is not therefore 'innocent'. Concepts such as 'love', 'drives', even 'personalities', are concepts embedded into our language which structure our experiences and how we understand the world (Burr 2003: 48).

Deconstructionism is a branch of social constructionism which conceptualises language as a system of signs which have constructive power: '[i]t is concerned with how the human subject becomes constructed through the structures of language and through ideology. The central concept here is the "text"' (Burr 2003: 17). The 'text', however, is included within scare quotes, because the concept of text in the work of deconstructionists is not simply referring to written material. According to Derrida (1976: 158), 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte': 'there is nothing outside the text'. By this he meant that everything is within discourse because everything has meaning: meaning can be encoded in what people wear/the way they do their hair. Anything can be included within discourse – architecture, animals, the weather. 'Given that there is virtually no aspect of human life that is exempt from meaning, everything around us can be considered as textual and

'life as text' could be said to be the underlying metaphor here' (Burr 2003: 66-67).

In Saussurean linguistics (1966) (which was later extended into 'poststructuralism'), the spoken sound (or its secondary representations like written words) is the 'signifier', while the thing it refers to is the 'signified'. In Saussure the link between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. Also arbitrary is the division and classification of concepts – the categorisations are not linked to what they signify, but instead are tied to each other (in the society we belong to). There is no intrinsic meaning to signs themselves. Meaning resides in the relationship to other signs. Saussure believed that signs become fixed over time by societies – therefore *meaning itself* is constructed through language (although there is a slide of meaning – meanings are contested and can change over time). As described above, in this way language dictates what kinds of thought and meanings are possible (Whorf 1941). 'Concepts and categories are acquired by each person as they develop the use of language and are thus reproduced every day by everyone who shares a culture and a language. This means that the way a person thinks, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language that they use' (Burr 2003: 8)<sup>23</sup>. These concepts and categories provide *meaning* – they shape our experience, and define what we are able to experience. Particular sets of meaning which underpin a social belief are described as 'discourses'. The concept of 'discourse' is a complex one and has a number of different definitions. It is defined here in relation to the thesis' theoretical framework.

Discourses according to Foucault are 'practices which form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1976: 49) – 'a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr 2003: 64). Each discourse presents itself as the 'truth'. It presents aspects of knowledge with a particular focus or priority, which

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<sup>23</sup> Many of the tenets of Saussurean structuralism and Whorfian determinism are no longer as dominant in modern linguistics as a half-century ago. Nevertheless they laid the foundations for Social Constructionism.

results in different implications for human actions according to the discourse. Every set of beliefs occurs within discourse, so no discourse is 'correct' – all are equally constructions. These discourses are tied to power in society: 'claims to truth and knowledge... lie at the heart of discussions of identity, power and change' (Burr 2003: 65). When social constructionists claim there is nothing outside the text they are not denying that the world exists, but 'are pointing out that our engagement with the world of things and events is dependent upon the meanings that discourses confer' (Burr 2003: 67).

Truth and knowledge are not merely conceptual – what we believe and how we describe ourselves and our world affects how we act, and ultimately shapes our society and world, rather than merely reflecting it (Burr 2003: 62). In this way, language constructs reality: '...language and our use of it, far from simply describing the world, both constructs the world as we perceive it and has real consequences' (Burr 2003: 46). Because language or discourse constructs reality, identities are doubly-constructed: by language itself; and by social manifestations of discourses such as laws, state structures, religion and state morality.

Discourse, and therefore meaning, is historically & culturally specific. Discourses change and develop over time, for example in that case of discourses such as sexuality or 'delinquency' (Foucault 1978; 1979). Therefore, we are constructed according to the discourses of the day: '...whatever personal qualities we may display are a function of the particular cultural, historical and relational circumstances in which we are located' (Burr 2003: 35). We are implanted with culturally and historically specific ideologies: the habits of belief, which are rooted in discourses and reproduced through language (e.g. 'maxims praising both caution and risk taking' (Wetherell et al. 2001: 218)). So for example, in South Africa, conceptions of black/white differences were constructed under apartheid according to the dominant discourses of the time, while today, different discourses are becoming dominant in South Africa.

Discourses such as racial superiority serve the interests of some, and not others. They inherently contain vested interests of the dominant (discourse-driving) group. The historical and cultural specificity of knowledge means that discourses fade and new ones take over. For example, postcolonialism is offering different 'standpoints' for knowledge, to counteract colonialist standpoints (Burr 2003: 7). This relates back to claims to truth, and the multiple subjectivities of postmodernism. Language in this sense becomes a 'social resource for constructing different accounts of the world and events' (Burr 2003: 14). This historical and cultural specificity led Gergen (1973) to argue that in order to gain an understanding of social life we should study the social, political and economic spheres.

### **2.3.3 Discourse Analysis**

In order to analyse discourses we must look to language. There are different approaches to discourse analysis. The two overarching approaches align with 'micro' and 'macro' social constructionism. The micro discourse analysis approach centres on discursive psychology and looks at the structures of language use in interaction – the 'joint action' (Shotter 1995) of social life. The macro, which is the primary method used in this thesis, is exemplified by Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) which considers the way in which language and social structures frame social and psychological life (Burr 2003: 21). It considers the historical construction of the discourses of a particular society, and how vested interest, or 'power/knowledge' in Foucault's terms, serves this construction. This kind of power-knowledge social constructionism, influenced by Foucault, arose in response to a crisis in social psychology, where there were concerns that it was an 'empiricist, laboratory-based science that had habitually served, and was paid for by, those in positions of power, both in government and in industry' (Burr 2003: 14). There was also concern over methods of research practices. Social constructionism has historically therefore been concerned with *unequal* relations of power, and giving a voice to the previously power-less. 'Macro social constructionism acknowledges the

constructive power of language but sees this as derived from, or at least related to, material or social structures, social relations and institutionalised practices. The concept of power is therefore at the heart of this form of social constructionism...' (Burr 2003: 22).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is not an analysis of what is being said, but rather, how attitudes are constructed, and what power functions they achieve. The construction of an attitude involves taking an object/idea, and locating it in an evaluative hierarchy, e.g. the relative acceptability of racism, or violence, in a particular historical and cultural context (Wetherell et al. 2001: 286). The Foucauldian concept posits that society constructs itself in such a way that beliefs are wrought into the fabric of society, so no-one is 'outside discourse' – no one is exempt from the influence of social construction. The way we are, the way we behave, the institutions of our societies, have all been formed by a series of narrative discourses. For example, Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) illustrates how the knowledge of 'delinquency' has been constructed as a discourse which has altered over time, so what is considered to be 'delinquent behaviour' today is contextually relative to the current social construction of the 'norm'. This specific notion of 'truth': what a particular society (both in a particular culture and a particular moment in history) considers to be 'delinquent behaviour' is not consistent but is tied to power.

Power is a discursive effect of what Gramsci (1971: 352) terms an 'ensemble of relations' which is the construction of knowledge in interaction – a process, or negotiation of claims to 'truth' that is constantly being contested and re-negotiated. Foucault theorised power as having positive and negative qualities, and as being dynamic, that is, it is everywhere, operating as a flow. It produces identity, as individual and group identities are all subject to discourse, which is determined by the flows of power. Power therefore implies what stories you can tell, when and where. By-products of the flows of power, 'mechanisms of power' (or social/ institutional control) operate directly on the subject. For example, norms of sexuality are socially negotiated, and laws exist which penalise

behaviour outside this 'norm' (Foucault 1978). Normalisation also happens in Foucault (1979: 183) through the penal system. In the case of the prison, and other institutions such as schools and the military, the social/ institutional control extends to the actual distribution of bodies in space (e.g. incarceration).

However, Foucault's work makes it clear that he does not consider power to be in the possession of individuals – 'controlled' or 'owned' – the discourses are not purposefully designed by a particular dominant group to control society. Rather, power is a flow which is vested in society and has particular discursive side-effects. Ultimately, in Foucault, discourses, and therefore power, serve a particular historical method of production. For example, in the early industrial era, methods of social control (e.g. schools, the military, prisons) were implemented which helped to produce 'docile bodies' to meet the demands of new forms of labour in industry (Foucault 1979: 135). However, the relatively fixed state of the method of production of a particular era does not mean there is no contestation. If a discourse became 'achieved', or agreed upon by everybody, there would be no change over time – society would become static. Instead there is continuous contestation over power and knowledge – and the discourses which underpin them. Struggle takes place both at a linguistic (micro) level, and at a discursive (macro) level.

#### **2.3.4 Micro and Macro Contestation**

Bakhtin (1981 [1975]) describes dialogic theory which has many aspects in common with constructionism. The theory of dialogic identity formation means identity is formed through linguistic, communicative means, in negotiation, and involves power relations. These power relations are contested in dialogue, in the struggle over meaning, the struggle over *words*.

Orientation of the word towards the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, word is two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal

relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the “one” in relation to the “other”. I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (Vološinov 1986: 20 [1929])<sup>24</sup>

In the work of Bakhtin (as in that of Saussure) no-one owns meaning; it is negotiated by the language community. Bakhtin proposed that dialogue itself constructs meaning: in dialogue, words are negotiated. While the speaker may have one concept of the meaning of a word, the listener may have another. Words are only signs, codes, which represent – but may represent different things to different individuals. This means that language is always ‘up for grabs’ – meaning is contestable. So language becomes a site of ‘potential conflict’. Words themselves are struggled over: they have power. On a micro level, the use of language sets up social relations, e.g. addressing one person over another, the form with which they are addressed. On the macro level, discourses are being negotiated. As seen previously, what people *say* is not divorced from what they *do* either as individuals or groups, or from the way society is run and organised (social practices and social structures). Overriding ‘discourses’ are struggled over and as a result the organisation of society itself is constantly contested.

Modern societies, Laclau argues, have no centre, no single articulating or organising principle, and do not develop according to the unfolding of a single ‘cause’ or ‘law’. Society is not, as sociologists often thought, a unified and well-bounded whole, a totality, producing itself through evolutionary change from within itself, like the unfolding of a daffodil from its bulb. It is constantly being ‘de-centred’ or dislocated by forces outside itself. (Hall 1992: 278)

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<sup>24</sup> While this work was authored by Bakhtin’s close friend Vološinov, it is thought that Bakhtin had a considerable influence on the contents (Clark & Holquist 1984).

This decentering takes place through competing discourses, or 'difference': '[c]ontemporary societies ... are cut through by different social divisions and antagonisms which produce a variety of different identities or 'subject-positions' (Sarup 1996: 56).

While flows of power are negotiated, and vested interests are at stake, the dominant group will be challenged, but will not remain passive during challenge (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Gramsci (1971) describes social control by a dominant group/ ideology as a 'hegemony', but shows how any hegemony is repeatedly being contested. This explains why things constantly shift, are constantly in flux. When a particular social formation is achieved this is described as 'articulation'. Articulation focuses on a process, within which temporary stoppage of meaning is sometimes accomplished (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). However, there is never *successful* articulation/hegemony. It is *always* temporary. Hall (1996: 145) states that articulation, the temporary stoppage of meaning, operates like a language, or discourse: it is cultural power; it closes down other options. It constructs particular chains of possibilities, and closes others<sup>25</sup>. Hegemony and articulation are therefore concerned with discourse and the construction of meaning, both at an individual, and at a societal level.

Social constructionism, at its extreme, is critiqued for the claim that 'everything is within the text' – everything is constructed, and therefore subjective – that there is no 'truth', and therefore no 'right' or 'wrong', only opinions and constructions of right and wrong. This concept has been criticised for promoting 'navel-gazing', in that if everything is valid, there is no purpose to social action, or attempts to redress unequal power relations. 'If all accounts of the world are equally valid, then we appear deprived of defensible grounds for our moral choices and political allegiances' (Burr 2003: 23). This criticism cannot be repudiated here, yet, as mentioned above, social constructionism historically arises from a tradition of

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<sup>25</sup> In South Africa it is possible to view apartheid as a 'consensus' by the dominant group(s) (despite some opposition from within), informed by coercion in the form of military and legal action, which temporarily stopped the slide of meaning, and fixed the social formation for a period of time. Apartheid can therefore be viewed as an articulation of a particular power discourse.

social redress, intended to allow previously disadvantaged voices/ standpoints to be considered as equally valid as the dominant voice.

Furthermore, the work of theorists such as Archer (2003) considers how the constructive work of individuals can be incorporated into a social constructionist framework by considering its interplay with social power structures, and the ability of individuals to challenge and manipulate the flows of power. While 'macro social constructionism tends toward the 'death of the subject' where the person can be conceptualised only as the outcome of discursive and societal structures' (Burr 2003: 23), this thesis adopts a position in which identity can be seen to be mediated by what Archer (2003) calls the 'internal conversation'. This refers to the subjective reflexivity of individuals, and confers agency upon the social actors, allowing them to achieve change both at an individual and societal level, rather than viewing them as 'determined' by social and historical structures.

In South Africa, agency involves not just individual identities but also national identity, a 'bounded space' which is invaded by complex historical and cultural factors. This is why a variety like Tsotsitaal, which to an extent operates *across* some of the complexities, is such an interesting site for research; as it evidences new identity constructions and developing discourses, which are the result of agency in a society that has only recently extended the arena in which Tsotsitaal speakers' agency can be exercised.

### **2.3.5 Conclusion of Theoretical Framework**

Tsotsitaal has historically displaced the 'Other', the dominant 'norm' through semantic shift, syntactic fluidity, metaphor, and other forms of language differentiation in certain domains. The identities associated with Tsotsitaal can therefore be seen to contest dominant meaning, ideology, discourses, and power. This works up and down the system of meaning construction, and encompasses a micro level of meanings of words, and a macro level of meaning where claims to truth are negotiated.

In this thesis, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis will be used to understand where the use of Tsotsitaal is situated in terms of power/knowledge, and the kinds of identity that Tsotsitaal references. A social construction such as this can be seen to be reinforced/ reiterated, through the discourses of people in everyday life. Therefore, the way people speak about Tsotsis, and the way Tsotsitaal is used, can be analysed to discover the traces of this construction-in-process. The narrative discourse through which Tsotsitaal emerged is that of colonial racism and later apartheid practices, including the ideologies (e.g. racism/ religion), laws (e.g. pass laws) and resultant mechanisms of power (e.g. prisons and mine compounds) which made up the colonial/ apartheid system. The argument in the following chapter is that these ideologies and systems gave birth to a particular identity, the ‘Tsotsi’, which will be compared with Foucault’s (1979) concept of the ‘delinquent’.

While this thesis discusses a stereotype around a particular identity type the discussion is always underpinned by an awareness of the social construction of the formative narrative, and the claims to truth that surround it. Furthermore, competing discourses are complexifying the Tsotsi concept and these will be taken into consideration in the discussion. It is hoped that this thesis will not at any point imply that Tsotsi is a static concept based on any underlying ‘truth’<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> As an additional note, I would like to indicate my awareness that I am also constructing knowledge in the writing of this thesis, according to the academic and social discourses of our time (and my personal identity discourses) – but for now the unpacking of narratives from competing perspectives is the best approach we can conceive of!

## Chapter 3 THE TSOTSI IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

*'All of us, black and white, are committed to violence, it is the background of the complex attitudes of our dichotomous society, the relationships complicated and standardised by the permeability of skin colour; it is the quality of the group attributes, we are born into it, we live with it and we die of it, each unto his own race, in the sweat-house of our skins.'*

Bloke Modisane (1986: 55)

### 3.1 Introduction

In this thesis, the two concepts of (a) the Tsotsi identity construction, and (b) Tsotsitaal speakers, are conceptually separated. This chapter and the following one will attempt to describe the concepts and their differences. This chapter considers the Tsotsi identity construct: the methods through which it has been constructed, the purpose it achieves, and its inherent features or what it embodies: violence, criminality and a certain masculinity.

It will begin by considering the historical construction of the concept of 'Tsotsi' from a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) perspective, and will show how aspects of the construct such as criminality, masculinity and resistance can be conceptualised as a product of the apartheid 'discourse' – the underlying social and economic imperatives which produced inequality ideologically aligned with categories of people defined by skin colour. The chapter utilises Foucault's work on 'delinquency', and applies this same concept to that of the Tsotsi.

The Tsotsi of this chapter is to a great extent a mythical construct: it comprises one (extreme) end of the spectrum of identities that speakers of Tsotsitaal align themselves with. But to an extent this extreme identity is the one that is conjured up when a respondent is asked: 'who speaks Tsotsitaal?' The following excerpt illustrates the link between Tsotsitaal and the Tsotsi identity construction in

terms of people's perception. The respondent in this example was born in 1945 in King Williamstown, Eastern Cape. She has lived in Cape Town on and off since 1979.

Q1: Wakhe weva ngeTsotsitaal?

['Have you ever heard of Tsotsitaal?']

G: Ndiyayiva nj' iTsotsitaal.

['I just hear the Tsotsitaal.']

Q1: Er, uyivaphi?

['Er, where do you hear it?']

G: Er hlawumbi uyahamba ubhek' aph' e [a place]. Uye uve noko hay' andisaz' esi siXhosa sithethwa ngaba bantwana mhlawumbi balaph' ekoneni... Zezo Tsotsitaal k' ezo.

['Er maybe you are walking to [a place]. You hear no I don't know/ understand this isiXhosa spoken by these youth maybe who are in the corner... It's that Tsotsitaal.']

Q1: Ngabantw' abathen' abasebenzis' iTsotsitaal?

['What/who use Tsotsitaal?']

G: Heyi andiyazi inokuba ngotsotsi ndiye nditsho ke mna ke. Ndiye ndiqond' inokuba ngotsotsi because ukuba batheth' into wena ekufunek' ungayivayo uyabona?

['No I don't, maybe it's Tsotsis I usually say so. I usually think that maybe it's Tsotsis because they speak something that you must not hear you see?']

This excerpt evidences a correlation between Tsotsitaal and Tsotsis: that it is Tsotsis who speak Tsotsitaal, and that Tsotsitaal is used because Tsotsis 'speak something you must not hear', in other words, they are speaking it for the purposes of secrecy. The interviewer then ascertains what the respondent considers a Tsotsi to be:

Q1: Yintoni Utsotsi?

[‘What is Tsotsi?’]

G: **Utsotsi** ngumntu ongakujongelanga ukuba ndizakuth’ukujonge njanina? uyabona njengokuba ndisiza pha basekoneni bona? Mhlawumbi sebegqibil, bayayazi bona ukuba bathetha ntonina ngolwa lwimi lwabo. Mhlawumbi bathi mabeze kum bandisetshe, uyabona? Okanye bohluh’icell uyabona? Ngumnt’onjalo ke **mos**.

[‘The Tsotsi is the one who is not considering you, what can I say how does he look at you? Maybe they have already decided, they know what they speak in their language. Maybe they say they must come to me and search me, you see? Or forcefully take my cell phone you see? It’s a person like that.’]

Q1: Ewe ngu**tsotsi** lowo.

[‘Yes it’s a Tsotsi that one.’]

As this example clearly identifies, there is a correlation between speaking Tsotsitaal, and committing crime, in this case, theft, within the township.

The majority of Tsotsitaal speakers: young, urban, black men are consequently being aligned with an identity construction. This construction is invested with power dynamics, a legacy of apartheid, which may impact upon the possibilities available to this group of South Africans. This chapter will define the Tsotsi myth and the forces which have shaped it. Chapter four will subsequently contrast it with the reality of Tsotsitaal in use by speakers.

While this chapter emphasizes the social construction of reality, it does not deny the existence of crime in the townships. In FDA, discourses produce objects in one sense: meaning that crime is a real effect of a discourse of historical inequality, and one which respondents have to face every day in township life.

### 3.2 Examples: Tsotsitaal as a Violent Criminal Masculinity

Some speakers of Tsotsitaal are involved in crime and gangsterism in the townships. The respondents in the following interview evidenced the 'deepest' Tsotsitaal in the interview data, much of which the translator was unable to understand<sup>27</sup>. Knowledge of deep Tsotsitaal can be put to criminal purposes: gangsters may use Tsotsitaal to obscure communications and hide actions. The respondents admitted to having been criminals (although they stated they were trying to move away from crime), thus they are aligned with the common perception of Tsotsitaal speakers, the criminal end of the spectrum.

S: EBlouberg, *but it's not a job ke leya qha like ndifun' ukusuka kwicrime uyathola uyabona? Like andifun' ukuba ndimixer necrime uyabona, nje ukuba ndispane uyabona? ...kuba crime doesn't pay.*

[ 'I work in Blouberg, but it's not a job that one, I just want to move away from crime you see? Like I don't want to mix myself with crime you see? Just to work you see? ...because crime doesn't pay. ']

M: Doesn't pay crime doesn't pay, crime pays, crime pays [laughs].

Q1: Njani?

[ 'How? ']

M: Njani? Njani? Mandithethe ngesiNgesi.

[ 'How? How? Let me say it in English. ']

Q1: Ya ungathetha ngesiNgesi akukho ngxaki.

[ 'Yes you can say it. ']

M: Crime pays *ngoba* [in that], crime pays, crime pays, I will tell you... because, because you going to tell yourself,

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<sup>27</sup> Respondents suggested that many of the lexical items in Tsotsitaal come from prison slang, especially in the lexicon of the Tsotsitaal variety spoken by street gangs, which was seen to be much 'deeper' and packed with terms of no known origin (examples are given in section 5.4.5).

I am a former gangster but now I am a changed man ha-ah  
*yima* [stop] ...

S: Whatsoever, what happened I used to do crime getting  
money I was not arrested. I don't have a criminal record.

M: Because you succeed.

The two respondents were formerly from rival gangs, but good friends. One of them said of his friend that although they were rivals, 'I liked him because he will never shoot me understand?' A little later during the interview, whilst being asked for examples of Tsotsitaal, they had a slight clash of opinion and began to 'mildly' rebuke each other:

M: Ndakudubula unye mfethu, ndakudubula unye...  
['I will shoot you... I will shoot you...']

S: Uyaxoka.  
['You are lying.']

M: *This guy... I am gonna shoot him*, ndakudubula unye.  
['...This guy...I am going to shoot him, I will shoot you  
till you excrete.']

It was clear in the context of the interview that they were joking, but the language they used evoked gang violence. The respondents were aware of the assumptions that criminals speak Tsotsitaal, and suggested that the main reason we had approached them for an interview was because we thought they looked like criminals, and would therefore speak Tsotsitaal (which was actually true).

M: *Hayi it's difficult, because like, like ngoku ukhethe  
thina ngoku you choose us uyabona? Chose us because you  
want Tsotsitaal, here is my friend, he was a gangster, I  
was also a gangster...*

['No it's difficult, because like, like now you have  
chosen us now, you chose us you see? Chose us because you

want Tsotsitaal, here is my friend, he was a gangster, I was also a gangster...']

Violence and crime are part of everyday life in the townships. The following excerpts from interviews are examples of Tsotsitaal speakers talking about crime in their communities. In the following examples, the respondents are six Tsotsitaal speakers interviewed at Mzoli's, aged between 18 and 22. Two of them grew up in the Eastern Cape (East London), while three of them stated they were from Cape Town. One was unaccounted for. Several of them complain of the 'gangsterism' in Cape Town:

O6: Mna bendinopreferish ukuphila ngaphaya emaXhoseni...

['I would have preferred to live there in Eastern Cape...']

Q1: Ja.

O6: *Because* ub' apha eKaapst kugcwele igangsterism and abantwan' abancinci ba-bainvolved kwigangsta bebancinci.

['Because here in Cape Town there is a plenty of 'gangsterism' and young children are involved in 'gangsta' still young.']

While these respondents all spoke Tsotsitaal, they very much aligned themselves with education and against gangsterism, although the next example shows they were aware that lack of opportunity had an influence on crime:

Q1: Ha- *but I don't think* bubuchule obo because ke uyabona like into yohlal' elokishini ngoku uhlal' elokishini ungenzi nto awugeli, awuphangeli, awuspani awuthini uhleli nje, yeyiph' eny' int' ozawucinga ke ngokw' emveni kwaloo nto?

['No - but I don't think it's a right thing that one because now if you see like, the thing of staying in the

township now, stay in the township doing nothing you don't study, you don't work, you don't work you do nothing, you are just inactive, what else will think now after that thing?']

O1: Yicrime.

['It's crime.']

O4: Kukurober.

['It's to rob.']

The correlation of the urban township with crime is explicit, and the respondents are correlating crime with the lifestyle in a Cape Town township, rather than with Tsotsitaal itself: Tsotsitaal, or the Tsotsi style, was not directly linked to crime in their responses. They go on to describe a disrespectful attitude by some urban youth towards 'illiterate' parents who did not attend school, and say that even those who are relatively well-off may choose crime because that is the township life:

Q1: People get into crime because um...?

O2: Some have, some of them their parents are rich but it's just that they want township life...

Q1: Okay.

O2: Its about township life everything... smoking don't smoke... don't drink... like their parents say don't do that, don't do that they will say 'shut up you never go to school ... I know better than you because I am now in grade 10 at Woodstock School'...

Q1: Okay.

O2: But... some of them are rich at home but they just want a township life...

This indicates that while crime may be a result of lack of opportunities, it may also be part of the culture (or 'subculture') of township life for young men. The

reality of South African urban townships is that crime is a central part of life for many residents. Robbery is common and townships suffer the most in terms of some of the highest rape and murder statistics in the world (see the website of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation CSVr 2007). Historical circumstances and political subtexts underlie this situation, in a story which began with colonialism, and resulted in the Tsotsi identity construction. Perhaps the core characteristic of the Tsotsi identity, and the one which sets it off from 'petty' crime and distinguishes it as a construct, is that of violence.

The direct correlation of Tsotsitaal speech with township violence was a theme which emerged in a number of interviews conducted for this thesis. This first example was during an interview with a group of young girls (all around the age of 20) who were mostly born in the Eastern Cape but living in Cape Town for a few years. They were asked what they thought of Tsotsitaal, and stated that the language can cause one to be 'beaten'<sup>28</sup>:

Q1: O, okay so uthi uthi uthi inantsika awudibani ne nesiTsotsi?

['O, okay so you say you say you say [that] you don't like Tsotsi?']

G1: NesiTsotsitaal, siyabethisa *sometimes*.

['With Tsotsitaal, it makes one to be beaten sometimes.']

The respondent went on to describe how, if someone used a Tsotsitaal word that they did not fully understand in the wrong context, and did not realise they were swearing, they may be 'assaulted' for it.

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<sup>28</sup> The work of Rudwick, Shange and Nkomo (2006) on gay and lesbian language is of relevance here; in their work, women who speak Tsotsitaal are sometimes considered lesbians by black African males, although I did not encounter this perception in my relatively small database.

The same group in the following excerpt give examples of some Tsotsitaal terms they do not understand. The terms include *twenty-eight*, which appears to refer to one of the prison/street gangs which have a presence in Gugulethu. *Four-five* refers to a penis in Tsotsitaal. It is unclear what *six-nine* refers to. Again the perception by the respondents is that misuse of Tsotsitaal will cause a girl to be beaten.

G1: Kukho neento ze**four-five** uyabon' iintw' ezinjeya?

Int**twenty-eight** iintw' uyabon' iintw' ezinjeyana uyabona?

['There are also things of 'four five' you see things like those? The 'twenty eight', things you see, things like those you see?']

G2: Awuyazi wena ub' ithini.

['You don't know what it says.']

G1: Awuyazi wena **itwenty-eight** ukuba itheth' ukuthini.

['You don't know what the twenty eight means.']

Q1: I**four-five**?

['The four five?']

G1: Yho! ndizakuzazelaphi?

['Yho! Where will I know them?']

Q1: O, alright, alright, alright hayi ke-e-r...

['O, alright, alright no e-r...']

G1: Ufumanise kuthiwe hayi ningamasix nine nina xa ufuna hayibo yinton'isix nine okanye naw' uphindise naw'ulisix nine avel'akubethe.

['You find they say no you are six nines when you want no what is six nine, or you will say so too, you are also a six nine, he will beat you.']

In the following excerpt, the girl is first role-playing meeting a Tsotsi, and copies the way that a Tsotsi speaks (the words underlined in bold are Tsotsitaal terms she has mimicked), and she then describes how a Tsotsi will slap you if you

'pretend to be old'. This refers to speaking in an 'old-fashioned' manner, or 'primly', rather than in the urban fashion.

G2: Nezandla zakhe, ukub' uyathetha yilaway yakhona, nje eksê yintonina wena freestana? Uyava? Kube sekukhal' freestana wena?

['And his arms, if he speaks it's that way of it, just 'ek sê'! What you understand? You hear then there will you understand?']

G3: Uyazelaphi...?

['Where do you know it...?']

G2: Umile ke ngoku wena... umamele mhlawumbi uzakuthetha *not* la ntw' ayenzayo...

['You stand still now... you are listening maybe you are not going to speak the way he does...']

G1: Uzakuthetha... asuk' akufak' isihlanu njebungamphenduli... hayibo yintoni? kuthen' ungandiphenduli?

['You will talk... he will slap you if you're not answering him... no no what? Why are you not answering me?']

G2: Uzenza mdala.

['You pretend that you're old']

G1: Uzenza mdala wena akufak' impama

['You pretend as if you are old he slaps you']

According to interview extracts the perception of Tsotsitaal speakers is clearly that of a violent masculinity. As will be shown below, the Tsotsi identity construct that these examples all refer to (and the alliance between Tsotsitaal speaker and criminal) was constructed under apartheid through the application of what Foucault describes as 'technologies of power'.

### 3.3 Discourse

The argument is made in the remainder of this chapter that apartheid equates to a 'discourse' which has produced Tsotsis as a class of 'delinquent' through what Foucault calls the 'mechanisms of power' which support its economic infrastructure. 'Delinquency' in Foucault is a construction not a consistent subject. It is argued that because of the historical circumstances, the concept of delinquency is applied broadly to black urban male youth, but that in fact the Tsotsi identity is one facet of a complex stratification of township identities, a subculture, which will be discussed in chapter four.

As discussed in the theoretical framework (section 2.3), discourse has several applications in sociology. The Foucauldian approach is to consider the ways in which discourse serves and upholds power in society, where power is a description of hegemonic relations on the body (Foucault 1979: 27). In Foucault power is the force which drives the ways in which society understands itself – what Foucault calls 'knowledge' (Foucault 1976). While power often results in *unequal* relations (backed by ideologies, e.g. the class structure in Europe), Foucault states: 'we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1979: 194).

It does this through the production of knowledge through discourses, which are an effect of the flows of power, and which define and produce knowledge by governing 'the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about' (Hall 2001: 72). Discourses furthermore influence the practical application of ideas – a discourse can influence laws, for example, which then regulate people's conduct in society (Hall 2001: 72). Therefore, while power *produces* these discourses, power is also served by the discourses; they govern and influence the actions of society, which means that power structures are upheld by the very discourses they produce.

The ways in which a discourse regulates the behaviour of society is the subject of Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish* (1979). The discourse he describes has at its heart notions of 'normality' and 'delinquency' which produce citizens either as functioning subjects, or alternatively as delinquents, criminals and mad people, in need of correction or punishment. He traces the development of the penal and carceral system in Europe and shows how disciplinary institutions came about in response to industrialization, taking the place of earlier regulatory systems such as torture and execution. According to Foucault (1979: 54) Rusche and Kirchheimer in 1939 stated that torture and execution were the 'effect of a system of production in which labour power, and therefore the human body, has neither the utility nor the commercial value that are conferred on them in an economy of an industrial type'. Since industrialization, systems of punishment and control have undergone change due to the commercial value subsequently placed on the human body. As Foucault writes:

A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do as one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and efficiency that one determines. (Foucault 1979: 138)

In Foucault's concept, all types of discipline, such as in the form of military training, schools, mental institutions and correctional institutions (what Foucault calls 'technologies of power'), are part of a discourse which serves industrial society and its flows of power by creating 'docile bodies', which are necessary for the systems of production of that particular social formation. Consequently, power, in the sense of hegemonic relations on the body, is not something that the state *exerts on* society; rather, what produces society, including the *need for* the state and justice systems is a discourse dictated by the flows of power, and the need for power over bodies (Foucault 1979: 27).

The 'normalization' of people to keep them in the system, for example those who 'transgress' the laws of society, involves coercion, in the sense of discipline applied through the carceral mechanisms. Foucault suggests furthermore that there is no 'central law' which is being transgressed, but that laws themselves serve the apparatus of production. However, he argues that there is a need in society for a role to define the place of our body in the system, and that outside the system are outcasts, mad people, useless bodies (Foucault 1979: 29-30). As in Gramsci (1971: 483), a discourse is also consented to by society itself, and consent coupled with coercion, can 'fix' meaning, or achieve hegemony. Consent is realised through ideology. According to Foucault, the 'Ideologues' constituted a discourse which provided a recipe to control men through ideas:

Let us hear once more what Servan has to say: the ideas of crime and punishment must be strongly linked and 'follow one another without interruption... When you have thus formed the chain of ideas in the heads of your citizens, you will then be able to pride yourselves on guiding them and being their masters. A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more; and on the soft fibres of the brain is founded the unshakeable base of the soundest of empires'. (Foucault 1979: 102 [from J. M. Servan, *Discours sur l'administration de la justice criminelle*, 1767])

Ideology therefore, is at the root of a discourse, and secures it, and the consent of the dominant group. Again, ideology is not something separate from society but it serves the methods of production in the same way that technologies of power do: it serves the flows of power in society. Ideology re-produces society and provides bodies to serve the methods of production. Ideology in Foucault '...stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant' (Foucault 1980: 118).

Foucault's theories are a useful way to understand the effects of colonialism and later apartheid in South Africa, where industrial society (particularly with the opening of the mines) set off a particular coercion of bodies. Both consent (by the dominant group) and coercion were involved in fixing the hegemony of apartheid in South Africa. Ideology (i.e., the classification of people based on racial stereotyping) underpinned the entire system, and reproduced people in relative subject-positions.

In South Africa, under colonialism, the dominant group co-opted the ideology of racism to its cause of organising society along racial lines. Racism was rooted in European coloniser attitudes towards Africans and other non-European groups. Europeans were considered a civilised and superior 'race' based on religion, Darwinian notions of evolution, and (today discredited) theories on the relative development of these races (Rogers & Bowman 2005). For example, the research of Dr. John Colin Carothers, an ethnopsychiatrist working in Africa between 1938 and 1950, in his book *The African Mind in Health and Disease* correlated physical difference (e.g. skin colour) with behavioural difference (Carson 1997). In doing so, he allocated attributes such as lack of intelligence, inordinate sexuality, laziness and violence to African people. Furthermore Africans were associated with crime. According to Jordan (1968: 4) one pre-eighteenth century statement regarding black people claimed: 'Another (as it were) innate quality they have [is] to steal anything they lay hands of, especially from Foreigners... this vicious humour [runs] through the whole race of Blacks' (Jordan 1968: 4).

Later on, when apartheid became entrenched in South Africa, it was supported by a dense ideological framework surrounding 'ethnicities' and national self-determination which conceptualised the African as rural. Under apartheid, this ideology was formalised firstly through religious themes and later in law (MacKinnon 2004; Verkuyl 1971) by the Afrikaans state. These divisions gave Europeans the right to differentiate groups in terms of civil rights and human rights. This supported the infrastructure, or economic basis, through the structuring of society to preserve the economic interests of the ruling minority,

which necessitated a large working class population. The system of production was served by producing a working-class based primarily on colour.

Foucault's concept of power-knowledge hinges on the state control of 'technologies of power' such as the prison system, schools, psychological institutes etc. The enterprise of apartheid was underpinned and reinforced by a series of laws and punishments (and resultant coercions and technologies of discipline such as prisons and mine compounds) designed to control the working class. Apartheid itself is a discourse in Foucault's terms: a particular structuring of society produced by flows of power, and upholding and reproducing those self-same flows of power through ideology and coercion. The task of coercion in South Africa has reproduced those early ideologies of criminality as an innate characteristic of particular racial groups, and at the same time, the objects themselves have been produced: crime in South Africa is a community reality.

### **3.3.1 Technologies of Power in South Africa**

Ideology reflexively supports discourses which society as a whole is governed by. As Foucault described of France at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, 'popular illegalities', or transgressions of the law which were a result of the imposition of new laws, induced in society a 'great fear' of a social mass who were thought to be subversive and criminal. This resulted in the 'myth of a barbaric, immoral and outlaw class which, from the empire to the July monarchy, haunted the discourse of legislators, philanthropists and investigators into working-class life' (Foucault 1979: 275). In South Africa, the imposition of new laws (e.g. pass laws, to be discussed below) resulted in a similarly criminalized societal segment, and 'great fear' was induced in the privileged Europeans to further promote apartheid measures.

In Foucault, as in South Africa, this resulted in penal theory based on the presumption that 'crime is not a potentiality that interests or passions have inscribed in the hearts of all men, but that it is almost exclusively committed by a

certain social class; that criminals... emerged 'almost all from the bottom rank of the social order' (Foucault 1979: 276 [from Comte, C. *Traité de Législation*, 1833]). Foucault (1979: 276) states that this implies that the law is not made for all, but rather that it was made for the few, and to be used on the 'most numerous and least enlightened'.

As presented in the theoretical framework (chapter two), as a society we construct reality, but we do this in the interests of some, and not others. There are vested interests in society which result in particular reproductions which serve the interests of the dominant group. Vested interests in South Africa were partly served through institutions, which 'managed' the working class and imposed the system upon them, and ultimately gave birth to the Tsotsi identity.

Identities are partly formed by laws, state structures, religion and state morality. The institutions particularly relevant to the experience of black and coloured South African males (although the effects were felt equally by females, with different identity effects that cannot be covered in this thesis) are mining compounds, prisons, and the confinements of governmental policies under apartheid such as the pass laws (which, while not in the strict sense of the word an institution, had the effect of an institution by which people, their identities and their physical bodies were constrained).

Whilst the overt validation for prisons was their reformatory function, Foucault describes this as justification for the enactment of revenge, and the removal of danger from society (Foucault 1979: 242). In practice, he claims, prison fails in reducing offences. In actual fact they encourage recidivism and turn 'the occasional offender into a habitual delinquent' (Foucault 1979: 272). He writes:

Can we not see here a consequence rather than a contradiction? If so, one would be forced to suppose that the prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offenses, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to

transgress the law, *but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection.* (Foucault 1979: 272 [my emphasis])

A general tactics of subjection served the power flows in apartheid society. Haysom (1981: 21) described how all-male colonial institutions such as mine compounds and prisons and legislation around these institutions (e.g. mine workers breaking contract) meant that a high percentage of black people had nominal criminal experience. Furthermore, during white domination, 'pass laws' were put in place to restrict the movement of black, Indian and coloured people around South Africa. The principle which lay behind apartheid, and to an extent pre-existed the period of Afrikaner government (MacKinnon 2004), was that of 'separateness': that the various racial categories would live in segregated areas and have self-governance in these 'homelands'. In practice, the requirement of non-whites for labour meant that while white people had access to the choicest land in urban regions, other groups were designated residential areas in the city which were usually on the periphery yet close enough to provide labour for industry and domestic labour (MacKinnon 2004; Glaser 2000). Pass laws controlled people's movements through these areas, and passes were allocated to non-whites to allow them to work in restricted areas. A coloured, Indian or black person with no legitimate work, and therefore no pass, could be arrested and detained or fined for transgression of these laws, if caught in an urban area with no legitimate pass (Glaser 2000).

Pass laws have contributed to crime in South Africa since their inception. As Van Onselen describes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century:

'Note' or Nongoloza organized allegiance with other gangs on the Witwatersrand while he was in prison. The gangs operated from the mine compounds, communicating with the prisons to obtain Note's orders through captured criminals and releases, mostly pass offenders. (Van Onselen 2001)

In the late 40s and 50s when apartheid became further entrenched, Glaser (2000: 81) describes how 'any African, whether born in the city or not, could be deemed a "vagrant" and expelled to the countryside'. Therefore, while a person may have had family in an area, he or she may not have a pass, and so routine fines and detention became a part of life for many people who remained in an area illegally after losing employment. This has resulted in a reproduction of the old colonial alignment between colour and crime. As Modisane (1986: 114) depicts it: '...I realised for perhaps the first time what the protective permit system did, in human terms, to the people who for some reason had not been issued with permits or had had them cancelled on expiry; people were turned into cunning law-breakers, apprehensive and ready to flee from their homes to evade the processes of law'. During the height of apartheid more than a million Africans were imprisoned each year for pass regulation contravention (Modisane 1986: 148). The illegal existence of Africans without a valid pass led to the necessity of making a living outside the law. Crime within these communities was destigmatised. Beer-brewing, another activity deemed illegal, was undertaken by many respected members of township communities, particularly women<sup>29</sup>. As Ellen Hellman wrote: 'Going to gaol for beer-brewing is bad luck. Hence going to gaol altogether tends to lose its moral stigma', and similarly, "getting by' without a pass is an indication of skill' (Glaser 2000: 62).

Of course, ideology also pervaded the process of criminalisation of Africans through these mechanisms. The employment situation was exacerbated by the perception of urban Africans as 'unreliable and defiant', resulting in illegal workers from the countryside being preferred over locals by employers (Glaser 2000: 98) to which urban Africans reciprocated with 'scorn for regular, arduous, poorly paid employment' (Glaser 2000: 98). Additionally, existing segregation technologies were extended through the response to burgeoning crime by the

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault (1979: 85) gives an interesting precedent, where transition to agriculture in France meant that previously accepted illegalities (free pasture, wood-collecting etc) were suddenly regarded as theft '(thus leading, among the people, to a series of chain reactions of an increasingly illegal, or, if one prefers the term, criminal kind...)'.

national government and the SAP (South African Police). The response was rooted in ideologies of the black 'savage' and involved 'spatial containment, controls on mobility, and the raid system'. These methods were designed more to increase white security, insulate them from the perceived 'threat' of black people and contain crime within the townships than to support the professed apartheid commitment to separate governance (Glaser 2000: 101).

Rather than combating illegality in the urban environment, therefore, pass laws actually produced it. Furthermore, '[y]oung men, more than any other section of the township community, were victimized by pass law implementation' (Glaser 2000: 81). This resulted in what Glaser describes as 'juvenile delinquency':

Influx control backfired tragically as a strategy for combating juvenile delinquency. Instead of allowing the administration to concentrate its energy and resources on a limited number of strictly legal urban youths, the pass laws created a massive population of influx-control refugees who lived a shadowy illegal existence in the townships. Hounded by police and without any chance of finding legal employment, their best chance for urban survival lay in joining criminal street gangs. (Glaser 2000: 40)

In this way, Tsotsi gangs were created by the mechanisms of power (Glaser 2000: 81). The young men who constituted the membership of these gangs were similarly bounded by discourse.

### **3.3.2 Tsotsis and Delinquency**

The construction of Tsotsi aligns with what Foucault describes as the construction of 'delinquency'. In Foucault, as we have seen, notions of criminality are socially constructed. The laws and systems of production and power of a particular social formation govern what people understand to be 'the norm' and conversely, a transgression of the norm. In *Discipline and Punish* he argues that the creation of these laws and systems actually constructed a class of offender,

the 'delinquent'. The notion of 'delinquent' relies on a constructed discourse of those who are 'normal' and those who are prone to crime (rather than real divisions, although crime is still often spoken about as though it were hereditary). Delinquency is created by 'othering': by constructing what is considered to fall outside the 'norm' as 'other'. Foucault describes the fabrication of the delinquent as a point of application of the power to punish, and as a foundation upon which contemporary technologies of discipline and punishment rest:

It is said that the prison fabricated delinquents; it is true that it brings back, almost inevitably, before the courts those who have been sent there. But it also fabricates them in the sense that it has introduced into the operation of law and the offense, the judge and the offender, the condemned man and the executioner, the non-corporal reality of the delinquency that links them together and, for a century and a half, has caught them in the same trap. (Foucault 1979: 255)

Foucault argues that 'delinquency' is intended to fulfil certain societal requirements; this 'other' is created through economic ideologies and technologies of power, and is part of the discourse which supports this power. By aligning them with Foucault's delinquents, Tsotsis can be seen as discursive products. Tsotsis exist even if they do not exist. The concept of 'delinquent', or alternatively, Tsotsi, exists 'before the crime and even outside it' (Foucault 1979: 252).

Individuals within this delinquent construction may also 'buy into' the concept. Foucault (1979: 260) described how notorious criminals in France would be 'displaying their crimes and enacting their misdeeds' through mechanisms such as tattooing, which bears curious parallels with the gang tattooing which is a feature of South African gang cultures (amongst other gang cultures). This hints at an agency which Foucault's determinist theory rarely alludes to. Crime can be rewarding in conditions of societal inequality, especially under a system such as apartheid where people may otherwise have few avenues open for improvement or gain.

Foucault (1979: 193) furthermore suggests that crime is in a way a process of individualization: the more abnormal a person is, the more individualized s/he becomes. This is taking back jurisdiction over one's body, even while submitting to the social flows of power. Foucault's conception was limited to a notion of reversed individualisation as a 'passive' result of industrial economies, in other words, that crime in a sense is built into the structure of our society. However, by incorporating a concept of agency into the theorisation, it can be fruitfully explained as a consequence of *unequal* relations, and this type of identity construction as a contestation of the hegemony and unequal flows of power.

The 'bracket' of delinquent or Tsotsi relates back to the ideology which permeated South Africa under apartheid, the belief that crime was primarily committed by a certain social group. The concept of Tsotsi was emblematic of young urban black men; conversely, in the ideological terms of the apartheid discourse, all young urban black men were embodiments of Tsotsis. Laws were made and applied to control and contain this threat, which happened to crossover significantly with another section of society that was a significant threat to the apartheid system: students who were active in the resistance movement.

### **3.3.3 Subcultures & Resistance**

*In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of 'incarceration', objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle. (Foucault 1979: 308)*

Although ideology is pervasive, hegemony and power are constantly struggled over. Historically, the Tsotsi construct (and its forerunners, the Witwatersrand gangs) has had some correlations with resistance to European rule. For example, in the following interview excerpt the speaker correlates Tsotsitaal with 'pantsula' (a style associated heavily with black townships especially during the struggle):

N: Even the Tsotsitaal it came during the time of pantsula when the students were rioting and stuff like that, so they were not conscious about it, it happened because the coloureds were like coming together with the blacks, they were trying to come up with a new style of speaking as youngsters, they were trying to make their statement known.

The above speaker implies that the formation of the Tsotsi construct was happening conjunctly with resistance to the apartheid state, although he does not go so far as to say that Tsotsis were active in the struggle. Nevertheless, in South Africa the hegemony – the discourse of apartheid – did not go uncontested: those who were not served by the flows of power contested it from the outset. Pass laws to an extent politicized, as well as criminalized, Tsotsis. The parallels here between Foucault's France (the 1780s to the Revolutions of 1848) and apartheid South Africa are interesting. He describes how crime and rebellion became aligned:

...not, as contemporaries said, [because] the leaders of popular agitation had been criminals, but because the new forms of law, the rigours of the labour regulations, the demands either of the state, or of the landowners, or of the employers, and the most detailed techniques of surveillance, increased the occasions of offences, and threw to the other side of the law many individuals, who, in other conditions, would not have gone over to specialized criminality. (Foucault 1979: 274-275)

This criminalization of political opposition resulted in 'a consequent increase in acts of violence' (Foucault 1979: 275).

The political dimension which pervades the criminal identity in South Africa aligns with Foucault's (1979: 273) 'popular illegalities' which were to an extent 'struggles against political regimes'. Foucault (1979: 273) argues that the

entrenchment of the prison was a way to serve the structures of power which were threatened by these popular illegalities. Therefore the resistance subculture reproduces state controls and measures, ultimately becoming a form of 'war', where 'disobedience was an act of hostility' (Foucault 1979: 57). In Foucault (1979: 57), signs of a rebellion are not different from a civil war; pass laws in South Africa pitted the power of the state against 'insurgents' of the laws of the state.

However, the political subtext behind crime in South Africa has on occasion been an adaptation of resistance ideology to justify criminal activities. An early example of the utility of resistance ideology in the organisation of South African gangs is that of Nongoloza, the revered ancestor of the prison gangs. As Van Onselen (2001: 387) describes, in 1912, '[m]onths before politically conscious blacks met to form the African National Congress [ANC], a black army on the Witwatersrand with branches as far afield as Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Pietermaritzburg was delivering a serious challenge to a repressive and privileged white state'. By juxtaposing Nongoloza's Ninevites with the ANC, Van Onselen paints the gang with the colours of resistance. The theory of why the Ninevites came into existence is often cited by researchers as a reaction to the conditions of wage labour on the Rand in the event of mining compounds (Steinberg 2004a). However, Nongoloza's gang did not emerge as a politically-motivated cause – they were not the Robin Hoods of the Rand, robbing from the rich and distributing to the poor. The gang early on robbed black mineworkers of their wages on highways on their way back to the compounds from work, and only later moved to housebreaking White-owned farms when the resistance ideology began to permeate gang lore (Van Onselen 2001: 386).

At this time the Ninevites began to develop an anti-Government agenda. Steinberg (2004a) argues that this agenda was a way to construct group identity around a quasi-political ideology. Furthermore he says that this ideology is still in evidence today in prison gangs, and that in regard to the myth of origin of the gangs and the story of Nongoloza, all present day numbers gangs agree that '...he

became a bandit because blacks were being disinherited of their land and forced to work like slaves in the mines'. He concludes that 'South Africa's prisons have incubated a fiercely anti-colonial ideology' (Steinberg 2004a). Nongoloza himself was ultimately revered in the same manner that Foucault (1979: 68) describes with the 'great' criminals, and his eventual fate (working for the prison authorities) is not acknowledged in prison gang myth (Steinberg 2004a).

Foucault (1979: 90) describes crime as the breaking of a pact with society that one is a member of. The Ninevites can be conceptualised as an antisociety in Halliday's terms, set up in direct opposition to society (Halliday 1978: 164). An antisociety reproduces the mechanisms of the social body in an attempt to reclaim autonomy over the body (Halliday 1978: 168-69). A political subtext is an ideal way in which to mobilize an antisociety.

Prisons in Foucault (1979: 233) reproduce 'with a little more emphasis, all the mechanisms that are to be found in the social body'. The South African prison gangs used these very mechanisms to generate an antisociety. The rank structure of first the Ninevites and later the prison gangs involved resistance through imitation (Steinberg 2004a). Discipline, such as that described by Foucault (1979: 150-57) is mimicked in prison gang structures. Time is organized and capitalized like a military operation (Foucault 1979: 157-60). The prison gangs system becomes a 'distorted reflection of the structure from which it arises' (Halliday 1978: 167). Haysom (1981) describes how the gangs provide an imaginary world and organisation that takes the edge off boredom and gives prisoners back some control. He furthermore demonstrates that the control itself is not imaginary: the judge and jury have as much power as in the institutions of the law in normal society: they can impose the death penalty or show leniency in a 'case'.

Steinberg describes the process by prisoners of identity retrieval and reclamation of the body in the following terms:

What better way to retrieve the adulthood prison has stolen than to borrow the agency of one's custodians? Instead of holding up an image of inmates to prison warders, the gangs hold up a mirror. 'We are what you are. You are an army, we are an army. Where you have a head of prison, we will have a Judge. Where you have a head of section, we will have a General. Whatever you do to us, we will do to you in turn. (Steinberg 2004a)

The prison is a symptom of European colonization. The resistance-identity may be viewed in relation to this: the prison was the symbol of the white man's power to punish – to make bodies docile, to force or entice them to work in the mines, or to 'normalize' into an acceptance of place and status. Under apartheid it was the right arm of the white state. Therefore the antisociety within the prison understood itself to be resisting the white state. It was a construction of 'other' in opposition to the dominant norm.

Whether or not there was any legacy of anti-colonial sentiment from these early gangs, the Tsotsi gangs outside prison appear to have been similarly informed by institutional experience, and exacerbated by pass laws; the effects of this subliminal politicization were to be felt as resistance to apartheid gained momentum.

Coupled with 'a ceiling on legitimate realisation of expectations' (Haysom 1981: 23), Tsotsis were motivated by antipathy towards the state. William Carr (in Glaser 2000: 61) wrote in 1957: 'The resorting to crime is a way of attempting to get one's own back against a hostile society in whose functioning one plays no part'. The culture growing under the apartheid regime was seen as a reaction to inequality, and was described in the language itself: Ellen Hellman (in Glaser 2000: 62) wrote in 1953: 'The growing prevalence of an attitude which condones theft from a European and describes it by the vernacular 'work' points to the emergence of a tradition of this nature.'

According to Glaser (2000: 172) prior to clearing the Western Areas in 1954, '[a]lthough the majority of township youths had no interest in political organizations, it would be incorrect to assume that *tsotsis* lacked political consciousness. Through everyday experiences of poverty, discrimination, blocked social mobility, and police harassment, *tsotsis* developed an antipathy to the establishment and to institutions of authority'. This antipathy was played out through violence and crime within the townships.

Modisane describes the way in which alienation from political process and rejection of the state led to some strange sympathies between activists and Tsotsis:

The law is white, its legislators are white, its executive authority is white, and yet we were being criticised for not flying to the standard of the law; we who were black and therefore denied the responsibility of formulating this law or being ruled by consent ... discrimination is contained in the law and the police are the instruments of black oppression, and if I had to choose between the *tsotsis* and the police my vote would be cast for the *tsotsis*. This is the morality of black South Africa. (Modisane 1986: 63)

The political movement to an extent utilised violence and crime by the Tsotsis. Glaser (2000: 172) shows how, although the Tsotsis had a limited role compared with that of the students during the struggle of the 50s and 60s, they were not apolitical. The activists (particularly students) and Tsotsis were two distinct (and, on occasion, warring) groups<sup>30</sup>, yet during the riots of 1976 the Tsotsis were involved, especially in the more overtly criminal endeavours (looting, hijacking etc) (Glaser 2000: 214). Therefore, although Tsotsis were not politically active, their violence and anarchic behaviour was condoned and co-opted by the liberation movement. Conversely, and in a replication of delinquents during the nineteenth century (Foucault 1979: 279), the Sowetan riots were exploited by

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<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the split between political movements and the Tsotsi subculture was partly linguistic: '...the Black Consciousness philosophy was "best articulated in English." The gang constituency spoke *tsotsitaal* and was largely inarticulate in English. Few activists seemed able or willing to engage with gangsters in their own language. The movement, it appears, disapproved of *tsotsitaal* both because of its criminal connotations and because of its Afrikaans component' (Glaser 2000: 169).

gangs: 'in an atmosphere of racial polarization, robbery of white-owned or "collaborationist" property lost any criminal stigma in Soweto; it was seen almost as a positive act of symbolic revenge. Gangs, according to a Pimville resident "continued with their criminal activities in the name of the struggle"' (Glaser 2000: 172).

Gang activity and membership during the later stages of apartheid resistance blurred further with political activism. According to Glaser (2000: 173), after 1976, youth who fled from Soweto to the ANC camps were often 'raw street youth' who became valuable soldiers because 'they were not scared of death'. Furthermore, in the 80s 'youth' made the townships ungovernable – 'consistent with territoriality of gang culture' (Glaser 2000: 188).

The resistance identity of Tsotsis under apartheid was a subcultural positioning in opposition to the 'norm' – the apartheid state. In return, the ideology of the dominant culture was impacted upon by the Tsotsi narrative, which reflexively reinforced existing prejudices and racist narratives. The effect was a self-reproducing class of delinquent.

Ultimately the alignment between Tsotsis, or gangsters, and political activism, impacted on gang formations in Cape Town in the 80s and 90s. As apartheid drew to a close, the gangs which were emerging on the Cape Flats co-opted political narratives. According to Steinberg, some of the charismatic gang leaders of the 80s:

...crafted their own heroism by deftly inserting a subtle political subtext into their discourse. They started off as dirt-poor ghetto kids under a racial dictatorship, they said, and they had become the richest and most powerful men in the province in spite of that. They had defied apartheid, not just by breaking its laws, but by becoming omnipotent. (Steinberg 2004a)

According to Irvin Kinnes (2000: 13), following democracy there was an expectation of significant changes. However, the situation of many people did not immediately or significantly improve, and this was cited as political justification for criminality. Meanwhile, the prison gangs, a legacy of Nongoloza's political ideology, suffered a similar disappointment. Expecting a general amnesty, they were disappointed by a restricted amnesty which only applied to political prisoners, rather than the general amnesty they had hoped for. They believed that alongside political prisoners within the institution, they had resisted apartheid through their prison gang activities, and they saw the restricted amnesty as a 'Cain and Abel betrayal' (Steinberg 2004a) by the ANC which did not endear the new government to them. Continued politicisation, therefore, despite the transition to majority rule, was still centred on perceived (and real) inequalities and the justification of criminal activities as a response to an uncaring state.

#### **3.3.4 A Certain Masculinity**

The historical construction of Tsotsis therefore was achieved by the mechanisms of power and was reinforced by the reaction to those same mechanisms, a resistance narrative which manifested itself in an antisociety (and an antilanguage) in Halliday's terms.

This kind of violent masculine construction is a result of responses to historical stresses such as colonialism and apartheid. Glaser (2000: 190) writes that 'the historical construction of masculinity' is at the heart of the youth crisis in South Africa. By this he is referring to a masculinity which has been constructed in such a way, that violence, both political and social, are core features. The perpetuation of the discourse of the 'Black Savage' has formed part of this narrative. South African masculinities are further impacted upon by narratives such as that of the 'warrior' Zulu culture (originating in myth and fact surrounding Shaka Zulu and the Zulu wars) (Harries 1993) and the 'dignity' of violence under conditions of unequal rule (Modisane 1986). At the same time, the perceived necessity of violence in ending the apartheid era and complications such as violence resulting

from the split between the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party) and the ANC, and the hostel riots (Kynoch 1999) have contributed to South African masculinities over the last half century.

While it is impossible, due to its pervasiveness, to cover all the aspects of the construction of masculinity in South Africa within this thesis, these influences have had an impact on the Tsotsi identity construction. As stated previously, Tsotsis originated as a subculture but a side-effect of the political situation at the time was violence being seen as a reaction to coercion, and therefore to an extent condoned. Modisane (1986: 63) links the rise of violent crime to the apartheid system: 'With our silence, the indifference of the law, the strain of being black in South Africa, we produced men and boys with long records of murder...' He illustrates through a personal narrative that people perceived black life to be cheap in the eyes of South African law during the era of the Tsotsis:

'The law is encouraging them.'

'Three years is cheap for a man's life.'

'Anyway, Potoiki got what he was looking for,' Lazarus said. 'If these tsotsis kill each other off like that Sophiatown can be a good place. The police are hopeless, they don't care'...

'The police are only interested in Passes and liquor,' Moffat said.

'Yah, but kill a white man,' William Dumba said, 'then you'll see our police turning the place upside down.'

'Kill a black man and it's three years,' Moffat said. 'They like it when the perkies, the monkeys, kill each other.' (Modisane 1986: 52)

This also had an effect on identity formation – the lack of value accorded to life, that of a person's own or that of others. As Modisane testifies, in Sophiatown in the Tsotsi era, brutal murders took place between rival gangs in the community. Modisane formed a street corner gang in reaction to the violence around him. He speaks as though there were little or no alternative to violence, that the history that had gone before dictated the continued violent patterns off successive

generations, that violence within a township had to be met with violence in order for an individual to survive. Violence and crime are professed as a way of achieving respect, and what Modisane terms 'dignity'. During the Sophiatown Tsotsi era, he states 'the tsotsis were violent men, the force of violence was the only voice they respected' (Modisane 1986: 67). He goes on to discuss how this alters their relationship to apartheid and the white minority by offering a kind of rebuke:

...the white man fears the tsotsis who are perhaps among the only Africans who have personal dignity; they answer white arrogance with black arrogance, they take their just desserts from a discriminating economy by robbery and pillage. The educated African is confined by academic rationalisations, the tsotsi is a practical realist; he is sensitive and responds to the denials and the prejudice with the only kind of logic Western man understands and respects. (Modisane 1986: 228-29)

The logic of the Tsotsi was a violent logic. According to Glaser (2000: 105), in Soweto a limitation on expectations and possibilities for youths meant that gangsters from famous gangs within South Africa, and from movies (particularly from the US) were idolised and became role models. He states that there was a 'fairly clear correlation between early school-leaving and violent, antisocial gangsterism' (Glaser 2000: 106). Gang culture, according to Glaser (2000: 106), was concerned with 'street wisdom' rather than regular employment, which was mocked as 'undignified and submissive', or education which was associated with 'discipline, drudgery, and corporal punishment'. This also had a linguistic aspect: Tsotsitaal was represented as the language of streetwise 'clevers', while Glaser (2000: 133) argues '...speaking English could often hamper social acceptance as it was seen as a sign of showing off education. *Tsotsis* felt that "teachers have the knowledge but they [the *tsotsis*] have the sense".' These youth gangs '...simultaneously held middle-class values in contempt and aspired to middle-class levels of comfort and consumption. They were eager to display their wealth, power, and success...' Ultimately, according to Glaser (2000: 81) '...the *tsotsi* subculture separated itself from mainstream society by embracing criminality,

rejecting the work ethic, and glorifying violence.’ This comment, however, begins to evidence the correlation of the ‘subculture’ in a wider sense, with the Tsotsi construct, as a delinquent class of youth. This still has implications today in perceptions of the subculture which utilises Tsotsitaal.

Violence has remained a key feature of perceptions of Tsotsis (in the sense of gangsters), and manifestations of gangsterism in Cape Town today: both prison gangs and their township equivalents utilise violence in practice. Institutions such as prisons promote the deprivation of freedom, and consequently human rights. In this context, violence and gang society may be seen as a way of reclaiming autonomy over the body and identity (Foucault 1979: 193). Steinberg (2004a) sees violent masculinity as a way to resist ‘infantilisation’. This is equally as applicable in the case of apartheid South Africa where black men were considered ‘boys’ in the colonial tradition, as in the context of prison of which he writes, where ‘the initiation ritual – the stabbing, the beatings, the solitary confinement – is about the making of men, *ndotas*’ (Steinberg 2004b: 220). The experience of prison for many black people under apartheid may as a result have contributed to a de-sensitisation to violence. If a short-term prisoner is recruited into a gang, in number gang tradition, he is required to stab or murder (Haysom 1981: 23; Steinberg 2004a). This has implications for escalating crime rates: released prisoners have experienced ‘moral blunting’ due to the socially structured situations of prison life (not the human material per se) (Haysom 1981: 31) resulting in violent street gang culture. The perpetrators of violence within prison (the ‘big men’) – take particular notions of masculinity away with them. This can feed back into extremely gendered, violent, gang culture on the outside. According to Gear & Ngubeni (2002) social and institutional violence is reflexive:

...the connections between what goes on inside prison and in the rest of society need to be engaged with. Identities based on the use of violence, aggression, manipulation and subordination, played out on a daily basis between men and women, and reaffirmed or competed for amongst men, are far from foreign to us. Indeed, much

of what we hear from respondents resonates strongly with peoples' treatment of each other beyond prison walls...Prisoners are not in the business of creating from scratch a whole new society, but rather in drawing on and adapting identities and ways of relating that they bring with them from outside. In turn, these intensified and adapted social processes will be fed to the outside when prisoners are released. (Gear & Ngubeni 2002: 83)

The prison gangs, operating outside prison in the townships, contribute to violence in the community. In a study of violent gang culture in Manenberg (a historically coloured township in the Cape Flats) Elaine Salo states that 'violence is not an arbitrary action' (Salo 2005). She argues that studies have shown that violence is a social act, and is both meaningful and reflexive.

The numerous anthropological studies of physical violence have shown that violence is not an arbitrary action, "devoid of historicity, meaning or reflexivity" (Schmidt and Schroder 2001: 18). At the level of the local, violence has been shown to be an inherently social act, firstly expressing a relationship between the perpetrators, the victims as well as the witnesses or the observers and secondly conveying meaning to the actors involved. In Manenberg, gang violence is not a gratuitous, empty expression of male aggression: it not only symbolises these men's marginal position of masculinity within the social structure, but also creates and reproduces the meanings of personhood and community in the local context. (Salo 2005)

Gear and Ngubeni (2002) argue that violence can be used to express 'manhood', and to make claims to power, especially in conditions of marginalisation. Violence is viewed as an identity-building technique within a community.

Violence does not occur in a vacuum but rather is embedded in the way that people have become accustomed to relating to each other. It is often thought of, for example, as a viable way to respond to conflict. Violence is also wrapped up with particular identities, often with notions of masculinity and may be used as an expression of 'manhood'. Or it may constitute a response to a sense of marginalization and be acted out as a way of asserting a claim to power, often in

contexts where there is a sense of broad disempowerment. Attempts to reduce violence have to connect with the meanings and identities through which violence is enacted if they are to have any impact. (Gear & Ngubeni 2002: 2)

The construction of the Tsotsi identity, which took place through broad disempowerment, is the construction of a violent masculinity which is the identity that people refer to when they speak of Tsotsis. As we saw at the start of this chapter, the embeddedness of violence in South African township life is evidenced by some of the testimonies in this research.

### **3.4 Conclusions**

As illustrated at the end of chapter one (section 1.2.6), the alignment of the concept of Tsotsi with violence and crime is evidenced in contemporary culture by the film with the same title (Hood 2005). Furthermore there was evidence, during the course of this research that this is a common, or 'default' perception of Tsotsitaal speakers. Respondents have often exhibited negative reactions to the word: during a data-gathering trip to the former Transkei, one young man was asked (jokingly) whether he was a Tsotsi, whereupon he became quite upset and angry and said it was dangerous to ask that question, that it could offend someone, or draw the attention of a 'real' Tsotsi. This kind of reaction suggests that the concept of Tsotsi is verging on the taboo.

The discussion in this chapter has centred on how criminals have been produced in South Africa by apartheid institutions and mechanisms of power. Furthermore it has been suggested that alongside the production of actual criminals, apartheid produced an ideology of criminality, which bundled together everyone who falls into a particular group in society, producing a class of delinquent called Tsotsis. The language of Tsotsitaal is spoken by many young black men in urban townships, amongst a particular subculture. This subculture is conflated with the delinquent construction which stands as the extreme case. Yet historically, the

bracket of young black men in urban townships has been stratified. Glaser (2000: 108) described different stratifications within the Tsotsi construct, and respondents reflect similar stratifications today. Tsotsitaal is aligned across a spectrum of identities, and its purpose is more complex than merely an 'argot' or language of criminals. If Tsotsitaal therefore is not consistently aligned with crime, what are its other functions? What other purposes does it meet in the variety of interactions in which it is used? To pursue this question, Tsotsitaal speakers themselves were approached. One of the responses was that it is a language of 'guys'. When we start to unpack this, we begin to see quite a different masculinity emerge.

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## Chapter 4 THE TSOTSITAAL SUBCULTURE

### 4.1 Introduction

The question considered in this chapter is, 'What is the purpose of Tsotsitaal? What does its use achieve for its speakers? The concept of Tsotsi aligns with crime, but when we unpack the *purpose* of Tsotsitaal, we can begin to see a number of alternative themes and identity alignments. When considering the majority group of speakers – the young, urban, black males who use Tsotsitaal, the definition of this group itself can lead the way to an explanation. Identity is constructed through a dialogue with 'other' – through difference. Tsotsitaal marks difference within a number of themes.

- Speakers are young – and define themselves by difference with the older generation.
- Speakers are urban – and define themselves against the rural.
- Speakers are black – and define themselves in relation to a particular black subculture, with accompanying cultural expressions (e.g. music, clothes).
- The speakers (for the most part male within the thesis data) define themselves in the sense of a particular masculinity, which involves being 'streetwise' or 'clever'.

This is a much more multifaceted conceptualisation of the Tsotsitaal speaker than a simplistic one of 'criminal', and takes into account the wider subculture and field of use in townships. This section seeks to circumscribe the domain which marks this broader subculture. Criminality and violence are indeed enmeshed in the subculture which has given birth to the language Tsotsitaal, yet the 'criminal, violent gangster' identity that is associated with the concept is often significantly removed from Tsotsitaal speakers' own perceptions of themselves.

The following chapter gives examples from the data of the themes above, and

pursues the argument that the 'Tsotsi' is not the consistent subject that is conceptualised; and that the Janus-face of the Tsotsi identity is a national 'project identity' for urban black youth, a subculture which is trying to connect particularly with urban black American identities, and which is expressed through the Tsotsi style: language, clothing, music and mannerisms.

## 4.2 Peer Groups

Rather than an alignment with criminality, Tsotsitaal speakers in the data testified that it was a language of friendship groups, of peers. Even the two ex-gangsters (see section 3.2), despite having been involved deeply with crime and gangsterism in the township, did not conflate speaking Tsotsitaal with crime:

Q1: So do you speak "Tsotsitaal?"

M: Yeah I do speak Tsotsitaal.

Q1: And when? Or you just speak it all the time?

M: I speak it when I am sitting with my friends.

This speaker (who was in his late twenties) used Tsotsitaal when communicating within his peer groups rather than all the time, which may suggest a generational divide. Another young male respondent had the following to say about perceptions of the older generation:

Q1: Kukhona abantu abalayo ukuyithetha iTsotsitaal, mhlawumbe abantu abadala kanje... Bangafuni ukuba...?

['Are there people who refuse to speak Tsotsitaal, maybe older people, like... Who don't want to...?']

N: Anangafuni ukuyiva mhlawumbi ithethwa?

['Maybe who don't want to hear it being spoken?']

Q1: Eh eh. Okanye abangafuni bona ukuyithetha.

['Yes. Or who don't want to speak it themselves.']

N: Yah, banintsi.

['Yes, many']

Q1: Intoni izizathu zabo abazinikayo?

['What are the reasons they give?']

N: Izizathu zabo bacinga intobana mhlawumbi xa uthetha iTsotsitaal unguntu ekawabanjwa wayobantinta okanye unguntu o-wrong-o, abanye abantu. Abanye abantu babona intobana bona mhlawumbi ngabaxhaka njega bengathethi iTsotsitaal nje, uyabo. Okanye unento zakho ozenzayo ezi-wrong-o kuba uthetha iTsotsitaal kanti ayikho njalo. Uyakwazi ukuthetha iTsotsitaal ngoku unguntu ufana nabanye abantu ungazange wamoshanto emntwini.

['Their reasons are they think that maybe if you speak Tsotsitaal you are a person who has been arrested and spent time in prison or you're a wrong [bad] person, other people [think that]. Other people see [think] that maybe they are fools that they can't speak Tsotsitaal, you see. Or you have things that you do that are wrong [and people assume] it's because of speaking Tsotsitaal whereas it's not like that. You can speak Tsotsitaal even though you are just another person like other people without having spoilt/damaged anybody's anything.']

In his view, the older generation sometimes conflated Tsotsitaal with crime, or with experience of prison. In contrast, he continues by describing its purpose in terms of peer groups, in a particularly eloquent description of the way Tsotsitaal works within the young male township community:

Q1: Mm. Abantu abatheni abathetha iTsotsitaal? *Like...*

['Mm. What kind of people speak Tsotsitaal? *Like...*']

N: *Like* abantu abathetha iTsotsitaal, ndizothini na ngabantu abatheni? Mhlawumbi ilanto yokuzixelela 'Yah, ndingu-outie'. And ungu-outie nje, uyahlangana uya-mix-ana

nama-outie. Then ufumanise ukuba, yah, sure, u-mix-ana nama-outie nje unguntu othetha ngoluhlobo. Uthathe lanto uqonde intoba 'Ok...' Uphinde uve umtu ethetha ngoluhlobo, uthathe lanto uqonde ukuba, 'Ok...' And iTsotsitaal, senditsho ndingathini na?, yinto ekwaziyo ukuhlanganisa ama-outie, ndingase nditsho kanjalo - ispecific kuma-outie. 'Cause xa ndithetha ngoluhlobo uyaqonda 'Eish, hayi lo-outie ngu-outie ngulova uguluva lo sure! Inja yam', uyabo. Nje kanjalo.

[ 'Like, people who speak Tsotsitaal, I'll say what kind of people are they? Maybe it's that thing of telling yourself, 'Yes, I'm a guy'. And as a guy you meet and you mix with [other] guys. Then you find that, yes, correct, as you are mixing with guys you are a person who speaks this way. You take that and you understand that it must be... 'Ok...' Again you hear someone speaking that way, you take that thing [what s/he said] and understand that, 'Ok...' And Tsotsitaal, I mean what can I say?, it's something that can join together guys, I can say that - it's specific to guys. 'Cause when I speak that way, you understand/know 'Eish, no, this guy is a guy; he's a 'lova', a 'guluva' this one, sure! My dog', you see. Just like that. ']

This example encapsulates some of the most central themes to the self-identity of Tsotsitaal speakers. A *lova* or *guluva* in this excerpt refers to a streetwise person, while the camaraderie is presented as particularly male-orientated. The speaker's concept of Tsotsitaal is that of camaraderie rather than criminal activity; that it joins together rather than excludes, that it is for mutual understanding, not for secrecy. Alternatively, in the following excerpt, the respondent is describing how he and his friends keep the language secret, and if someone understands a term they change it.

O3: If you understand we must change.....

Q1: How, what, you're saying you keep it secret? It's a secret language?

O6: Every time he... we must change it all the time.

Q1: Okay, but it's a, I mean is it just with your friends or...?

O6: Ja, it goes around, it goes around.

However, the respondents, a group of young men all around the age of twenty, go on to state that rather than for criminal purposes, the secrecy function is a way to obscure their plans from their 'Olady'; their mother:

O2: Ja uyakwaz' ukuyibe uyakwazi ukuyithetha *like* i-olady lingakuva,

*like* uthi *like*, *like* uba uzawuy' endaweni i... uthi eksê ndifun'uyibetha ngesikhath' esithile uyabona... uzangajampisi okaylike ndizawuthath' uthath' icover uyabona *like*...? *Like* awuzuyithetha *like*, *like* ndifun' uyibetha, ndifun' uku... endaweni ethile, *like* okay ndiyibethe... *if like* aligcwali ngendawo ethile *like* iOlady lakho... ufun' uhamba... eKhayelitsha eClubini...

['Ja you can put it you can speak it like the old lady don't hear you, like you say like, like that you will go somewhere the... you say 'ek sê I want to 'beat it' ['go' in Tsotsitaal] at a particular time you see... you must not leak the information okay like I will take you must take the cover you see like...? Like you won't say it like, like I want to 'beat it', like I want to... in a particular place, like okay I'm 'beating it'... if like, she doesn't like a particular place like, your old lady, [and] you want to go [to] Khayelitsha in a club.']

In these examples, a picture begins to emerge of a way of communicating which is also a way of building an urban identity, and negotiating relationships with contemporaries. The following sections will consider four aspects of the urban identity and peer groups: the urban alignment, the generational emphasis, the 'streetwise' identity, and the subcultural forms.

#### **4.2.1 Urban/Rural**

Tsotsitaal for its speakers is a compilation of signs which are innately linked to the urban context. It is a marker of 'being urban'<sup>31</sup>. During the interviews for the research project on Language and Migration in Cape Town, one of the key question themes was what people perceived the differences to be, between life/people in the Eastern Cape and in Cape Town. This kind of discussion quite regularly recalled a particular lexicon associated with the city, and Tsotsitaal was mentioned specifically as an urban phenomenon.

In the example below, the speaker suggests that while some people from rural areas can speak Tsotsitaal, they learn it from people who come from the cities.

Q1: So what kind of people in the Eastern Cape speak Tsotsitaal?

T: Sometimes people that, people that come from like urban areas who come stay in the Eastern Cape. Most the people there they learn the Tsotsitaal from them.

This indicates that Tsotsitaal originates in the cities and spreads to rural areas through back-migration. Another respondent states that 'you cannot just get here already speaking the language spoken here'; that it must be learned in the urban context. In the following interview, the respondents were two men, both over the age of fifty, and originally from the Eastern Cape. They did not know Tsotsitaal

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<sup>31</sup> Glaser (2000: 108) describes a similar urban/rural split during the historical development of the code (see section 1.2.2).

while they were growing up, but they testify that in the city they have picked up bits here and there:

Q2: Wena tata uyakwazi ukubeva abantw' abatheth' iTsotsitaal?

['You father do you hear the people who speak Tsotsitaal?']

T: He!

['What!']

G: Sigqitha kuni nje niyithetha, sigqitha kuni niyithetha, siyazi ukuba nithetha ntonina.

['We pass through you while you speak it, we know what you say.']

T: He mfondini kufana nento yokokuba kukho umsebenzi aph' elokishini, ukhona le Tsotsitaal ithethw' apha phambi kwakho uman' usabela ukuba xa kuthwa kuthiwanina.

['Hey my fellow it's like if there is something/custom here in the township, you are here this Tsotsitaal is being spoken here in front of you, you always respond so that you know if they say this what do they mean.']

Q1: Ud' uyifunde?

['Till you learn it?']

T: Ude ke ngoku uyibamb' eny' into ukub' itheth' oku noku noku uyibamba ngolo hlobo...

['Till now you grab another thing that it means this and that and that, you get it that way...']

Q2: Ewe.

['Yes.']

G: Uyayaz' ukuba sasikhule singayazi...

['Do you know that we grew up not knowing it...']

T: Ingengakub' uyayazi!

['Not that you know it!']

Again this interchange highlights what many previous researchers have pointed to: Tsotsitaal is something that is picked up by living in the city, by urban living, and is not so common for the older generation in rural regions.

Females in the data tended to align themselves more with traditional and rural themes. In the following example, however, several of the female respondents although born in the Eastern Cape, were quite city-orientated. They admitted to drinking alcohol and they wore trousers, both of which are seen as quite modern and urban. The respondents in the excerpt first 'perform' the Tsotsitaal style by mimicking the lexicon. They go on to say they are 'in the middle of Xhosa and Xhosa', in other words, they use a form of Xhosa somewhere between rural and city Xhosa.

Q1: Oolaweyi, eksê hey umoj? Unjani?

['The 'laways' ek sê hey umoj? How are you?']

G4: OJoe?

['The Joes?']

G1: Hayi ke ngabaselokishini abathetha ngolo hlobo.

['No it's the ones from township who speak that way.']

G5: Mandithi ke thina ke siphakathi thina mandithi siphakathi.

['Let me say we are in the middle we, let me say we are in the middle.']

G1: Phakathi kwesiXhosa kwesiXhosa.

['In the middle of Xhosa and Xhosa.']

They do not speak Tsotsitaal, and they say it is young people from townships who speak like that, using *eksê*, *laweyi*, *hoesit*, or *grand*. One of the respondents disagrees that it is all young people from the townships: she claims that 'the township young girls at least speak nicely', implying that Tsotsitaal in Cape Town townships is a male language domain.

On occasion in the interviews it was difficult to ascertain whether the respondents were speaking about Tsotsitaal and Tsotsitaal speakers specifically, or whether they were describing a broader urban style. In some ways, the two appeared to be conflated: Tsotsitaal represented the urban identity, and the urban identity was partly constituted by Tsotsitaal. Returning to the differences between rural language and urban language, one of the respondents claimed that the only difference between people from the city and people from the country was in the degree of Tsotsitaal used. He was therefore implying that Tsotsitaal was the chief defining factor of urban style.

Q1: *So awukho umahluko xa uthetha nabo okanye ubajonga kubantu abasuka ngapha eEastern Cape abangazalelwanga apha eKapa?*

[‘So there is no difference when speaking to them or looking at them from the people who are from the Eastern Cape, not born here in Cape Town?’]

N: *Yah, hayi, awukho umahluko. Ndingase ndisitsho kanjalo just because ixesha elinintsi basebenzisa iTsotsitaal, uyabo. And nam ndiyakwazi ukuyisebenzisa iTsotsitaal, but ndikwazi nje na mna ndiyisebezisa through indawo endikhe ndazihamba.*

[‘Yes, no, there is no difference. I’d rather [I think I would] say that just because most of the time they use Tsotsitaal, you see. And I can also use Tsotsitaal, but the reason I can is through/because of the places I’ve been [to].’]

Tsotsitaal is not limited to Cape Town townships. Urban centres in the Eastern Cape such as Port Elizabeth and East London have their own versions of the code. While there are similarities between these different varieties of Tsotsitaal, the respondents in the following excerpt describe how there are also fundamental

differences (in this example in terms of the click which forms part of the word for cell phone) which make it possible to identify where someone comes from by the Tsotsitaal they speak. These could be considered regional accents of Tsotsitaal.

X: I mean like to come in before that one, uuuuh, like you would say in Xhosa *nufunuthenga* I want to buy. From the Eastern Cape my cellphone would be, uZukile [referring to the interviewer] you know that? No, *nufunuthenga* is cellphone, but in Cape Town Gugulethu, Langa way of talking they would say [*ndifungaya*]. It's more different. It's more of the click you know, they pick it up oooh this one is from Eastern Cape.

D: It's easy

X: This one is from PE this one is from Transkei this one is from Joburg this one is from Banzai

Q1: From, from the Tsotsitaal?

X: From the Tsotsitaal. You pick it up there, it's easy... Like a person who is born and bred in Cape Town, he will say we are here at Mzoli's place, he won't say Mzoli he would say no 'section two'. From PE I will say no I am in NY (111 10115) I would be more detailed.

Q2: Ja

X: He'd more like [clicks fingers] 'sharp' and say no 'section' uuuhm ja

Towards the end of this example the speaker highlights the lexical differences between Port Elizabeth Tsotsitaal and Cape Town Tsotsitaal, which, in the Cape Town variety, is evidenced by local terminology for the name of a section in Gugulethu. The final phrase was a demonstration by the respondent of how someone from Cape Town would say they were at Mzoli's. Interestingly, he does not limit the example to lexicon, but additionally 'performs' the way that

Tsotsitaal is spoken by clicking his fingers. This is a common gestural accompaniment to Tsotsitaal speech in Cape Town.

In many responses, there was a tension evidenced between urban and rural identities. In the next excerpt, the speaker provides a (presumably negative) term, *imvemvane*, for people who do not understand Tsotsitaal and are therefore seen as 'old-fashioned' or 'rural'.

O4: Uyabona *like like* ndisenokuthi *like* kumjita njengokub'ulapha sblome nemvemvane uyabona?

['You see like like I may say to my fellow as you are here we stay with 'mvemvane' you see?']

Q1: Yinton' imvemvane ke ngoku?

['What is imvemvane now?']

O4: Nantso ke imvemvane... imvemvane *like like* uba awusi-*understand* sizakuthi nants' imvemvane.

['There you go imvemvane... imvemvane like like if you don't understand us we will say here is imvemvane.']

In the next excerpt the speaker was a University student in a focus group. They imply that Tsotsitaal has an impact on the pronunciation of Xhosa in the urban environment: that it becomes less exact, and that Tsotsitaal therefore affects the 'purity' of Xhosa.

P: Like, from my understanding, the rural Xhosa is like more pure, it's like exact Xhosa that we're supposed to speak. And then in town it's like, it's like more like; it's vague. For example when they're saying... Uhm... If you're asking the person 'Where do you stay', he's like *kaLanga baba*, you know? What's that *kaLanga*? - in Xhosa it's like *KwaLanga* - it's K-W-A: *KwaLanga*, you know... Bona they say *kaLanga*. You know what I mean? It's more like... It's more

Tsotsitaal... in towns! They're mixing a lot of like, in terms of the Tsotsi language, Afrikaans and stuff here in Cape Town. But eEastern Cape you're like *KwaLanga*, you're not like *kaLanga* - *Ndihlala kwaLanga* or *Ndihlala kuBhojane* [I stay in Langa or I stay in Bhojane].

The features of the urban/ Tsotsitaal style (alongside lexicon) which differentiated it from that of the Eastern Cape included 'pitch' (shouting), 'tone', 'preparations for their voice', and 'shortening'. The first two passages show how people from the city are perceived to 'shout'. This relates to the 'lifestyle': in the first example, the respondent states that it is to do with acting 'cool'.

T: Not everybody who comes here can speak Tsotsitaal, but like, you know maybe, I think maybe when, maybe when they are drunk, they want to act cool, they, they don't want to talk like normal they talk like loud and the Tsotsitaal like, I don't know.

In the second example, the content of the reply shows that the speaker relates respect to the village environment and way of talking, while she claims the city language involves constant 'shouting', or what she describes as 'wa wa wa':

A1: Er ...abantu behlel' apha bobabini kodwa bayashouter kakhulu *but then may be just because banentlonipho uyabona, intombazana kufunek' izithobil' elalini ayizothetha **la way mos** abathethi **la way...mos** mhlawumbi bangabafazi bayapheka bayakwazi ukwenza loo nto but nje umnt' ewalker down' estratweni ab' eshouter ngolu hlobo ayenzeki kakhulu but apha ... you just hear people say wa wa wa wa that's all the difference I can see.*

[ 'Er...people staying here both but they shout a lot, but then maybe just because they have a respect you see, a

girl must humble herself in a village she will not speak that way they do... 'mos' maybe they are married women they are cooking they can do that but just someone walking down the street and she/he shouts this way it does not happen a lot, but here...you just hear people say 'wa, wa, wa, wa' that's all the difference I can see.']

'Tone' is quoted as a key difference in the language of someone from the Eastern Cape in the following example:

Q1: Uhm, okay umbona njani? Umbona mhlawumbi indlela anxibe ngayo, indlel' athetha ngayo?

['Uhm, okay how do you see him? You maybe see the way he dresses, the way he talks?']

L: Ewe yindlel' athetha ngayo yohlukile, thina sohlukile **mos**? Mandithi uyayiv' itone le.

['Yes it's the way he speaks it's different, we are different mos? Let me say you hear his tone.']

In this next selection, the discussion centres on the difference in voice style where it is stated 'they don't do preparations for their voice' in Cape Town:

Q1: So bathetha njani aba ... bazalelwa apha bakhulela apha?

['So how do they talk these ... born here grew up here?']

G5: Yho! Hayi ba...

['Exclaims! No they...']

G3: Like bayagxavula ukh' ubone? Abalilungisi ilizwi labo ukh' ubone?

['Like they rush you see? They don't do preparations for their voice, see?']

This concept of 'preparations for the voice' can also correlate with the following example where respondents give city and rural versions where the rural version is *with* emphasis and the city version is *without* emphasis:

D: It's one of the things... Er... As soon as you come to the city there's this... accent thing that comes along.

P: Mh mh.

D: Your accent changes like-

Q2: How?

D: - in the rural area you say, actually say, be like *KwaLanga* or... *KwaBho-*, *KwaBho-*... whatever, you know.

P: *eMthwaku!* [with emphasis]

D: You know what I'm saying...

P: Emphasising words-

D: *eMthatha* [with emphasis]. You come here and you like *Mthatha* [without emphasis]

P: *Mthatha* [without emphasis]

D: *KwaLanga* [without emphasis].

The speakers therefore begin to distinguish a 'style' of speaking associated with the city. The next extract illustrates another aspect associated with the city 'tone' or 'style', the shortening of terms:

D: We don't have time to say [said really slowly]:

*NdinguNomthunzi mna* [Me, I am Nomthunzi]. Eyo!

[laughter]

Q1: So what do you say in the city?

D: *NdinguNomthunzi* [I'm Nomthunzi] *qha* [only]!

Y: Yah, I think that's...

D: *NdinguNomthunzi mna ka, yoh...* That's five seconds of our life gone, Joe! We don't have the time.

K: It's that *mna ka* that's the difference.

The 'tempo' of the city reflects something else about the urban identity – as the speaker says, 'that's five seconds of our life gone, Joe!' indicating a faster pace of life in the city. While much of the above relates to a more general urban language style or tone, it also makes up the style and tone of Tsotsitaal and is sometimes linked to it in the interview data, for example when the University student above claimed 'It's more like... It's more Tsotsitaal... in towns!'

As suggested in an earlier example, other forms of behaviour such as drinking, are also aspects of the urban environment, and linked to speaking Tsotsitaal. This is disapproved of by many of the more traditional community members and contributes to the bad reputation that Tsotsitaal sustains. In the following excerpt, a female in her 20s who had spent most of her life in Cape Town but had quite a traditional perspective, was describing firstly males, and then females who speak Tsotsitaal.

T: They think they are cool, they think it's cool.

Q1: To be a gangster? That's why they want to speak it?

T: Mm. they think it's cool

Q2: Back in the Eastern Cape or here?

T: Even here. If you, like, if you don't swear and you don't like stay in the tavern and you don't like, drink and get drunk in the street and like, drink beer, they think you're not cool... You do see girls like, drinking in the streets, but like, we're not saying like, you mustn't drink, but you, like it's not nice when you see like a girl, like drinking like in the streets, like walking with a glass of beer, like that's how I grew up. Like, even if they drink, you're not supposed to be drinking and like smoking like, in the street like, walking because you could meet mos like your parents or like there's no like respect, and if you don't do that you're not cool.

Q1: So that girl those are the girls who would also know some Tsotsitaal or speak it or...

T: And they think they are cool

This to an extent evidences one of the reasons for the particular association of Tsotsitaal with the male gender. Females in the Cape Town data still appeared to have stronger alignments to rural tradition than males. The urban style and language, including Tsotsitaal, was represented as less respectful. In the next excerpt, the young women in a focus group describe the difference in 'respect' between city language and rural language, which to an extent recalls 'hlonipha'. Hlonipha is a South African 'respect language' in which speakers (mainly females) are expected to avoid the names and initial syllables of their ancestors in speech, meaning they must find alternative ways to say things, because such initial syllables occur widely in Xhosa (Finlayson 1995). Respectfulness in language is traditional within Xhosa culture, and here the speaker states that there is a significant difference in terms of respect between the language used in the Eastern Cape and the language used in Cape Town.

N: I guess the most significant aspect or something that we can pin-point from the difference between the two is that in Eastern Cape when we speak Xhosa, when we speak, we respect most of the time. We don't just use words for the sake of using words; that's the difference. When you come here, you just speak, you don't care. But in the Eastern Cape there are things that you don't have the right to call them. That's why he says that you might have a different word for one thing - it's because of respect, and probably your grandmother or grandfather is having that name, and as children you're not supposed to call him by that name. So you use a different word to call, I mean... You know, to use the same...

Q1: Mm

Z: Kinda like you're obviously not supposed to say your dad is drunk or some adult is drunk you like say *Yo hayi, uqhuba amatakani* [Phew no, he is drunk, lit. 'herding lambs'; walking erratically]; use another word for it...

I: Here in Cape Town, you just say 'No, he's passed out...' It's like, when you go home to your parents you have to speak like proper, like dictionary Xhosa. But when you're here you slam; I don't have to say 'My father is...' whatever. I should say 'He's passed out; he's drunk', you know. But when I'm home, I'm like 'Oh no, he's sleeping'... [laughter]

I: 'He's shutting his eyes... He's resting.' You don't say he passed out.

Again in this example the emphasis was on the urban style, rather than Tsotsitaal specifically, but the following illustration gives an instance where Tsotsitaal lexis is seen as inherently disrespectful.

T: Kaloku zezi zinto zootsotsi ezi zokuvaya, thina kaloku sithi umntu utshabile.

[ 'These are these things of Tsotsis these of 'vaya' we say a person 'utshabile' .']

G: Siyifumana kuni kaloku, siyifumana kuni.

[ 'We get it from you, we get it from you.' ]

Q1: Bona bath' u uvay-

[ 'They say he is 'uvay-' ]

T: Uvayile.

[ ' 'Uvayile.' ]

G: Kuthiwe hay' ela thayima livayile.

[ 'They say no that thayima livayile [old timer has gone]. ' ]

In this example, *utshabile* is a respectful way of saying a person has died, while *uwayile*, derived from the Tsotsitaal *vaya* 'to go'<sup>32</sup> is disrespectful. In the final sentence the speaker is mimicking Tsotsitaal: *thayima*, from English 'old timer', is also a Tsotsitaal term.

The next speaker, a young man in his twenties from the Eastern Cape who had been living in Cape Town for less than a year, was asked if there was a difference in how he would approach someone in the Eastern Cape and someone in Cape Town to borrow money. He states that he would not use Tsotsitaal in the Eastern Cape because respect is required there.

N: Senditsho ndiyakwazi apha uyabo ukuyicela *maybe* ndiye kumama omdala, uyabo. Ndiyakwazi ukufika kuye ndiyicele ndibe ndithetha iTsotsitaal but ngaphaya kuya nyanzeleka ndithethe ulwimi lam ngqo *so that* ezabona naye ukuba, 'Hey lomtwana uthobekile, unembheko', andi-trust-e ukuba ndizomnika imali yakhe. Kanti owalapha uma-olayidana uyakwazi ufika uthethe nje noba ezeTsotsitaal wena ma-outie, uyabo. Nje aku-understand-e *just because* naye ngowasekasi, uyabo. Lento izinto azivayo nangabantwana bakhe *even* umtwana omcane kangaka, uyabo. Yah, senditsho ba uya-understand-a yena into yeTsotsitaal.

[ 'I mean here you can ask for it maybe go to an older woman, you see. I can go to her and ask for it while speaking [in parts?] Tsotsitaal but that side [the Eastern Cape] it's a must that I speak my proper language so that she will also see that, 'Hey this child is disciplined, he has respect', and she can trust me that I will give her back her money. Whereas an old woman from here; you can get there and just speak even [things from] Tsotsitaal as a

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<sup>32</sup> Either based on Portuguese 'to go' or Afrikaans 'to blow, to go (slang)' (see also sections 5.3.1 and 5.4.2).

guy, you see. And she will understand you just because she's also from the township, you see. This [whatever you are saying] is part of things she hears even from her children, even a child that's as young as this, you see. Yah, I mean, she understands this Tsotsitaal thing.'

This statement contrasts Tsotsitaal with 'discipline' and respect, which are required in the Eastern Cape. Yet in the city, he was able to use a much less formal variety, including some Tsotsitaal, even when speaking to an older woman.

#### 4.2.2 Generation

During the interview conducted with ex-gangsters, in which the deepest Tsotsitaal was spoken, they affirmed that Tsotsitaal has a specific place and should not be used in situations where respect is required, such as in conversation with elders, or with a girlfriend. They also make reference to the interviewer as an 'old man'. He was actually a young man but they were referring to his more traditional attitude and language use.

M: We are good, we speak it deep together, but when I am with my girlfriend I don't speak Tsotsitaal. I talk English when I am with you and when I am with him, this buti, I must speak isiXhosa because he is an old man to me né, I must speak real Xhosa not Tsotsitaal because if I speak iTsotsitaal he is gonna say kwedini undixelel' ikaka. He will say that to me. Because if uyiouti né? Singamaouti né? I ring Tsotsitaal né? But when I see old people I ring...

[ 'We are good, we speak it deep together, but when I am with my girlfriend I don't speak Tsotsitaal. I talk English when I am with you and when I am with him, this brother [referring to interviewer] I must speak isiXhosa

because he is an old man to me né, I must speak real Xhosa not Tsotsitaal because if I speak Tsotsitaal he is gonna say young man, you are telling me shit. He will say that to me. Because if we are young men né, I speak Tsotsitaal né? But when I see old people I speak...']

S: You speak like an elder because you with older people, it's like that.

M: While I am speaking with my friends, this friend I speak Tsotsitaal.

S: No, no no...

M: No, no, ntoni? Ndakuthela unye ngale kaka yeSavana wen'ub' undiqhel' amasimba.

['No, no what? I will pour you with this Savana if you... the shit.']

Q1: In other words guys I mean, culturally nisenayo la nto ithi *if* umntu mdala...?

['In other words guys I mean, culturally, you still have that thing that says if a person is old...?']

S: Intlonipho, intlonipho...

['Respect, respect...']

Another aspect of the identity construction indicated by Tsotsitaal speech is a generational one. Because of the rapid transformation of the variety, Tsotsitaal tends to be specific to a particular ingroup. Some of the older speakers in the informal interviews claimed that the Tsotsitaal of today's youth was not the 'real' Tsotsitaal: proper Tsotsitaal was the Tsotsitaal of their youth. Conversely, the younger speakers considered the older generation of Tsotsitaal to be old fashioned and out of date.

Tsotsitaal is furthermore a stage that one is expected to get over: one does not speak it when older or more respectable. This may also relate to respect, and the attainment of respect with age. It is also specifically linked to the township

environment, and a number of respondents suggested they hoped to leave the township behind in the future. This evidences a limitation in the use of Tsotsitaal – that even speakers themselves have the underlying conception that Tsotsitaal is not respectable, and not for an older generation. It is specific to a phase of life, and a subculture that speakers hope to transcend. As the next speaker, a young man in his twenties, describes, he would not speak Tsotsitaal if he had a respectable job, but when interacting with people in the township it is necessary.

Q1: iTsotsitaal iyinto ongayithetha ukube mhlawumbi umdala, unabantwana bakho...? Uyabona nje... So akhona amaxhego ayithethayo?

[‘Is Tsotsitaal something you would speak if maybe you were older, with your own children...? You see... So are there older men who speak it?’]

N: Ewe, akhona amaxhego ayithethayo *maar* ambalwa. And ayonto igrandi intobana ukhule ube lixhego usathetha iTsotsitaal. Ndinotsho ndithi iTsotsitaal into ye-stage-i esithile.

[‘Yes, there are older men who speak it but they are few. And it’s not something right to grow and be an old man still speaking Tsotsitaal. I can say that Tsotsitaal is something for a particular stage [in life].’]

Q1: Abantu bayadlula kuyo?

[‘People grow past it [get over it]?’]

N: Yah, bayadlula.

[‘Yes, they pass.’]

Q1: Wena uzodluli kuyo?

[‘Will you pass from it?’]

N: Eh outie, ndizodlula... Ndizodlula... Uyabona mna *if* ndinokufumana ispani ndifumane ezinto ndizibawelayo, heyi ndidlulile kuyo yonke lonto eyo. *Just because* into ebangelo lonto ndikwazi ukuyisebenzisa intoba abanye abantu endiye

ndithethe nabo ukuba ndifuna ispani okanye ndifuna *something* ngoku ndifumanise ukuba yah bathetha iTsotsitaal. Then xa ndithetha iTsotsitaal ke nam ndizokwazi ukuhlangana ke ngoku.

['Eh man, I will pass... I will pass... You see if I could get a job and get the things I wish for; I'm past that entire thing. Just because the reason that I can use it is because other people that I speak to [in Tsotsitaal] is because I'm looking for a job or I need something, and I find that they speak Tsotsitaal. Then if I speak Tsotsitaal then I will also be able to blend in as well then.']

This desire to 'pass' from speaking Tsotsitaal into a more respected situation was a theme that came up in a number of interviews. It indicates that Tsotsitaal is an enactment of 'difference', and that the things which the Tsotsitaal-speaking subculture is differentiating itself against (i.e. rural, generational respectability) are considered the 'norm' which is temporarily being rejected, perhaps rebelled against. In the following example this sense of youthful rebellion is aligned with gangsterism:

Q1: Ba-. [pause]. Kukhona mhlawumbi abantu abadala abangafuni ukuyithetha?

['They-. [pause]. Are there, maybe, older people that do not want to speak it?']

S: Abangafuni ukuyithetha?

['Who do not want to speak it?']

Q1: Mhlawumbi-

['Maybe-']

S: Yah, bakhona abayi caphukelayo lanto, uyabo. 'Cause bathi ne- ubutsotsi, qha kuthiwa bubutsotsi apha. Kuthiwa bubukoli, uyabona, into ezidibene nobukoli, uyabona? So, bona baziyeke, baqhitha kudala kwezonto ezo, uyabona? So,

ke thina, uyabona nawe, ek sê siyakhula nje, uyabo.  
Kufuneka u, u, uzi-experience zonke eziweyi, uyabo? Then  
uyazi ukuba ek sê uqhithile kula-life, uyabo?

[‘Yes, there are those that hate that thing, you see.  
‘Cause they say right- it’s criminal, they just say it’s  
criminal here. They say it’s gangsterism, you see, things  
associated with gangsterism. So, they left them [those  
things behind], and moved on a long time ago from those  
things, you see? So, then us, you see also, I say, we are  
just growing up, you see. One/you must experience all these  
things, you see? Then you know that I say, you are past  
that life, you see?’]

Q2: Mm

S: So ujonge u-life ograndi, uyabo. Azawuba ne-family.

[‘So, you focus on the good/grand life, you see. You  
will have a family.’]

The speaker furthermore stated (jokingly) that he was nearly past his Tsotsitaal phase, and may even transcend it to respectability within the next week! There is to an extent a tacit suggestion in this that the speaker himself aligns Tsotsitaal with gangsterism.

The generational and urban identity which is evidenced by the use of Tsotsitaal is linked to a sense of being ‘streetwise’, and is marked by a particular identity performance, or township style, which will be explored in the following section.

#### **4.2.3 Being ‘Streetwise’**

Aspects of the Tsotsitaal subculture other than language came through strongly in the interview data where comparisons were being made between people who had lived in the city for a long time, and new arrivals from the Eastern Cape. The question was asked, can you identify a new arrival from the Eastern Cape? While

a number of respondents said that new arrivals could not speak the lingo, they also mentioned things such as clothing and body language (particularly ways of walking) as rural/urban indicators. These three aspects of the urban/rural style divide were often aligned, as in the following example.

M: Umjoge, no, lampahla leya ayikho apha.

[‘You look at her/him, no, that clothing is not available/around/in-vogue here’]

Q1: Ewe.

M: Uphinde futhi umehlule nangokuhamba. Xanifikelele uba nikwazi nokuthetha, umahlula naxa ethetheyo!

[‘And again distinguish him by way of walking. If you manage to get to talk, you can distinguish her/him even when they speak!’]

The difference in clothing style revolves around brands, and the availability and marketing that typifies the city. The difference in ways of walking was a favourite method of identifying a ‘city type’. This was mentioned by Calteaux (1994: 319) as a swaying type of walk associated with Tsotsitaal speakers (called ‘*bumper*’ in her study) and may relate to the term *phikelele* in this data (see section 5.4.2).

This first example ties in the style of walk to the clothing style of the city which is described as ‘smart’.

G1: Wena mnt’ usuk’ emaXhoseni senditsh’ uba owaselokishini...

[‘You one coming from Eastern Cape I mean to say the one from the township...’]

G3: Kufana newalk yabo , kufana newalk yakhe umntu lo!

Kanti kanti kufunek’ ubesmart ukh’ ubone?

[‘It’s like their walk, it’s like his walk this person! But but you must be smart you see?’]

The lady in the following example is from the Eastern Cape, and self-detrimentally compares her walk with that of the people from the city who walk 'smoothly'.

Q1: O, *alright, okay* indlela mhlawumbi yokuhamba, *istyle* sokuhamba mhlawumbi ukhon' umohluko?

[ 'O, alright, okay the way of walking maybe, the style of walking maybe is there a difference? ' ]

G: Mkhulu kaloku umohluko.

[ 'The difference is big.' ]

Q1: Yinton' umohluko?

[ 'What's the difference?' ]

G: Umahluko kaloku asihambi ngokufanayo uyabona? Thina sesaqhel' okwakugxanya kwaphaya usolok' usebenza phaya kaloku.

[ 'The difference is we don't walk alike you see? We are used to that awkward walk of there, you always work there. ' ]

Q1: Okay, okay uyagxanya xa uhambayo?

[ 'Okay, okay you walk in big [open] steps when you walk?' ]

G: Ewe, sihamba nje gxavu gxavu bona ke bayazicenga.

[ 'Yes, we walk awkwardly they walk smoothly.' ]

An additional dimension to walking becomes evident in the next interview selection. While the speaker describes the act of walking, he also seems to describe a ritual of specific walking patterns within an area. This involves holding knowledge about where you can walk, at what time, which marks you as streetwise. This may have to do with gang presence.

S: *No*, uyabona umtu ofikayo uyabonakala, uyabo. Nje kwayi-walks zakhe.

[‘No, you see a person who has just arrived is recognisable, you see. Just her/his walks. ’]

Q1: Mm.

S: *i-Walks* zakhe ... **ek sê** uthi ehamba nje abelaqaza, abelaqaza, elaqza, uyabo?

[‘Her/his walks ... ek sê when s/he is just walking they would be looking around, looking around, looking around, you see?’]

Q1: Mm

S: *And then* xa ufika apha eKapa, uyabo, mhlawubi **uvaya** kwinginqhi ongayaziyo, mhlawubi andithi **uvaya** apha... Mhlawubi, senditsho **ubetha** nge-3A, mhlawubi, uyabo?

[‘And then when you arrive here in Cape Town, you see, maybe you are walking in an area you do not know, maybe, let me say you are walking here... Maybe, I mean you go to 3A, maybe, you see?’]

Q1: Mm.

S: Uyabo. Uyi-**outhi**. Nguwe *i-outhi*, uyabo. Uyazi ke ukuba **amajita** apha, **ek sê i-outhi** phaya nges’khathi esithile kufuneke ihambe endaweni ethile, uyabo. Kufuneka ihambe endaweni ethile nges’khathi esithile; ixesha into ethethayo. Awele ... thole **amajita** ukuba **ek sê** angowalapha lo.

[‘You see. You are the guy, you see. You know that then guys here ek sê a guy there at such a time must be walking at such a place, you see. [The guy] must walk at such a place at such a time; it’s the time that talks/says something. And then ... the guys find out that ek sê this one is not from here.’]

In this example, *amajita* 'guys', may relate to street gangsters. The respondent seems to be trying to explain a rather complex code of behaviour in his township location: that it is the time of walking in a particular area that 'talks'. This concept goes even beyond the notion of 'style' encompassing extra-linguistic markers, and enters the realm of 'ritual'. The respondent additionally states that the clothes, and the way of 'dealing with the girls' also marks someone who is either streetwise, or newly arrived from the Eastern Cape.

The final example, in which a style of walking is said to denote someone who is streetwise, was obtained during the interview with two older men. In this example, someone who comes from Gauteng, rather than the Eastern Cape, is depicted as being streetwise prior to their arrival in Cape Town. The interviewer makes a joke that the one from Gauteng 'knows how to walk, because he doesn't come from the cattle':

T: Enye k' into mhlobam, xa ibingekho le nto yokuba abantu baqal' eziRhawutini, uyaqonda? Esizapha sevel' eRhawutini.

['Another thing my friend, if there wasn't this thing of people first going to Gauteng you understand? He comes here from Gauteng.']

Q1: Umntu oz'apha sevel'eRhawutini uyayazi indlel'okunyathela, ngob'akasuk'zinkomeni.

['The one who comes here from Gauteng knows how to walk, because he doesn't come from the cattle.']

[laughter]

Q2: O- ukhon'umahluko ke ngoku xa xa eze apha---?

['Oh-is there a difference now when when he comes here--?']

T: Xa esuk'ezinkomeni.

['If he comes from the cattle.']

This humorously recalls the rural/urban divide and the alignment of the streetwise Tsotsitaal speaker with the city rather than the countryside.

The following examples revolve more around the Tsotsitaal style in particular, in relation to a particular style of clothes, preference in drinks, and the type of football team someone supports. It serves to indicate that the Tsotsitaal style is not merely a linguistic or clothing style, but a lifestyle. However, the Tsotsitaal 'style' is seen to be not one coherent and stable combination of markers, but actually stratified into a number of different styles which represent particular identities. It relates back to distinctions made early on in the development of Tsotsitaal which Glaser (2000) describes in terms of 'ivies' and 'clevers'. The choices you make mark you within a range of identity types from a pre-existing repertoire, although most of these types are likely to speak Tsotsitaal (except the 'softie' who speaks more English). The first example delves in some depth into the markers of these respective types.

Q1: That question of clothing, do you think

D: Emphasises much more vividly, to say, the language...

Clothing has a lot of influence. Like Pantsola, Tsotsitaal,

X: Ya of course, ya ya

D: There's a difference, clothing fashion

Q1: What influence?

D: Like clothing, pantsola, there's different types of clothes. Ivies wear ties, jeans

X: If you wear your jeans like Levis your tight fitting, he's more of a lady this man, he's a 'softie'. You call him a 'softie'

Q2: And he wouldn't speak Tsotsitaal?

D: No he wouldn't speak Tsotsitaal, he will speak English, and more a ladies person, you know, drinking a certain brand of liquor you know

Q2: Which brand?

D: Like your ciders  
Q2: Savannas  
D: And then you've got your (big guns)  
Q2: What do they wear?  
X: Like myself I'm drinking Hansa [a type of beer] now ...  
Q1: Which soccer team do you favour? Pirates  
D: Pirates.  
X: Ya ya ya, at this age ... you must be Pirates  
Q2: You can't be Kaiser Chiefs?  
X: You can't be Kaiser Chiefs.  
Q2: Why not?  
X: Because we've aged  
Q2: I know people who are 42 who have Kaiser Chief friends. What's wrong with them? Tell me!  
Q1: It's because the Pirates is more, you know the Chiefs is more, like, Pirates men wear pants all the time, while Kaiser Chiefs is more like 'ivy'  
X: Sissy  
Q1: Sissy type of jeans  
Q2: [laughs] I'm going to pass this on

The speaker identifies himself as a 'clever' and describes how he (and the 'identity type') speaks Tsotsitaal, drinks single malt whiskey, and supports the Pirates football team. Clever is later contrasted with the term *mfo* which mean someone who is not streetwise (the term has other semantic nuances elsewhere in the data but is generally an abusive/ jocular term for 'guy'. It is probably derived from Zulu (see section 5.4.3).

D: Then, with the lingo as we are talking about linguistics, township lingo. There are people who think you cannot catch the lingo quickly. You can hear them talking

their township lingo and you catch it. Okay there is this thing called a 'mo-fo'.

[All]: Ya

D: Stupid, it means you are stupid. In Langa, there are guys who are born and bred, if you are not born in Langa, then automatically you are a 'mo-fo'.

Q1: Mmm.

X: Ya, I can share that, I must call you foreigner

X: Mfo

D: Means stupid. One thing they are interested in, take out your wallet, flash them ... you are a clever, once you have empty pockets then you are going back to be a mfo

In this example, a 'clever' is constructed as someone who has money, who is streetwise enough to get by and make money. They are also represented as 'educated'. In another example, two young men describe the clothes of the 'clever':

Q1: A 'clever' is also a style of dress, isn't it?

Z: Yah, yah, 'cause it's streetwise ...

Q1: What does a clever wear?

Q2: Yah, what does a clever wear?

Z: Clever wear...

M: All Star, Dickies, all those styles. But if you are clever, but you don't like to be on eyes, you have to wear Levis, Soviet, you see, (TH), all of that.

Q1: Ok. If you are clever on street you have to wear All Star, Dickies.

M: Yah, then you are clever in mind

The brands described here are American brands, an influence which also forms a part of the urban style (to be returned to in the following section). 'Clevers' are

not necessarily criminals, but to be a clever you have to have access to money, and expensive clothes, which identifies you as streetwise. In this final example, the interviewer asks what his new shoes mark him as in terms of identity types. The response humorously indicates that brand names are central to the style of urban youth.

Q3: So is this clever? [O shows his brand new pair of Aqua shoes]

[laughter]

Q1: Is he clever?

M: What's this?

[laughter]

Q3: It's just a shoe, I don't know...

M: You don't know?

Q3: It doesn't count?

M: Then you are a mafia.

[laughter]

#### **4.2.4 Subcultural Expression**

In one focus group conducted at the University of Cape Town, the students were asked if they distinguish a difference between the Xhosa spoken by students in everyday interactions at University, and the Xhosa spoken in the townships. One respondent described the township Xhosa as 'more ghetto'. The obvious association in this statement is that of black ghettos in the United States. It is hard to say whether the respondent meant that the lexicon itself is influenced by African American slang, but it seems fair to assume that they were suggesting a similarity in terms of 'style'.

The identity and style of the Tsotsis of Sophiatown were historically influenced by American cultural forms (see further Hurst 2007). During the time of the Tsotsi gangs in Sophiatown, movies were one of the main forms of entertainment in the

township (Dixon 1995). American gangster movies had a particular influence on some of the young men of Sophiatown who idolised crime and gangsterism (Glaser 2000: 62-63). The following excerpt from the website South African History Online (2007a) describes the effects of one such movie:



**Figure 2: Styles, the apple-munching gangster, played by Richard Widmark in 'Street with No Name' (SAHO 2007a)**

Street with No Name, a gangster movie starring Richard Widmark, had a cult following. Whenever it played, the movie-house would be packed with tsotsis. When the supposed heroes, the FBI, were on screen, the tsotsis would jeer; but as the scene moved to the gang's hideout, there would be a hush from the audience. When Richard Widmark, the gang boss, would appear, the whole audience would shriek, "Styles! Go it, Styles!" Styles wore a long overcoat, sniffed a Bensedrine inhaler and occasionally bit into an apple. His henchmen wore belted raincoats with slits at the back. At the time of the film's release, all the tsotsis wore their raincoats, sniffed Bensedrine and munched apples (Source: Sophiatown, Programme notes, Junction Avenue Theatre Company). (SAHO 2007a)

The American influence was also evidenced in the Sophiatown Tsotsitaal, which incorporated quotes from the movies, for example "Remember guys, I'm de brains of dis outfit!" (SAHO 2007a). The style/ culture was derived from the American model, yet also had a South African flavour: while American slang was incorporated into Tsotsitaal, it was mixed with African languages, English and

Afrikaans. Similarly, the gangster styles were adapted for the South African context, although American goods were highly prized. As the ABC documentary 'In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid' (1995) depicted,

Township youth in the '50s were soon sporting hats raked at steep angles and flashy double-breasted suits in imitation of tough guys Richard Widmark and Bogart, or the latest Harlem "zoot suits". Young men showed off their "can't gets" -- flashy Florsheim shoes and Stetson hats, unavailable in South Africa, imported directly by catalogue from New York. (Dixon 1995).

In the following photos, the 'American' and the 'Russian' refer to names of Sophiatown gangs.



Figure 3: An 'American' (Photo: Peter Magubane, Bailey's African Photo Archives) (SAHO 2007b)



Figure 4: A 'Russian' (Photo: Peter Magubane, Bailey's African Photo Archives) (SAHO 2007b)

As the photographs show, the gangster clothing styles of the American movies were imitated in South African Tsotsi culture. It seems the iconography of American gangster movies struck a chord with young disempowered men in South Africa's townships. The explanation for this may have been the ability of these movies to transport the crowd to another culture; perhaps the few black actors on the American screen at the time inspired the idea of a life of equality; or perhaps the viewers were infected by the 'American Dream', albeit a subversive one. As Dixon (1995) writes: 'Film gangsters offered an example of an alternative way of life apparently free of control of the white "baas"' (Dixon 1995).

Today, there is still an influence from American movies on South African youth. In a study by Bembe (2006), some slang terms are drawn from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or its gang slang dialect. Calteaux (1994: 116) posits that slang is 'adopted from Black Americans and is often picked up from television, films, videos, radio and music'. The following examples come from a study by Bembe (2006) investigating a group of youths from Gauteng who use slang when speaking English.

- *Yo was'sup bra?* (American, with 'bra' – South African)
- Hi, **black!** Where you been, **nigga** it's been what...three four months?
- *You dig, my man?* (Amer.)
- *Aigh't?* (Amer.)

Clearly, many of these terms derive from AAVE. However, the terms are primarily used only when the speakers are conversing in English (at school or university). In the township, speaking Tsotsitaal, these terms decrease in

frequency (Bembe 2006). Bembe believes the speakers' English is influenced by American music and film, and explains how 'they find themselves in multifaceted identities of part-American, part-South African, and can move from affiliation with one identity to another with great ease. This is nowhere more evident than in their ability to shift from American English slang words such as *y'all*; *homey*; *was'sup*, and *nigga*, to distinctly and exclusively South African ones such as *dwaal*, *eish!*, *heita!*; *baba (...) grand* (from Tsotsitaal (...)) and *gaz'lam'* (Bembe 2006).

While there is an American influence on the Tsotsi construct, it is filtered through a South African 'lens': in their home language, South Africans utilise and innovate South African terms, although there are some underlying similarities or references to the African American diaspora; one respondent in interview described the township Xhosa as 'more ghetto', which explicitly recalls the language and style of black ghettos in the United States.

The references to black American culture are nowhere more evident than in the musical preferences of the Tsotsitaal-speaking subculture. In one interview, a young man was narrating how he used to be involved in crime in the township, that he used to be a gang member, but that he was now a 'changed man'. This reminded him of a song of the same name by American music artist Tupac Shakur (2Pac), and he began singing the lyrics. American 'gangsta' rap at first glance appears to pervade the style, and is particularly analogous to township music Kwaito (often correlated with hip hop/ rap) which is sung partly in Tsotsitaal. Another respondent, when asked what music he liked, replied 'an American hip hop I guess', yet his companions liked Xhosa hip hop:

Q: Ima ke mhlawumbi ooban' abacul' ihip hop yesiXhosa mhlawumbi iimusicians?

[ 'Stop, maybe those who sing Xhosa hip hop: maybe musicians? ' ]

A3: Yho! ezintwana zi-*undergroup*.

[‘Yho! these young ones, it’s the undergroups.’]

A1: Ja ngama-out’aseKasi *maan*. Areleasil’ ama-**outi** *maan* uyabona? Ja ndiyawuv’ umculo wazo eyi ziyalibaleka *maan* kuthiwa ‘yi-[Dreamer Skaap]’ ne-[Illiterate Skill], uyabona? Acul’i-*Hip Hop* ngesiXhosa loo magenge heyi ayayipush’ into yawo.

[‘Ja it’s the township guys man. The guys release man you see? Ja, I like their music [exclaims] they get forgotten, it’s the Driemnaskap and Illiterate Skill, you see? They sing hip hop in Xhosa those guys they push their thing.

Q: Ar.

A2: *I wonder* ngawaphi?

[‘I wonder where they from?’]

A1: *I think* yiKhayelitsha.

[‘I think its Khayelitsha.’]

The respondents enjoy the South African variety of music because it speaks to their direct life experience in the township:

A2: Uyabona? *And* ja ja intw’ abazithethayo zezi nto zenzekayo ke apha *that’s why* ndithanda *I mean* ezinto kungaculwa ngazo zizintw’ ezenzekayo apha phambi kwam eKasi ukh’ ubone **laway**? Ja *so* ndiyakwaz’ ukurelator kule ngoma yabo ukh’ ubone?

[‘You see? And ja ja the things they say are these things that are happening here in front of me in eKasi you see that way? Ja so I can relate into this song of theirs you see?’]

The Tsotsitaal-speaking subculture is distinguished by rapid urbanization and the pressures that young people come under to respond to globalization and

consumerism with limited access to jobs/ money. While the identity appears to be influenced by certain identities in the African Diaspora, particularly African American media-reproduced identities, Swartz (2003) argues that American cultural hegemony is ultimately resisted by South African youth as they imbue their own musical forms and cultural expression with identifiably South African components.

While American hip hop culture *influences* the South African style, the identities have developed parallel to each other. The subcultural hip hop equivalent in South Africa is Kwaito, which has developed as a huge industry in South Africa (Swartz 2003). It utilizes Tsotsitaal in many of its lyrics, and reflects township life and concerns. It has developed a particular South African flavour with influences from historical musical forms (Swartz 2003). In this way it does not simply *mimic* hip hop.

Similar misrepresentations of blackness in the United States and under Colonialism in Africa - stereotypes about black people, have resulted in both cases in a 'historical marginalized status' (Osumare 2001: 172), which has led to similar identities in each place. In each case, the identity is a response to misrepresentation and marginalization. South Africans, looking from the 'periphery' to the 'centre' of mass-media marketed culture, appear to have recognized in African American culture a response to this misrepresentation and marginalization, and have incorporated aspects of the culture.

It is becoming clear that Tsotsitaal speakers today can still be associated with a particular 'style' in the way that the Tsotsi gangs of Sophiatown were. The style has in some respects changed since that era, yet in other respects it has remained the same. It still revolves around brand names; particular clothing items, such as a hat which, according to one respondent, may mark you as belonging to a particular gang depending which style you wear (e.g. the 'spotti', a type of sun hat, see Swartz 2003: 14-15); and body gestures or the way you walk. These

underlying similarities are part of what is described in this thesis as the overarching Tsotsi 'style' which will be returned to in chapter six.

### 4.3 Project Identities

The phenomenon of American emulation is not restricted to South Africa: in their article on youth languages in a number of African countries, Kiessling and Mous (2004: 317) state: 'in Africa, a common feature of style of the youth culture is preoccupation with international culture and, in particular, American culture'. While European youths are reacting *against* 'globalization and its dissolution of institutions and organization' (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 331), African youths are embracing globalization and rejecting tradition. They argue that this difference is due to the fact that African nations missed out the phase of civil society that legitimated national identities in Europe, and that the current identity building work of African youths is an attempt to understand themselves, both as individuals and as 'new' nations (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 332). In South Africa, this national identity work partly revolves around the concept of the 'rainbow' nation – the notion of South Africa as a nation of 'diversity' or multiculturalism, as the multiplicity of languages in the township lingo attests. Kiessling and Mous propose that languages like Tsotsitaal are linguistic responses to the project of building a national identity within ethnically complex nations.

[African youth languages] are strategies to construct new meaning in society by creating new identities, a new cultural community, by building on resources and growing a linguistic identity "organically," appropriating colonial languages by creative manipulation and developing "new solidarities that cut across the 'ethnic absolutism' of dominant ideologies" (Harris & Rampton 2002: 44)'. (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 331)

According to Kiessling and Mous (2004), Castells (1997: 461) identifies three types of identity construction: legitimizing identity (in agreement with dominant society – hegemonic); resistance identity (in disagreement with dominant

society); and project identity (redefining position in society through a new identity). They describe how African youth languages relate initially to resistance identities, but increasingly to project identities: 'Having characterized urban youth languages as antilanguages, we consider them as instantiating resistance identity in Castells' terms, expressing "exclusion of the excluders by the excluded" (Castells 1997: 9)' (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 313), and yet:

...could be viewed as emergent noninstitutionalized projects that are on the brink of establishing new project identities (from prior resistance projects), in response to global-scale processes such as the formation of postcolonial nation-states, integration into networks of global economic interdependencies and communication patterns, and the emergence of multiple cultural allegiances. (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 332)

The subcultures being created in urban African townships create camaraderie and group membership, yet also define themselves in opposition to the norm, or the dominant 'other'. Languages like Tsotsitaal are born from an act of 'difference' in 'the representation of people who are racially and ethnically different from the majority [read 'dominant'] population' (Hall 1997b: 326) and the response of the misrepresented: the building of a 'convergent' (Giles 1977) identity. As Hodge and Kress (1997: 51) explain, the 'motor of linguistic change...is the desire to express social difference and its other face, solidarity'.

Identities associated with urban youth languages in Kiessling and Mous are positioned against traditional identity and towards the global, which can explain the shift away from rural/traditional language and other style markers. According to Kiessling and Mous (2004: 332) '...global processes render the emblemized locality of traditional language communities obsolete (for youth) and stir an impulse to produce positive cultural attributes that may constitute, and serve as emblems of their identity', and which can be likened with facets of the Tsotsitaal style identified in this study, such as Kwaito music.

Rather than recalling crime, violence and resistance, Tsotsitaal can be conceptualised as a language which has begun to develop 'from criminal argot via urban youth language to a language of wider communication' whereupon, suggest Kiessling and Mous (2004: 334) 'the norms consolidate and the language stabilises'. While Tsotsitaal may not have achieved status as a language of wider communication, and will therefore tend to remain highly variable due its purpose of differentiation, the following chapter will begin to look at the structural aspects of Tsotsitaal to discover to what extent and in what fashion, if any, the 'language' (in a non-ordinary sense) has stabilised. Interestingly, Kiessling and Mous (2004: 333) state that 'local languages have been incorporated into increasingly complex systems of emblematic stratification in which individual languages take on the characteristics of *register alternatives* characterizing specific events or situation types'. 'Register alternatives' evokes the concept of 'styling' to be discussed in chapter six, and indicates a performance of identity which is central to the Tsotsitaal-speaking subculture.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that there is a gap between the way that speakers of Tsotsitaal are perceived, and the way they perceive themselves. In South Africa ideological and state apparatus produced the objects of which they spoke: the Tsotsi gangsters/construct. The term Tsotsi became associated with the lifestyle of the section of society which adopted a Tsotsi style, and the term Tsotsi itself became a synonym for gangster.

Glaser's (2000: 47) term the 'Tsotsi Era' implies that the period was distinguished by an 'embodiment' of Tsotsis – that bottom-line conceptions of Tsotsis stem from some kind of 'real' Tsotsi which marked the era. The Tsotsi identity is therefore conceptualised as a consistent subject, yet in reality this is a limited construct. The Tsotsitaal subculture is pervaded by multifaceted identities. On the one hand there is a performance of a particular masculine

identity which at its extreme condones crime and violence, but on the other hand there is a broader subculture – a ‘field’ of identity.

Some features of male youth gangs appear not to have shifted greatly in the years intervening since the Tsotsi era. As Glaser described of the 40s/50s: ‘The masculine identity of the gang hinged around fighting skill, independence, street wisdom, feats of daring, law-breaking, clothing style, proficiency in the tsotsitaal argot, and success with women’ (Glaser 2000: 4). While these attributes can be features of gang identities, the style, and proficiency in Tsotsitaal are not necessarily attributes restricted to gang members, but are part of the wider subculture of young urban black men in South Africa’s townships.

The project of identity construction within this subculture has been continuing unabated; and the dialogue with American cultural forms has fed into the flip-side of the Tsotsi construct: the project identities of township youth. Often in opposition to gangsterism, in terms very specific to post-apartheid South Africa, Tsotsitaal is being utilised to bring expression to the identity of young generations of urban South Africans living in black townships. Tsotsitaal itself is as multifaceted as the identities of its speakers, as the following chapter will begin to portray. Additionally, through an analysis of the structure and linguistic nature of Tsotsitaal, the centrality of the ‘style’ relating to the subculture, and the function of identity through difference can be evidenced.

## Chapter 5 LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Introduction

Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model was developed to identify structural regularities in linguistic contact phenomena, particularly in examples of codeswitching. As mentioned previously, the model was applied to Tsotsitaal in an article by Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 317-42) to show that, in their study data (mainly from Soweto), Tsotsitaal had an Afrikaans base (or grammatical frame). In this chapter, we will look again at Myers-Scotton's model, firstly to determine whether the classification of Tsotsitaal as a code-switching variety can be upheld for all varieties. Secondly, the model will be applied to the Cape Town variety to determine the base language. Questions of naming that have arisen in previous studies will also be considered. Finally in this chapter, lexical items from several varieties and sources, including the questionnaires and interviews from this research, will be analysed, both by applying an indexical score to determine areas of use, and through comparison with previous research data from other parts of the country to establish the relative consistency of the lexicon.

The chapter intends to uncover some linguistic features of Tsotsitaal, and to argue that it cannot be considered a 'language' in the common sense, but that it is *linguistically* constituted merely by a 'core' set of lexical items, and by stylistic variation (to be expanded upon in the subsequent chapter).

### 5.2 Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame Model

Myers-Scotton (2002) presents a method of understanding language contact and intra-sentential code-switching phenomena in particular. This is based on her Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model. The unit of analysis in Myers-Scotton's model is the CP – the projection of complement, or Complement Phrase.

In non-technical terms the CP may correspond to the notion of a sentence (*He was afraid*) or S; a unit larger than this (*that he was afraid*) made of 'complementiser' + S; or an even larger unit (*She thought that he was afraid*). In each case the CP is made up of a complementiser + S. Note that a complementiser can be 'zero' as in  $\emptyset$  – *he was afraid*.

In more technical terms the CP 'can be defined unambiguously in terms of phrase structure as a complementizer or an element in Specifier (Spec) position followed by an IP [Inflectional Phrase]' (Myers-Scotton 2002: 55). She further states that 'it is the syntactic structure expressing the predicate-argument structure of a clause, plus any additional structures needed to encode discourse-relevant structure and the logical form of that clause' (Myers-Scotton 2002: 54). More than one CP can be found in a sentence, and therefore her work is intended to look specifically at intra-sentential code-switching, not intersentential code-switching per se. The latter does not require an analysis of the grammatical structures, as the sentences are often fully monolingual (Myers-Scotton 2002: 55).

Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997) analyse the language derivation of morphemes within mixed CPs (CPs featuring morphemes from more than one source language) in both Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho examples sourced from townships in the Gauteng province, in their article 'The structure of Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho: code-switching and in-group identity in South African townships'. In the article, they distinguish between the 'Matrix Language' (ML) and 'Embedded Languages' (ELs). They argue that the ML provides both the grammatical frame for a CP, and syntactically active system morphemes (e.g. inflections, possessive pronouns, intensifying adverbs), while an EL only supplies content morphemes (concerned with thematic role of a CP, these can be verbs, nouns, prepositions, adjectives, some pronouns, and discourse markers) to mixed CPs (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 324-25).

They point to three possible types of constituent in a code-switching CP:

- (a) ML + EL constituents (mixed constituents), made up of morphemes from both the ML and the EL;
- (b) ML islands, or monolingual ML constituents;
- (c) EL islands, or monolingual EL constituents.

They state that to be able to classify a CP as exhibiting CS, 'it must include minimally either a mixed constituent or islands from both the ML and EL' (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 324).

This theoretical basis for the MLF model leads to two principles which are applied to the Tsotsitaal/ Iscamtho data in Slabbert and Myers-Scotton's article. The two principles are intended to determine the Matrix Language in a mixed CP, as well as to support the Matrix Language-Embedded Language theory (Myers-Scotton 2002: 59). Myers-Scotton, in a later work, outlines the two principles in full:

The Morpheme Order Principle: in Matrix Language + Embedded Language constituents consisting of singly occurring Embedded Language lexemes and any number of Matrix Language morphemes, surface morpheme order (reflecting surface syntactic relations) will be that of the Matrix Language.

The System Morpheme Principle: in Matrix Language + Embedded Language constituents, all system morphemes which have grammatical relations external to their head constituent (i.e. which participate in the sentence's thematic role grid) will come from the Matrix Language (Myers-Scotton 2002: 59).

In their article, Slabbert and Myers-Scotton apply these two principles to the Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho data, firstly to determine the Matrix Language of the two varieties and secondly to illustrate how there is even a Matrix Language in 'street'

varieties that ‘appear to be a disorganized jumble of slang and/or lexical input from many sources’ (Myers-Scotton 2002: 62).

Through applying these principles to their data, Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 331-38) show that, in the variety of Tsotsitaal in their study (from Soweto), the morpheme-order and system-morphemes come from a non-standard dialect of Afrikaans (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 329), while in Iscamtho (also from Soweto), they show that the morpheme-order and system-morphemes come from either Zulu or Sotho, depending on the speaker’s first language. They furthermore show that the ELs ‘only contribute content morphemes to mixed constituents or contribute well-formed EL islands’ (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 329).

EL islands are described by Slabbert and Finlayson as ‘material entirely from the embedded language that includes system morphemes’ (Slabbert & Finlayson 2002: 252). An island usually refers to a unit larger than a content morpheme. They explain the status of such islands within the MLF model in the following terms:

The idea is that if ‘by some chance’ within his or her turn a speaker has used a system morpheme from the ‘wrong’ language (i.e. the embedded language) then he or she is ‘obliged’ to continue with that language. (Slabbert & Finlayson 2002: 252)

Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997) argue that Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho conform to code-switching patterns as explained by the MLF model (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton, 1997: 329). They further state that: ‘Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho are best considered as code-switching patterns that have “fossilized” at least to the extent that, in either variety, the ML framing any mixed CPs can be predicted’ (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 325).

### **5.2.1 Code-switching or not Code-switching?**

While Slabbert and Myers-Scotton's article is compelling, and Myers-Scotton's model will be used to determine the base language in the data below, some caution is in order. Classifying the Tsotsitaal in this study as code-switching is problematic for several reasons. Code-switching normally occurs in conditions of bilingualism or multilingualism. While many of the respondents in the data in this questionnaire are bilingual or multilingual, the EL material does not necessarily come from languages in which they hold any level of proficiency. For example, a speaker may use an Afrikaans-derived term, yet be unable to speak Afrikaans (the speaker of Tsotsitaal in the data may in fact be only able to speak their home language, and Tsotsitaal).

Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 330) also describe two ways in which the Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho in their study differ from 'classic' code-switching, which are upheld in the data in this research. Firstly (and evidenced below), the meaning of a particular term may have shifted from the original meaning in the source language. Secondly, some morphemes have an unknown origin; they in fact do not necessarily derive from another language at all, but may only be common to Tsotsitaal and related varieties. For these reasons, the definition of 'code-switching variety' should be applied cautiously. However, the MLF model is still a useful tool to determine the Matrix Language of the Cape Town Tsotsitaal variety.

### **5.3 MLF Model Analysis of Cape Town Data**

This section will deal with two bodies of data: the questionnaires from Khayelitsha, and the interviews from Gugulethu. In the first section, an initial gloss will discuss the MLF model in relation to the Khayelitsha data. Subsequently, six glosses will be presented to highlight certain features of the data.

The second section (5.3.2) will look at the data from Gugulethu, to pick up on certain features that are common to both Cape Town townships, Khayelitsha and Gugulethu. Variation according to the ‘deepness’ of the variety will furthermore be considered.

### 5.3.1 Khayelitsha Questionnaires

Fifty sentences were each translated by six respondents from Khayelitsha giving a total of 300 examples. The morpheme order and system morphemes in each case come from Xhosa (sometimes non-standard) or Zulu, a related language from the Nguni language group. In all examples below speakers’ spellings are retained. (T) denotes a Tsotsitaal content word; (A) Afrikaans; (Z) Zulu; (E) English; and (X) Xhosa.

In translation of the sentence ‘don’t go to town today’, respondents provided the following six interpretations:

- 1) su- via e dorp  
NEG2-go(T) LOC town(T)  
‘Do not go to town’

In this example, *suvia* is a contraction of standard Xhosa:

musa uku-vaya  
NEG to- go  
‘Do not go’

This contraction *suku-* also features in translations 3 and 5 of the same phrase, as well as elsewhere in the data. This is a common contraction in urban Xhosa, and not specific to Tsotsitaal. Two Tsotsitaal terms feature in example 1: *via* and *dorp*. These terms in the Matrix Language Frame model would be considered content EL morphemes. If we discount code-switching as the model then they can

be seen as slang/ neologisms or borrowings. While its origin may be disputed, *vaya* probably derives from Portuguese ‘go’, and is used with this meaning in the data. *Dorp* is a South African English term which derives from Dutch (via Afrikaans) for small town/village. It is also part of standard Xhosa (as a borrowing) but in the form *e-dolop-ini* ‘in town’.

- 2) su- qond’ e- dorp- i famdukwana  
 NEG2-go(Z)- LOC town(T)-LOC today(T)  
 ‘Do not go to town today’

In this second example, we see *dorp* again prefixed by the locative *e-* and a shortened locative suffix (which would normally be *-ini*). Tsotsitaal *via* [or *vaya*] is replaced by the Zulu *qond* ‘go’, while the Tsotsitaal term *famdukwana* is an addition. The basic frame *su-* followed by *e-* remains the same as in example 1.

- 3) suku- phikelela e- dorp vandag  
 NEG2-frequenting(T) LOC-town(T) today(A)  
 ‘Do not frequent the town today’

In the third example, a slightly longer version of the contraction *su-* appears as *suku*. *Phikelela*, a Tsotsitaal term meaning ‘to frequent’, is followed by the locative *e-*, while ‘today’ is derived here from Afrikaans: *vandag*. We begin to see that variation is largely at the lexical level rather than in the grammatical frame.

- 4) su- yi- bethela e- towun namhlanje  
 NEG2-OBJ go(T) LOC town(E) today(X)  
 ‘Do not go to town today’

In example 4, another alternative word for ‘go’ is introduced: *bethela*, literally ‘beat’ (in this usage the sense is ‘beat it’), while *namhlanje* is Xhosa for ‘today’. *Yi* is the object prefix referring to the (unexpressed) road, the object of *bethela*, as in ‘I’m hitting the road’.

- 5) suku- yi- bethel' e- dorp vandag  
 NEG2- OBJ-go LOC-town(T) today(A)  
 'Do not go to town today'

Example 5 also exhibits the *yi* following the slightly longer contraction *suku*, while *towun* and *namhlanje* from example 4 are replaced by respectively *dorp* and *vandag*.

- 6) U-nga- phikelel- i e- dorp  
 2- NEG(Z)-frequent-NEG LOC-town(T)  
 'You should not frequent the town'

In this example, Zulu *nga* 'should not' is used to form the negative with the prefix *nga* and suffix *i* surrounding the Tsotsitaal *phikelele*, while the locative is the familiar *e-* along with the Tsotitaal *dorp*. The change of grammar base for the negative is probably an artefact of the exercise of translation<sup>33</sup>.

It is clear in this series of examples that the morpheme order and the system morphemes are provided in each case by Xhosa, except in example 6, where Zulu is used to form the negative. This is in opposition to previous examples of Tsotsitaal elsewhere in the country which have exhibited an Afrikaans ML (Makhudu 2002; Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997). In this data, Afrikaans and English do not contribute to the grammar base, and only provide EL elements in the form of verbs and nouns. It seems more accurate to describe the use of Afrikaans/ English in this example as *borrowing* rather than code-switching. Both the Tsotsitaal/ Afrikaans *dorp* and English *towun* (or *tawun*) are prefixed by the Xhosa locative prefix *e-*, suggesting that these borrowings are thoroughly immersed in the Xhosa syntactic structure, and are not involved in any phrases (in the linguistics sense) larger than a word. The syntactic structure for all CPs in

<sup>33</sup> The use of Zulu may also be stylistic or a matter of the linguistic history of the speaker. The respondent in this example did not provide details of his birth place or length of stay in Cape Town.

the data is in fact a Nguni language, and this consistency suggests that this is not an example of code-switching, but stylistic variation within the first language of speakers, Xhosa.

Only one of the respondents in this data claimed to speak any Afrikaans, which means code-switching between Xhosa and Afrikaans would be impossible for speakers unless Tsotsitaal had developed its own 'linguistic base' (Ntshangase 1995: 291); in other words, unless it had developed into a language in its own right with an Afrikaans-based grammar. The data gathered in this research indicates that this has not happened, and that Tsotsitaal in Cape Town relies on Nguni languages for its syntactic structure.

Additionally, it is notable that there are very few items derived from English in the data. While all the respondents spoke English at some level, the use of English is minimal, and is clearly borrowing rather than code-switching, as there are no incidences where a series of morphemes from English are spoken in sequence (as in fact with the Afrikaans elements). The examples clearly show that variation within Tsotsitaal is extensive primarily at a lexical level. Although syntactic switching is not evident in the data, I still find it useful to retain Myers-Scotton's term 'matrix language' (ML). It must, however, be understood as a general term which shows no commitment to her model. A synonym that could be applied instead is 'base language' or even – though slightly less expressively – 'borrowing language'.

Following on from this initial example, six further sentences and their translations are presented to highlight additional features of Tsotsitaal.

**'I've never been to Jo'burg'**

A     zange   nd-a-   dwadla e    Jozi  
         never(X) 1- PST-enter(T) LOC Johannesburg(T)

'I've never been to Johannesburg'

In example A above, the Xhosa *zange*, 'never', is followed by a remote past compound tense *nd-a-* on a Tsotsitaal verb *dwadla*, 'to enter'. The following example B is almost identical, aside from *dwadla* being replaced by *blom*, 'to stay':

B     *zange*   *nd-a-*   *bloma* *e-*    *Jozi*  
          never(X) 1- PST-stay(T) LOC-Johannesburg(T)

In example C, 'never' is replaced by the negative *a-ndi* with *ka* which in Xhosa signifies 'not yet'. *Phikelel* in this example stands for 'frequent' with the negative suffix *i*.

C     *A-*   *ndi-ka-*    *phikelel-*    *i*    *e-*    *Jozi*  
          NEG-1- not yet-frequent(T)-NEG LOC-Johannesburg(T)

D     *zange*   *ndi-m-*   *buke* *e-*    *Jozi*  
          never(X) 1- OBJ-see(T) LOC-Johannesburg(T)

Example D uses *zange* with *ndi-m-*, the first person followed by an object prefix referring to 'him or her'. In this example, 'been to' is replaced with *buke* meaning 'see', literally, 'I've never seen Johannesburg'.

Example E begins with the Zulu negative-first person *a-ng'*- and features an unknown Tsotsitaal term, the root *sidiz*, prefixed by *ka-* 'not yet', and followed by the negative *-i*:

E     *A-*   *ng'*-    *ka-*    *sidiz-*    *i*    *e-*    *Jozi*  
          NEG-SBJ(Z)-not yet- go(T) NEG LOC-Johannesburg(T)

The respondent in this example was born in Gauteng, and spoke Zulu as well as Xhosa, which may indicate that first language has an influence in this example of Zulu impacting on the ML, although it may equally be a stylistic choice.

Finally, example F is identical to example C:

F     A-   ndi- ka-     phikelel-    i     e-    Jozi  
      NEG-1-   not yet-frequent(T)- NEG LOC-Johannesburg(T)

This series of examples once again highlights the mainly standard Xhosa grammatical framework, and the extensive lexical variation. Additionally the number of different constructions and variation in the central verb begins to hint at a stylistic depth to Tsotsitaal, a creative capacity which can be utilised through the lexical variation.

'I'm not going'

This was one of the few series of examples to exhibit very similar responses throughout. This is presumably partly because it's a relatively short statement, and also potentially because it is frequently used, and therefore may have 'stabilised' (become a generic speech phrase<sup>34</sup>). All three of the Tsotsitaal verbs used here in the sense of 'going' have been encountered previously in the data: *dwadla*; *bethela*; and *vaya*.

A     a-   ndi-dwadl-   i     / a-   ndi-vay-   i  
      NEG-1-   enter(T)-NEG / NEG-1-   go(T)-NEG

B     A-   ndi-phikel-    i  
      NEG-1-   frequent(T)-NEG

<sup>34</sup> The concept of 'stable' phrases will be returned to in the following chapter.

C A- ndi-phikelel- i  
NEG-1- frequent(T)-NEG

D A- ndi-yi- beth- i  
NEG-1- OBJ-go(T)-NEG

E A- ndi-vay- i  
NEG-1- go(T)-NEG

F A- ndi-vay- i  
NEG-1- go(T)-NEG

Clearly in this example, there are no deviations from the standard Xhosa negative first person construction *a-ndi-* with the negative suffix *-i*. The only slight departure in the grammatical frame is the inclusion in example D, of the object prefix *yi*.

'Sipho won't go'

A u-Sipho a-ka- vay- i  
3-Sipho NEG-go(T)-NEG

B Sira a-wu-yi- beth- i  
Sipho NEG-LOC-go(T)-NEG

In these first two examples, respectively *aka-* and *awu-* form the negative with the *-i* suffix. In the case of *awu*, *w* is a filler between two vowels, while *u* refers to second person or third person. The second example replaces the name 'Sipho' with *Sira*. *Sipho* is a common name in South Africa, and the (stylistic) replacement is common enough to feature three times in this translation.

Example C is interesting because of its departure from the other relatively straightforward translations of this phrase.

C U-sira a-ka- zi- shay- i ngo- yi- betha  
3-Sipho NEG-REFL-go(Z)- NEG INS-LOC-go

Literally translating as ‘he’s not hitting the road by hitting it’, this example utilises both Zulu and Xhosa verbs for ‘hitting the road’ – *betha* which we saw previously, and the Zulu *ushaya* which similarly means ‘to hit or beat’, as an action or motion. This example contrasts with the other translations, as it appears to be a developed ‘saying’, not a straight translation. This may suggest a speech genre in Bakhtinian terms – an example of a ‘relatively stable utterance’ (Bakhtin 1986: 177). Bakhtinian speech genres will be returned to in the following chapter (section 6.6).

The remaining examples follow a more standard translation pattern with only the word order, and not the sense, altered in example E. *Aka* is the neg *a* followed by the third person subject prefix *ka*. *Betha* ends in *a* rather than the negative *i* because it is a compound present tense marker and negative.

D U-Sipho a-ka-zu- yi- betha  
3-Sipho NEG-REFL-LOC-go(T)

E A-ka-vay- i u-Sira  
NEG-go(T)-NEG 3-Sipho

F U-Sipho a-ka-zu- ku- vaya  
3-Sipho NEG-REFL-INF-go(T)

'I used to work in Belville but I'm working at Muizenburg now'

A be- ndi-spana e- Belville  
PST-1- work(T) LOC-Belville

The Tsotsitaal term *spana* appears to derive from the Afrikaans for 'yoke' as in 'to yoke oxen together'. In Afrikaans, *spansaam* translates as 'pull together', 'to work', as in a team of oxen. *Spana* is the only translation offered for 'work' in this series of examples, and is a common Tsotsitaal term.

B ndi-qhele uspana e- Belvill kodwa ndi-spana e- Muizenburg  
manje  
1- used to work(T) LOC-Belvill but(X) 1- work(T) LOC-Muizenburg  
now(Z)

C Kade ndi-spana e- Belville kodwa manje ndi-spana e-  
Muizenburg.  
Previously(Z) 1- work(T) LOC-Belville but(X) now(Z) 1- work(T) LOC-  
Muizenburg

In the following three examples, 'but', previously translated as Xhosa *kodwa*, is replaced by *ma*, *mara*, and *maar*, all derived from Afrikaans *maar* with the same meaning 'but'.

*Ndandi*, in D and F, is a compound 'I used to'. *Nda* is *ndi* plus the remote past tense marker *a*. The full form would run: *ndaye ndi spana*. This is normally contracted in Xhosa and not a unique feature of either Tsotsitaal or a more general urban Xhosa.

D Nda- ndi- spana e- Belville manje- ma ndi-spana e-Muizenburg

PST- 1- work(T) LOC-Belville now(Z)-but(A) 1- work LOC-Muizenberg

E Be- ngi- spana e- Belville mara manje ngi- spana e-  
Muizenburg

AUX- 1(Z)-work(T) LOC-Belville but(A) now(Z) 1(Z)- work(T) LOC-  
Muizenburg

F Nda-ndi-spana e- Bellville maar ngoku ndi-spana e- Muizenburg  
PST-1- work(T) LOC-Belville but(A) now(X) 1- work LOC-Muizenburg

The use of *maar* appears to be an example of logical connector borrowing (to be briefly discussed in section 6.2). Logical connectors are commonly borrowed in urban Xhosa (Deumert et al. 2006), and their status is ambiguous enough in terms of syntax that the borrowing is not explainable in terms of the MLF model.

'I went to work on Friday'

The following set of examples has a number of different formations. In the following example, *bendiye* is the Xhosa form of 'I went'. In this case the verb 'to go' remains in standard Xhosa, and is not replaced by Tsotsitaal as in other examples. *Vrydag* is borrowed from Afrikaans.

A be- ndi-ye e- span' Vrydag  
PST-1- go(X) LOC-work(T) Friday(A)

In this second example, the familiar Tsotsitaal term *phikelele* replaces the Xhosa *ya* in the previous example. The past prefix *be-* is omitted. *Spani* in this case is complete; in the previous example the final *i* was silent. *Faras* appears to be a Tsotsitaal term for 'Friday' (or Afrikaans *Vrydag*).

B Ndi-phikelele e- spani Faras

1- frequent LOC-work(T) Friday(T)

In the third example, the Zulu verb *qonde* 'to go directly' is used, while the remainder of the sentence remains the same.

C Be- ndi-qonde e- span' Faras  
PST-1- go directly(Z) LOC-work(T) Friday(T)

In the fourth example, Tsotsitaal *bethela* takes the place of the verb. The suffix *-la* is a verbal extension indicating direction, i.e. 'beating it (towards) work'.

D Ndi-yi- bethela e- span' Faras  
1- OBJ-beating(T) LOC-work(T) Friday(T)

In example E, the English *Friday* replaces the Tsotsitaal *Faras*, while example F is identical to example B.

E Ndi-ye e- spani Friday  
1-go(X) LOC-work(T) Friday(E)

F Ndi-phikelele e- span' Faras  
1- frequent LOC-work Friday(T)

Once again, this example clearly shows that variation happens primarily in the forms of verbs and nouns. The grammatical structure follows the rules of standard Xhosa, and is constituted of standard Xhosa.

'The snake bit him and he died'

In the following example, *eksê* - 'I say' derives from Afrikaans, and is a common term in the Cape Coloured dialect of Afrikaans, and even informal South African

English. *Bhodile* is a Tsotsitaal term for 'to die' in its perfect form.

A     eksê     u-bhodile(T)  
I say(A) 2-dead

B     Inyoka   i-   m-   ngqhub-   ile           wa-           citsha  
Snake(X) SBJ OBJ bump(X)-PST       PST SBJV-died(Z&T)

C     I-    m-   fadele    isilanka   umjita   wa-           citsha  
SBJ-OBJ fatally(T) snake(A) guy(T) PST SBJV-died(Z+T)

*Ukufadala* in this latter example means literally 'to collapse' or 'to be finished'.  
*Fadele* translates as 'giving in'.

In the following example, the respondent wrote only *inyo imfadele*. There is possibly a joke here, as 'snake' in Xhosa is *inyoka*, while *inyo*, though similar, translates as 'vagina'. *Fadele* means 'finished' in Tsotsitaal and can be used in a number of ways, for example, referring to money (the money is finished) but in this case refers to death (the snake finished him).

D     Inyo     i-    m-   fadele  
Snake(X) SBJ-OBJ finished

E     U-beth- w-    e    yi- nyoka   wa-           bhod-   a  
2 hit(T)-PASS-PST by-snake(X) PST SBJV-died(T)-SBJV

F     Inyoka   i-    m-   bithe   wa-           photheka  
Snake(X) SBJ-OBJ-bit(E) PST SBJV-given up

In example F, -eka is the verbal extension, a stative extension '-able', imparting the meaning 'in a state of immobility'. *Photheka* in this way translates as 'given

up' and comes from the Xhosa *photha* – 'weaving' or 'braiding'. The meaning 'given up' is a metaphorical extension of the Xhosa 'braid' and relies on the metaphor of having one's feet braided together, in which case you cannot move, you are immobilised, useless (Zukile Jama, personal communication).

As these examples have shown, the morpheme-order and system morphemes of the data from Khayelitsha are consistently provided by the Nguni first language of the speakers, aside from some grammatical forms from Zulu which may be stylistic or related to the speaker's first language, although Zulu and Xhosa in fact overlap considerably in grammar and lexis. Some examples will now be presented from interviews in Gugulethu to show consistency across Cape Town townships.

### 5.3.2 Gugulethu Interviews

While the above discussions have centred on Tsotsitaal from Khayelitsha, we see very similar patterns in Tsotsitaal from Gugulethu. Take the following example of a very 'deep' version of Tsotsitaal elicited from a slightly drunk, ex-gangster who was born in Gugulethu:

S: Zi-thole mfo-wethu okwenzekayo u-ya-bona, na-ko ndi-  
juluka nda-ngenela nda-dl' imbombothi, nda-mnandi nda-beka,  
u-ya-fristana?

['Do you get it my brother? It's like this, you know, with it I sweated, I went inside, I had liquor I became fine, I'm leaving, you understand?']

In this example, a student assistant on the project who was an L1 speaker of Xhosa, underlined the Tsotsitaal terms and gave his understanding of them below. His comment read:

['This is a deep Tsotsitaal but I **do** understand some few words which I will define here below:

*Zithole: literally means 'get yourself'.*

*Okwenzekayo: means 'what is happening'. It's like this*

*Ukujuluka: literally means, 'to sweat'.*

*Imbombothi: I don't know the meaning of this term.*

*Ndamnandi: I don't know its meaning.*

*Ndabeka: means 'to walk' or 'to run'.*

*Uyafristana: means 'do you understand?'*

NB: In the context of Tsotsitaal I really have no idea what these terms/ words mean.']

This example of a 'deep' Tsotsitaal is characterised by densely-packed unfamiliar terms which appear nowhere else in the data. As we can see in the transcription however, despite the deepness, the grammar base is still Xhosa. It utilises *u-ya-* and *ndi-*, *nda-* prefixes, as well as *zi-*, a reflexive, and *o- -yo*, a relative clause. The implication here is that even the 'deep' varieties of Tsotsitaal spoken by criminals or gangsters (rather than schoolchildren as in the majority of the Khayelitsha data) utilise an Nguni language, primarily Xhosa, as the ML. In these examples from Gugulethu there is less influence from Zulu on the grammar base, supporting the argument that first language plays the greater part in the Tsotsitaal ML, as the respondent in this case was born in Gugulethu and his parents were Xhosa speakers from the Eastern Cape.

In the following example from the companion of the previous respondent, *ukutrerha* appears to be a Tsotsitaal term for 'circumcision'. In the context of the sentence this becomes *ndatrerha*, past tense 'circumcised'.

M: Ye mntakwethu ndizakuxelela ke mna ke. Abazali bam babesuka eQueenstown, eNdlovukazi kuKomani, ndagoduka ke mna ndayokwenza into zam phaya, ndaphinda ndatrerha ndiyile outi ndiyiyo. (Laugh) hayi serious nyhani...

['Hey my brother I am going to tell you. My parents were from Queenstown, in Ndlovukazi, Komani, I went home

and did my things there, I'm also circumcised, I am who I am. (Laugh) no serious [nyhani]...']

Similarly to the first example, we can see the syntactic framework is provided by standard or urban standard Xhosa, while there is a loaded lexis from Tsotsitaal. Despite the 'deepness' of the examples from this interview, some familiar lexical items also appear. On several occasions the speakers use the term *spana* for 'work':

M: U-ya-spana Joe<sup>35</sup>.

Similarly in the next example, *blom*, seen in section 5.3.1, makes an appearance:

Q1: How do you say in Tsotsitaal I live in Gugulethu?

M: Ndiblom' eGugs.

The examples of 'deep' Tsotsitaal from these respondents show us that the ML is the same in Gugulethu as in Khayelitsha. When it comes to the lexicon, it highlights two things: firstly that there is immense variation, which appears to indicate the intended 'audience' of the variety of Tsotsitaal, and secondly that there are a number of terms, such as *spana*, *blom*, *outie*<sup>36</sup> and *sharp*<sup>37</sup> which appear to be common to all Tsotsitaal varieties.

### 5.3.3 Conclusion to MLF Model Analysis

As the above discussion has shown, in this research data from Tsotsitaal in Cape Town the morpheme-order and system-morphemes come consistently from Xhosa, signifying that the Matrix Language is Xhosa.

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<sup>35</sup> *Joe* is a Tsotsitaal term used to refer to a third person.

<sup>36</sup> *Outie*, for example, is also known in Durban (Raj Mesthrie, personal communication). Stone (1991: 329) attributes the word to the English 'outlaw'.

<sup>37</sup> *Sharp* is perhaps the most widely-used Tsotsitaal word. It was cited in the data as a translation for 'goodbye'.

This has implications for previous research. Firstly, Slabbert and Myers-Scotton's claim that Tsotsitaal has an Afrikaans base needs to be reconsidered. They argued that Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho have a relation to other varieties spoken in the community on a morphosyntactic level. This is upheld by the Cape Town data. They also argue that previous research has put too great an emphasis on lexicon, and state that 'the false assumption that a mixed lexicon presupposes a mixed grammatical structure has prevailed' (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 328). This is an important observation, and analysis of the ML in their study, and in this thesis, shows this not to be the case; the grammatical structure is not mixed but has a consistent ML. However, Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 329) go on to argue that 'the grammar has always been considered the basis for defining a variety in relation to other languages.' What this thesis has thus far shown, is that there are different Matrix Languages for different varieties of Tsotsitaal. This dictates that it is not possible to describe Tsotsitaal as a discrete 'variety'.

Part of the conceptual problem in previous research already hinges on naming. Naming became difficult in Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997), and Calteaux (1994), when varieties were found to be called Tsotsitaal and have an African language base, and to be called Iscamtho and yet have an Afrikaans base (see section 1.2.2). Slabbert and Myers-Scotton's (1997) primary data was gathered in Soweto, and on the basis of the varieties discovered there, they state that 'We will refer to those versions with Afrikaans as the ML as Tsotsitaal, and those versions with a Bantu language as their ML (generally Zulu or Sotho) as Iscamtho' (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 326). While this may have been a valid choice in their research location, the picture is complicated by different regional varieties such as the Cape Town variety. Furthermore, their choice was based on some research (Ntshangase 1995) which suggested that Tsotsitaal was diminishing in use and being replaced by Iscamtho. Again, this may have been a regional trend, yet it is not the case in the areas surveyed in this research. While Afrikaans-based Tsotsitaal might be receding, and being replaced by Bantu-based Tsotsitaals, Iscamtho currently appears to have a limited regional use as a term for this type

of variety. In the light of the Cape Town data, it begins to seem fruitless to continue to classify *any* variety of township slang in South Africa which utilises an African language ML as Iscamtho, and only varieties which feature an Afrikaans ML as Tsotsitaal. This does not reflect the reality of the linguistic landscape; ultimately, classifying Tsotsitaal by grammatical structure or Matrix Language alone becomes problematic.

It seems more valid to argue that Tsotsitaal refers to something other than a single linguistic variety. But in this case, what is it, exactly, which typifies the language? Effort has been put into differentiating Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho, not only on a linguistic level but also in terms of historical development (Ntshangase 1995). The historical development, as argued in chapter one, means that numerous regional varieties have developed which may fall under a number of different names, have different MLs and yet be linked by some common threads (e.g. the common roots in gang slang, lexical items, and domain of use). Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 328) mention a fieldworker for their study who states that 'Iscamtho is not a language; it is a matter of words'. If, rather than dismissing this suggestion, we admit that there are structural regularities to the varieties, and yet argue that these regularities do not explain the association between the varieties found in Soweto (with an Afrikaans base), Cape Town (with a Xhosa base), or Durban (with a Zulu (Rudwick 2005) or English (Mesthrie, forthcoming) base), we need to reconsider the lexicon in the constitution of the varieties.

It seems more fruitful to argue, as Ntshangase (1995) did of Iscamtho, that it is a language used 'through' another language, and '...has no structure of its own since it relies heavily on the language structures from which it operates' (Ntshangase 1995: 291). In this case, the EL content morphemes are what typify the variety, and the base language is merely dependent on the particular social context and the available vernacular. In this case, lexical items common to both Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho may imply that the varieties *are* in fact related, although not in the sense of being the same 'language', as the Matrix Language differences

clearly demonstrate that this is not the case. Rather, it can be argued that these varieties are not languages at all. They are not even code-switching. They are linguistically only identifiable as varieties discrete from the vernacular because of the borrowing of specific items which constitute ‘fashions in words’, or, ‘style’ in language. In the case of Tsotsitaal therefore, Slabbert and Finlayson’s (2002) description of a lexis embedded in a base code would be more accurate. This hypothesis may provide a better explanation for the different varieties and dissolve some of the confusion over naming.

Common to a number of the above examples from the Cape Town data are a few core terms which can be seen to indicate the variety. These include verbs such as *spana*, *verstana*, *ringa*, and *vaya*, as well as items such as *sharp* and *Joe*. This suggests that the lexicon is a defining feature of Tsotsitaal; although only a limited lexicon, because stylistic variation is also a defining feature. The second half of the data analysis will discuss in further detail the lexical items solicited from the questionnaires, and the implications of this core set of Tsotsitaal terms, to determine if the varieties can in fact be considered merely ‘a matter of words’.

#### **5.4 Lexical Analysis of Cape Town Data**

As discussed above, it appears that Tsotsitaal features a set of ‘core’ terms which are common across the different speakers in this thesis data. A number of these terms also appear in research conducted previously in other regions of South Africa, such as that undertaken by Slabbert and Myers-Scotton and Ntshangase. For example, the term *spana*, which is featured in the analysis above meaning ‘work’, and is thought to come from the Afrikaans term *inspan*, or *spansaam* meaning ‘pull together’ as in a team of oxen, is cited in Slabbert and Myers-Scotton’s Iscamtho data. They suggest that it ‘seems to be related to the Afrikaans verb *inspan* ‘prepare for work’” (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 336), and they further state that it is used in Afrikaans-based Tsotsitaal with the same meaning. The occurrences in their data are as follows:

i-outie e *span-a* e TOWN  
9-guy 9REL work (Afr)-FV LOC town  
'a guy who works in town'

(Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 336)

U-mu-ntu o *span-a-yo*  
PP-1-person REL work (Afr)-FV-REL  
'a person who works'

(Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 336)

In these examples of Sowetan Iscamtho, it is clearly evident that *spana* is used both with the same meaning as the Cape Town data, and with Nguni verb formations (compare with the usage in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 above). A number of other terms were also found to be common to both the Cape Town data and that of previous researchers in Gauteng. However, although these core items can *indicate* Tsotsitaal, they are not *necessary* to it. By way of an example, in one interview, a respondent was solicited examples of 'I am going to work' for which he gave the following three examples:

S: Hayi, eh... **'Ndisagila ngapha espani'**, uyabo?  
['No, eh... 'I am going to work', you see?']

S: **'Ethesheni, ngisagila ngapha ethesheni'**, uyabo?  
[''Work, I'm going to work', you see?']

S: Kunendlela ngendlela.... Uyabona? **'Ndisangena ngapha ethesheni'**.

['There are ways and ways... You see? 'I am entering/going to work''']

While in the first example the respondent uses *spana*, he uses a different term, *thesheni*, for 'work' in the following two examples. The core concept here is that

there are ‘ways and ways’ of saying things in Tsotsitaal. Variation in lexicon is part of the key to the language, and can occur from one friendship group to another, one township to another, or depending on a specific context. So why does this variation occur? The remainder of this chapter will consider areas in which variation or relexicalisation takes place by means of an indexical score, to begin to trace the domains of Tsotsitaal use, and to circumscribe the function of this variation.

50 lexical items were included in the questionnaire, (adapted from Comrie & Smith 1977)<sup>38</sup>. The items were chosen according to the likely usage of the terms in the township environment. The data does not therefore show a full range of relexicalisation or overlexicalisation, as it was based on a questionnaire designed for a ‘standard’ language. The areas chosen to be explored through the lexicon were the domains of ‘everyday interaction’, ‘clothing’, ‘relationships’, and ‘environment’.

Each set of responses was given three index values based on:

- a) How many items were Tsotsitaal-specific, i.e. not used in the same context in standard Xhosa or Zulu. This index value is given first.
- b) How many Tsotsitaal variants there were. This value is given second.
- c) How many Tsotsitaal items are known derivations from Afrikaans. The index value is given third.

When no translation was given, the score is zero, as it is assumed there is no specific Tsotsitaal term, other than the standard Xhosa. In some instances, the respondents themselves provided the standard Xhosa, which also received a zero score. High scores therefore indicate areas of relexicalisation.

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 1

### 5.4.1 Everyday Interaction

So, for example, in terms of ‘everyday interactions’ the responses for ‘hello’ were as follows:

- A grand
- B Holla
- C eksê
- D MoJa
- E Heita
- F Heita

6-5-1

In this example, the Tsotsitaal index is 6, as ‘standard’ Xhosa would be *molo* or *molweni*. The variation index is 5 as there are five alternative ways of saying hello provided – the last two respondents both gave *heita*. The Afrikaans index is 1, although in this case *eksê* from Afrikaans *ek sê* meaning ‘I say’, probably derives from Cape Coloured Afrikaans and not ‘standard’ Afrikaans.

The score 6-5-1 is a very high indexical score and indicates a large amount of variation for this greeting. Similarly in the translation of ‘goodbye’:

- A sharp
- B Moja ke
- C moja
- D Mayitshayisane
- E Sharp
- F Sharp

6-3-0

In this example, the Tsotsitaal index is 6 (the traditional Xhosa form is *sala kakuhle* or *hamba kakuhle*) while the variation index is 3 (*moja ke* and *moja* being counted as the same). The Afrikaans index is 0. We can see therefore that ‘everyday interactions’ have a high Tsotsitaal index value and a high variation index value.

#### 5.4.2 Clothing

‘Shoes’

- A qaza
- B Qaza
- C iqaza
- D Amanyathelo
- E Qaza
- F Bhaqaza

6-2-0

While the root of *amanyathelo* may be Xhosa *nyawo* ‘foot’, the transformation is extensive. For this reason the responses have an index of 6. Shoe brands appear to be an integral part of the clothing style of young urban township residents; the high index may reflect this predilection. Similarly with ‘trousers’:

- A ngcaza
- B Imblukwe
- C Ingxaza
- D Ingxaza
- E Ngxaza
- F Ingxaza

5-1-0

Here, *imblukwe* derives from Afr. *broek*, or Eng. *breeches*, and is a traditional Xhosa word *ibhulukhwe*, therefore does not score on the index. *Ingxaza*, however, is of unknown origin. Once again, the connection between this high index score and the centrality of trouser styles to the Tsotsi identity is worth noting. A third example of this is with ‘hat’:

- A twala
- B Thwala
- C ithwala
- D Ithwala
- E ithwala
- F isitrarhela

6-2-0

Again the index score is high. The importance of trousers and hats is reflected in the descriptions of early gang styles (see section 1.2.2) in which the Ninevite gang around 1910 is reported to have worn distinctive hats and narrow bottomed trousers (Van Onselen 2001: 384). One respondent in an informal interview for this research described how gangs in Khayelitsha today are identified specifically by the type of hat which they wear. For example, one notorious gang sports something similar to an Islamic style cap (the gang name was ‘the Palestinians’). The hat is therefore a central part of township style and identity, for example in the case of the ‘spotti’, a type of sun hat, described by Swartz (2003: 14-15). Swartz goes on to describe how Tsotsitaal speakers wear ‘*All Stars* [a type of shoe], loud shirts and checked pants’ (Swartz 2003: 16), supporting the high relexification indices in this thesis data.

‘Sweater’

- A –

- B –
- C umjezwana
- D –
- E bloko
- F Ibloko

2-1-0

While *umjezwana* derives from Xhosa *ijezi* (originally Afr./Eng. *jersie/jersey*), *bloko* is of unknown origin. However, the low index score indicates that the sweater or jersey is not central to the style. It is worth noting the diminutive morpheme used to transform the Xhosa *ijezi* to *umjez(w)ana*, which also features in the translation for ‘shirt’:

- A hempana
- B Ntsedwana
- C ntshedwana
- D Intshedwana
- E Intshedwana
- F Intsedwana

5-1-0

In this example, while Swartz (2003: 16) mentions ‘loud’ shirts as central to the street style, the high index may also be misleading. *Hempana* (lit. ‘little shirt’) is diminutive Xhosa *ihemp*, which derives from Afrikaans *hemp* for ‘shirt’. This does not rate an indexical score because it has become standard Xhosa. *Ntshedwana*, also diminutive, appears to derive from Eng. ‘shirt’. It is likely, however, that this is a common borrowing in urban Xhosa and not restricted to Tsotsitaal, although it is not standard.

One other item that relates to the style is 'walk'. A particular style of walking comes up many times in the Cape Town data as a signifier of the urban Tsotsitaal speaker. As previously mentioned, in Calteaux's research in 1994 in Tembisa, the way a Tsotsi walked involved 'swaying' and was called *bumper* (Calteaux 1994: 319). Walking can be considered central to the style (which will be returned to in the following chapter), and has a correspondingly high indexical score in the data, with a high variation index.

- A –
- B phikelela
- C inyathelo
- D vaya
- E yibethe
- F –

4-4-0

Phikelele has a number of meanings in common usage, for example 'to move to and fro/ to be stubborn, persevere' (Zukile Jama, personal communication). It is mostly seen in Tsotsitaal but also forms part of traditional Xhosa: the dictionary cites it as *phikela* 'to do something persistently'. It is therefore interesting in this context as 'walk'.

*Inyathelo* was previously seen in the translation for 'shoes' by a different respondent. It featured there in the plural: *ama-nyathelo*. Stephanie Rudwick (personal correspondence) proposes the etymology 'step forward' from Zulu. *Yibethe*, as mentioned earlier, is from English 'beat', and becomes 'beat it'. *Vaya*, as mentioned above, features prominently in Tsotsitaal data and can be considered a 'core' lexical item. It probably derives from Portuguese *va*, meaning 'go'. Slabbert and Myers-Scotton (1997: 335) alternatively suggest that it almost certainly originates in the Afrikaans *waai*, which they state is a verb meaning 'go',

although in standard Afrikaans the translation is 'blow'. In their article Slabbert and Myers-Scotton cite three incidences of the term:

u-vay-a

1-go (Afr)-FV

'goes'

(Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 336)

u-ya-vay-a

2S-PRES-go (Afr)-FV

'you go'

(Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 335)

ma-si-vay-e-ni

HORT 1PL-go (Afr) –FV-PL

'let us go'

(Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997: 335)

In their data, these incidences all occur in the Iscamtho data, which exhibits a Zulu ML. The verb form is found to be the same in the Gugulethu data:

S: ...mhlawubi uvaya kwinginghi ongayaziyo, mhlawubi  
andithi uvaya apha...

['...maybe you are walking in an area you do not know,  
maybe, let me say you are walking here...']

In Xhosa and Zulu the verb is formed in the same way. Additionally, in the Cape Town data, Xhosa formations occur:

(1) I'm not going – *andivayi*

(2) Siphon won't go – *uSiphon akavayi*

In Khayelitsha and Gugulethu *vayi* appears to mean 'walk' as well as 'go', although this interchangeability could also be a result of the interpretation of the English in translation. In Slabbert and Myers-Scotton's data it is unclear whether it can also mean 'walk'.

Central to the 'style' of Tsotsitaal is Tsotsitaal itself, and the translation of 'talk' reflects this. 'Talk/chat' scored highly, and at 5-1-0 showed no variation. *Ringa* appears to be another core Tsotsitaal term. It is commonly assumed to derive from English; the term featured in Ntshangase's (1993: 1) thesis and he attributed it to the English 'ring' as in telephone.

- A ringa
- B Ringa
- C ringa
- D -
- E ringa
- F Ringa

5-1-0

Ntshangase (1993: 1) interestingly cites *iringas* as an alternative name for Iscamtho. In the Cape Town data, it is used to mean 'talk' in a more general sense, although it also refers to talking Tsotsitaal specifically. In this sense it is like *scamtho* which can be used to mean 'to talk', but is also a name *for* the lingo in Johannesburg Iscamtho.

In the following example *ringa* is used in the broad sense of 'to talk':

S: 26, uyabo? Qha intoni, andifuni kuthiwe **ek sê**, uyabo, ndibe ndi-**ringa la-line**, uyabo.

[‘26, you see? But [you know] what, I do not want people to say ek sê, you see, for me to [talk about that line/issue], you see.’]

In the next excerpt, *ringa le-taal* refers specifically to speaking Tsotsitaal (*le-taal*):

S: Kwayi ndlela o-ringa ngayo kaloku, uyabo, ‘cause awunothi gqhi sowu-ringa le-taal yalapha, uyabo.

[‘Even the way you speak also, you see, ‘cause you cannot just get here already speaking the language spoken here, you see.’]

A direct translation was given in the following excerpt:

M: Xa siringa, xa siringa, okay ke mandithethe nawe. “Ringa” né, “ringa” like is a Zulu word, ringa is speaking I am speaking to you.

[‘When we speak, when we speak, okay let me talk to you. “Ringa” né, “ringa” like is a Zulu word, ringa is speaking I am speaking to you.’]

The importance of speaking to the Tsotsitaal style can thus be ascertained from the centrality of the term *ringa*. It can also be considered one of the ‘core’ terms, consistent to all varieties of Tsotsitaal.

### 5.4.3 Relationships

As expected, the index is generally high for terms of reference for family/friends, indicating the centrality of relations between speakers in the township. Mother and father are both represented by terms retained from Sophiatown Tsotsitaal (Molamu 2003: 77): *oledi*, from English ‘old lady’, and *tayima*, from English ‘old

timer'. The Tsotsitaal and variation indices are 6-1 in both cases, indicating a 'standard' Tsotsitaal term with no variation. Although one respondent additionally gave the alternatives *moms* and *topi* respectively, these are likely to be from the urban vernacular. There was also some minor variation in spelling, e.g. *timer* which followed the English spelling, as opposed to *I thayima* which is obviously influenced by Xhosa.

'Brother' is a particularly interesting example, because of the prominence of male-male relations in Tsotsitaal use, where the majority of Tsotsitaal is spoken amongst male friendship/ peer groups as described in chapter three.

- A broer
- B Mntaks / mtucks
- C gazlam
- D I buteri
- E umjita wasemadla
- F Mfethu

6-6-1

The first response, *broer*, comes directly from Afrikaans. The second is unknown while the third, it has been suggested, may be a combination of 'cous(in)' (transformed into *gaz*), and *lam* 'of me' in Xhosa. Literally the sense of the word would be 'cousin of mine'. The fourth response, *I buteri*, is a transformation of *ubhuti* from Xhosa, borrowed from Afrikaans, which borrowed it from Malay. The transformation is extensive enough that in this case it scored on the index. *Umjita* is used elsewhere in the data for 'guy', while *wase-madla* is an unknown term. The final response, *mfethu*, appears to be a contraction of Zulu *umfowethu* meaning 'my brother', where 'brother' is *-fowa*. It appears elsewhere in the data as a further contraction *mfo* and appears to be a core Tsotsitaal lexical item around Cape Town. It therefore also accords an indexical score despite its Nguni origins.

Other relations which scored high were 'grandmother' (with an index of 4-3-0), 'girlfriend' (with an index of 5-3-0, including the Sophiatown *cherry*, thought to derive from French *cherie* and comprising two out of the six responses), and 'boyfriend', which included the responses *ow*, *iawti* and *auti*, Tsotsitaal variants of Cape Coloured Afrikaans *outie*<sup>39</sup> (Stone 1991: 329).

'boyfriend':

- A –
- B ow
- C iawti yam, ibunju
- D Umjata
- E Bunju
- F Auti

5-3-1

In the whole body of lexical items, the two highest-scoring items both in the Tsotsitaal index and in variation, were 'hello' at 6-5-1 and 'brother' at 6-6-1. This fact alone gives a good indication of the domain of use.

#### 5.4.4 Environment

The lowest-scoring words were those which would more readily be associated with a rural environment than an urban environment.

Below are the responses for the word 'sun':

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<sup>39</sup> Derived from English 'outlaw', this nevertheless constitutes borrowing from Cape Coloured Afrikaans rather than South African English which does not utilise the term. *Outie* also appeared once as a translation for 'husband'.

- A –
- B –
- C ilanga
- D –
- E –
- F Ilanga

0-0-0

In this example the Tsotsitaal index is 0, the variation index is 0 and the Afrikaans index is also 0. Both responses come from ‘standard’ Xhosa.

‘Pig’, ‘cow’, ‘sun’, ‘moon’, ‘wind’ and ‘freedom’ all scored 0-0-0. ‘Water’ provides one exception:

- K vathi
- A Amavathi
- B mavati
- C Amavati
- D Amavati
- E Ivati

6-1-0

In this example, despite the high Tsotsitaal index of 6, the variation index is its lowest at 1. *Vathi* may be derived from Afrikaans ‘water’ wherein the initial ‘w’ represents a [v] pronunciation (possibly reinforced by English ‘water’). In this example, the high index may be misleading, as this borrowing may also be used in urban vernacular Xhosa, rather than the traditional *amanzi*. However, a Tsotsitaal term may also be explained by the centrality of issues surrounding water provision in township life, especially in informal settlements.

A high-scoring response relating to the urban environment was in translation of words for money, where each denomination has more than one Tsotsitaal term:

*Yingubo* or *Tiger* – 10 rand

*Klip/Klipper/Iklippa* or *idrater* – 100 rand

*Bhlok* or *Istiner/Stina/Is'tina* – 1000 rand

The high score reflects the relative importance of money over cows in an urban township.

#### **5.4.5 Conclusion of Lexical Data Analysis**

Items with a high index include: *Hello, Goodbye, Go away, and How are you.* These terms can be considered *interactive* and reflect the use of Tsotsitaal in everyday interactions.

Another set of high index items are: *Shoes, Hat, Trousers, Shirt, Talk, and Walk.* These relate to *style* and reflect the connection of Tsotsitaal to a particular style within the township.

A third set of high index terms are: *Mother, Father, Brother, Grandmother, Friend, Girlfriend, and Boyfriend.* These reflect *relationships and camaraderie* as the background for Tsotsitaal usage.

Items with a low index include: *Sun, Moon, Stars, Rain, Wind, Person, Pig, Cow, Voice, Awake and Freedom.* These fall within what we might consider to be 'rural', 'nature' and 'abstract' arenas, and the low indices reflect the urban focus of Tsotsitaal.

I would like to make several points regarding vocabulary at this stage.

- 1) Obviously the vocabulary differs widely from speaker to speaker (arguably due to creative styling, to be discussed in the next chapter). However, it is still likely to be intelligible across Khayelitsha unless developed within a particular friendship group. Meanwhile, there seem to be a series of 'core' terms which are common to Tsotsitaal beyond the boundaries of peer groups, townships, and even home languages. The core terms constitute the 'light' version of Tsotsitaal and are present in the 'deep' version. The female respondents in this study, most of who stated they did not speak Tsotsitaal, nevertheless were able to use a number of core Tsotsitaal terms.
- 2) Secondly, the data shows that the source of lexical items is rarely Afrikaans. The Afrikaans index was very low throughout the data. Many of the Afrikaans borrowings appear to manifest in the vernacular Xhosa, rather than in Tsotsitaal itself. The Tsotsitaal borrowings from Afrikaans were few and show contact with the non-standard Cape Coloured variety rather than traditional Afrikaans. Therefore we can argue that Afrikaans has very little influence on Cape Town Tsotsitaal, while non-standard Cape Coloured Afrikaans has a little more influence perhaps due to language contact at work or school.
- 3) Some of the lexical items are common to urban Xhosa more generally, and not explicitly Tsotsitaal. These seem to be borrowings from English or Afrikaans which took place prior to urbanization for example, *betha* is given in Xhosa dictionaries with multiple nuanced meanings, although not including the Tsotsitaal sense 'to go'.
- 4) There is a distinct rural-urban distinction in semantic fields between index values.
- 5) There is a strong leaning towards style and camaraderie in the lexicon.

As stated at the beginning of the lexical analysis, variation in lexicon is the key to Tsotsitaal. The analysis of areas in which terms have a high variation index (have undergone relexification) throws up some questions. Relexification in criminal varieties happens for the purposes of in-group secrecy (Makhudu 1995: 302). In Makhudu (1995: 302), similar relexification of words functions in common township lingo particularly in areas of friendships. So we are return to the

question of whether Tsotsitaal functions to promote secrecy for criminal purposes, or to promote camaraderie within friendship groups.

One respondent in the interviews gave examples of relexification which specifically related to membership of the two criminal (prison-origin) gangs operating in his area. The respondent was asked if some of the words in Tsotsitaal originate from prison, to which he replied that *most* are from prison. He goes on to describe two words for the same term, which are used by respectively the 26 and 28 prison gangs (who had a presence in the street in the area we were interviewing, particularly the 26 gang).

S: Uyabo ezaweyi zokutshayisana, uyabo, zokugilana, uyabo. Zisuka ngapha e-prison ezaweyi.

[‘You see those things of ‘tshayisana’, you see, and ‘gilana’, you see. They are from prison those things.’]

Q1: Ohh. Ukuthini uku ‘gilana’?

[‘What does ‘gilana’ mean?’]

S: Hayi ukuba ek sê hayi ne, ‘kufunaka’ sidibane endaweni ethile’, uyabo. Laweyi yoku ‘gilana’ isentyenziswa ngama-28, eyoku ‘tshayisana’ isentyenziswa ngama-26.

[‘No, it’s ek sê no right, ‘We must meet at such and such a place’, you see. That thing of ‘gilana’ is used by the 28s, and ‘tshayisana’ is used by the 26s.’]

The respondent quickly terminated the discussion, when he became nervous that a 28 or 26 gang member may be passing and hear us talking – as he testified:

S: Hayi kaloku, ek sê yinto yalamadoda anagapha ngaphakathi, angapha e-prison, uyabo. Uyabo?

[‘No, the thing is, ek sê it’s for the man there inside, there in prison, you see. You see?’]

...

S: Nangokuku ek sê ndinga senxakini ek sê ndingathi ne, mhlawumbi ndithetha lawayi, kube kuqhitha mhlawubi ama-28 okanye mhlawubi ama-26 apha, uyabo.

[‘Even now ek sê I would be in trouble ek sê if ne, maybe, I’m talking that thing when [a group of] 28s is passing or maybe the 26s here, you see.’]

This is the only example in the data where specific gang terms originating from the prison gangs are identified. Due to the difficulty in accessing prison gang members or ex-prisoners, the question over a link between Tsotsitaal and the prison lexicon remains unanswered in this thesis, but it will be assumed on the basis of this testimony that there is some crossover. This respondent also evidences that relexification takes place within the speech forms of criminal gangs. This may indeed be for the purposes of secrecy (for example, so that a passer-by or member of another gang cannot understand what plans are being made), or may be for the purposes of in-group identity: to identify the relative ‘streetwise-ness’ of a speaker, if he is up-to-date with all the latest terms of his gang.

However, it is not only criminals who come up with new terms. A small group of friends may develop terms for camaraderie purposes rather than criminal. In one interview with a group of young men in Gugulethu, the respondents were describing in what way the language is different in the city to the Eastern Cape. They cite idiomatic expressions in the urban language as a key difference from the Eastern Cape where they speak ‘deep’ Xhosa:

O3: Uyabona thina sisebenzisa *like* la way *simix*  
iTsotsitaal uyabona *like* u - eksê - yonke **le way** uyabona?  
Apha kusetyenziswa la nto kuthwa ngamaqhalo

[‘You see we use like that way we mix Tsotsitaal you see like -‘eksê’ - all that way you see? Here they use a thing called idioms/idiomatic expressions’]

Q: Nezaci...i

['And 'izaci''']

O3: Nezaci ja *like* izibaxo zonke la nto soz'uyifinder *like* uba umnt'opheth'like ngapha kuthethw'isiXhos'esideep and ningawalahlanga namasikowenu.

['And 'izaci' ja like hyperboles all that thing you may not find it like that, a person bringing/carrying, like there they speak deep Xhosa and you have not discarded your customs.']

The respondents then gave an example of an expression which would not be intelligible to someone who does not speak the local Tsotsitaal. In this example, the interviewer was initially confused and thought the respondent said *ncokola* meaning 'to talk', but then supposed that *ncukula* meant 'to eat' (see interviewer transcription comments in square brackets). However, the extended conversation implies that this is an idiomatic expression meaning something altogether different.

O1: Kanti nangoku *like* --- ndizishaya ngokuncukula ilaway istew-

['But even now like --- I would like to 'ncukula' stew [I presume this means to eat]']

Q: A a khawu khawuphinde yihlo.

['Please please repeat yourself my brother.']

O1: Ndizishaya ngokuncukula istew.

['I would like to [eat] stew.']

Q: Undishaya ngokuncokol'istew?

['You [lit. beat me] would like to [ncokola lit. talk] stew. ']

O1: Ncukula istew.

['Ncukula' the stew.']

Q: O ukuncukula okay.

['O to 'ncukula' okay.']

O1: ...uyabon' ukncukula?

['...you see to ncukula?']

Q: O uzishaya ngokncukula istew?

['O you would like to 'ncukula' the stew?']

O1: Ja istew. Awundivanga kodwa like ungumXhosa but ndizawuthetha into ongazuyi-*understander* uyabona?

Ndizawncukul'istew ndibemmashu.

['Ja the stew. You haven't heard me but like you are Xhosa but I will say something you will not understand you see? I will eat a stew and be 'mashu' [I presume he will then be full]]'

O1:

Q: Ubemashu nhe?

['You will be full?']

O1: Ja ndiphinde ndibuye.

['Ja and then I come again.']

No explanation was given in the final event for this phrase, but the respondent had demonstrated that Tsotsitaal idiomatic phrases would not be understood by someone who spoke more traditional Xhosa (such as the interviewer). Similarly, in the following example the respondent appears to be trying to explain how they use *Zwayi* as a replacement for the name 'bread' – *isonka*:

O2: Ha uyabona? Jonga *like when we call bread...mos like we don't say bread* ngu uZwayi isonka...

['No you see? Look like when we call bread...mos like we don't say bread it's Zwai the bread...']'

O3: UZwayi, uZwayi...

['Zwai, Zwai...']

O2: Ligama lomntu isonka, wena ucingba ngu

ligama...uZwayi, wen'uqhele njengegama lomntu uzawubuza uba

uph'uZwayi uyabona? Kanti nank'ulaph'ecaleni kwakho sith'okay khawundiph'utwo slice khawundiphe nje uZwayi.

[ 'It's a person's name isonka, you think it's a name...Zwai you are familiar to it as a person's name you will ask that where is Zwayi you see? But here he is next to you, we say okay give me two slices just give me Zwayi.' ]

The same group of young men had changed the Tsotsitaal word for 'twenty rand' from 'chalk' to 'twin', as they stated, 'because it was known'. Similarly, fifty rand was changed from 'pink dollar' to 'rooger', five rand from 'half-tiger' to 'half-blanket' (*Yihalfngubo*).

This kind of variation and creativity in lexicon therefore comes about through the machinations of camaraderie, and identity within a friendship group rather than a criminal gang. It can be posited that this kind of relexification equally contributes to variation in the lexicon of Tsotsitaal, as terms are picked up by others, become popular and are spread through social networks within a larger community. It can therefore be asserted that both crime *and* camaraderie play a part in the development of Tsotsitaal.

## **5.5 Conclusion of Linguistic Analysis**

The first half of this chapter has shown that the ML for the variety of Tsotsitaal in Cape Town is Xhosa. Whilst Sowetan Tsotsitaal may have an Afrikaans base, the evidence of recent studies from Pretoria (Bembe 2006) and Durban (Mesthrie, forthcoming; Rudwick 2005) suggest that the term Tsotsitaal refers to a variety which does not necessarily always utilise the same grammatical framework. Rather, the different varieties utilise the available first language of the majority of speakers in a particular region to provide the morphosyntactic frame, and contemporary versions increasingly utilise African languages rather than Afrikaans. To continue to describe these codes only in terms of their base

language, to try to separate African language-based varieties from Afrikaans-based varieties seems to become a fruitless task, when speakers insist on referring to these varieties across South Africa as Tsotsitaal. Despite the variation in Matrix language, respondents have claimed that even if they do not understand the particular grammatical version, they *still know it is Tsotsitaal*.

One respondent describes how the Cape Town variety 'mixes up' with Xhosa and Afrikaans, while the Johannesburg variety 'mixes up' with Sotho and Tshangan, and describes how, although he understands the Johannesburg Tsotsitaal because he went to school for many years in the area, many people will not understand the Tsotsitaal from another area:

S: 'Cause ndike ndageleza kwelacala iskhanti esinintsi, uyabo. So yonke ndiyiphethe laweyi, naleyangaphaya.

['Cause for a long time I went to school that side, you see. So, all of it, I understand it, even that side's.']

Q1: Ok. Uyayi verstana?

['Ok. You understand it?']

S: Ngendlela egrandi.

['In a good/grand way.']

Q1: Bese, abanye abantu bona bayakwazi ukuyiva?

['And do other people manage to hear [understand] it?']

S: Ha ah, abakwazi abanye abantu, abakwazi.

['No, other people can't, they can't.']

This implies that the Matrix Language has an impact on speaker proficiency in a Tsotsitaal variety. However, another respondent states:

M: Where we staying né, we are speaking Xhosa in Cape Town, so it's made of Xhosa but in Jo'burg it's made of

isiZulu understand? Because you get different lingos. If you speak [the] other thing there in Jo'burg [you] won't understand but it's the same thing understand?

His claim that despite 'different lingos', the Johannesburg variety is the 'same thing' leads us to enquire what, in this case, typifies the language. The analysis has identified some words that are the same in previously studied varieties of Tsotsitaal, Iscamtho, and the Cape Town variety in this study. This implies that a 'core' lexicon denotes the variety more than the base language, which changes to varying degrees regionally. But are lexical items just 'fashions in words'? Is it *only* the words, or are there extra-linguistic elements that come into play to signify the variety? Is there more to Tsotsitaal than grammar and lexicon?

The index scores discussed in this chapter indicate that Tsotsitaal is used in particular contexts of use, namely, everyday interaction, style and relationships between speakers. The variation indices furthermore suggest that variation itself, and what variation does for speaker identity, is a key to understanding Tsotsitaal. Nikolas Coupland in his book *Style: Language Variation and Identity* (2007) looks at the approach of sociolinguistics to variation; what he terms 'styling' and language use in context. The following chapter will consider his arguments and propose a new definition for the phenomenon of Tsotsitaal based on the evidence in this thesis regarding its structures and functions.

## Chapter 6      STYLECT

### 6.1 Introduction

Q1: So do... you speak "Tsotsitaal?"

M: Yeah I do speak Tsotsitaal.

Q1: ...and when? Or you just speak it all the time?

M: I speak it when I am sitting with my friends.

Q1: So is it like a slang or...?

M: Yeah it's a slang, it's a slang<sup>40</sup>.

The term 'slang' (alongside jargon and argot which are related to particular arenas of use, respectively, professional and criminal), is generally used to refer to variation in lexicon (Swann et al. 2004: 281). As we saw in the previous chapter, Tsotsitaal is constituted by lexical variation, utilising both a core set of terms across its different manifestations and locale-specific items unique to a region or friendship group. These lexical items are used 'through' the available base language (Ntshangase 1995: 291). So is it *just* lexical? Can it be described as slang or argot?

Argot is usually used in reference to a language used by criminal groups (such as a prison argot) in order to achieve secrecy (Swann et al. 2004: 14). While lexical items developed for the purpose of secrecy may feature in the Tsotsitaal lexicon, its use is not restricted to criminals, as evidenced in the interviews conducted for this thesis, and sustained by Calteaux's (1996: 57-58) observation of a continuum of use.

In the data, respondents themselves have stated that Tsotsitaal is 'just slang', and it certainly employs slang terminology. The variety loosely labelled Tsotsitaal involves a matrix language with neologisms and extensive *borrowing* from other

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<sup>40</sup> While the interviewer suggested the term 'slang' to the respondent in this excerpt, in the attitude survey the similar term 'lingo' commonly arose as a way of referring to Tsotsitaal.

languages, often accompanied by semantic transformation (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 324) taking place on a large scale. In Tsotsitaal the theme of identity through difference can be seen as central. Tsotsitaal partly operates to achieve ingroup cohesion through differentiation (see sections 1.2.3 and chapter four), yet can operate as a common language in and across certain neighbourhood speech communities. Variation in lexicon takes place both chronologically – the Tsotsitaal spoken today is notably different from the variety of Sophiatown in the 50s (Molamu 2003) – and geographically, with variation evident at both a national and a local level (relating back to the differentiation of speakers in terms of generation, gender, urban/rural and culture in chapter four). As Calteaux (1994: 153) claims in her thesis: ‘...Tsotsitaal not only differs from one township to the next, but there are also differences within the township, from one section to another’. This certainly seems like slang, if Tsotsitaal in its local manifestations becomes specific to an in-group.

However, Tsotsitaal exists across a number of languages which it utilises as the matrix language, a highly uncommon phenomenon in argot or slang which usually only shows as lexical variation *within a specific language*. Besides, fashions in words change rapidly and the core set of lexical items offers little stability for such an extensive phenomenon which has been in existence for around 70 years. So what else do all the varieties have in common? What explains the strong *linguistic identity* that Tsotsitaal seems to command?

This chapter argues that the term ‘slang’ does not adequately take into consideration the longevity and history of the code, particularly in relation to the extra-linguistic markers – the overarching ‘style’ of Tsotsitaal – which lends stability and coherence to the inherent variation. The term ‘stylect’ is proposed in this chapter to accommodate the broader scope of Tsotsitaal, and to describe it as a lexicon (lect) which is style-related.

The chapter will firstly present the concept of 'style' in a linguistic sense. It will then propose why Tsotsitaal has to be conceived of in a broader sense than the linguistic alone.

## **6.2 Body Language and Discourse Markers**

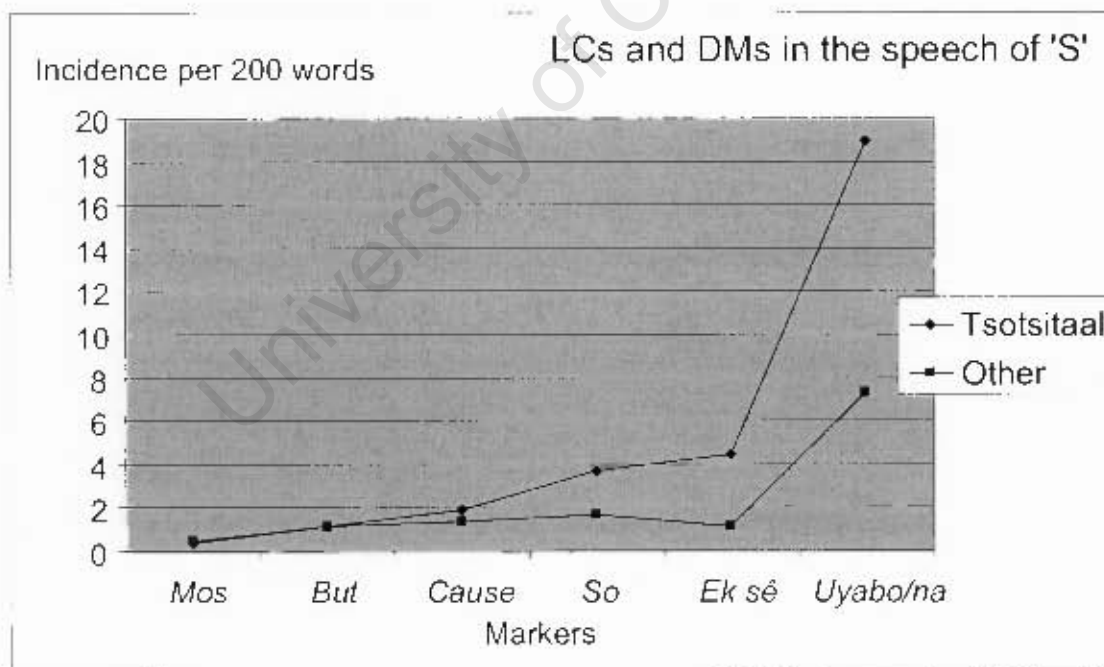
As illustrated in chapter four, some of the markers that were consistently cited in the interviews in connection with the urban style were styles of clothing, walking, and speech. One aspect, however, which was little commented on, although sometimes emulated, and which links more directly to the performance of speech, was in the body language which accompanied Tsotsitaal – the clicking of fingers, the gestures and body posture.

One anecdote from the series of interviews conducted under the SANPAD/NRF project highlights this element. A group of us were interviewing in Gugulethu on a particular day and as we walked through the township, we were followed by two young men. After a moment, we turned around and asked if we could interview them. They refused at first, but after hearing we were from the university, they agreed. The young men were both Xhosa-speakers in their late twenties, from the Eastern Cape. They were polite and attentive and answered all our questions. We asked about their education – both had matriculated – about work, and about the differences between life in the Eastern Cape and in Cape Town. One of them had been in Cape Town for five years, the other for one year. They spoke seriously and did not use many non-Xhosa words – the ones they did use were mainly borrowings from English (Deumert et al. 2006).

At a certain point the conversation turned to Tsotsitaal. The respondent (respondent 'S') who had been in Cape Town for a longer period, after at first denying that he spoke Tsotsitaal (while his friend insisted he was perfect at it), began to give us some Tsotsitaal terms. We noticed at this point that his whole body language changed. He started clicking his fingers, gesticulating, and his body posture changed – he drew his shoulders back, he sat more upright and

seemed more assertive. This section of the interview data where Tsotsitaal was being discussed and, to an extent, spoken, was typified by a large increase in discourse markers. Discourse markers are defined as lexical expressions that signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment of discourse they introduce and the prior segment – how one piece of discourse is connected to another (Fraser 1999). They are also used to direct hearer attention.

The following figure<sup>41</sup>, is based on the incidences of discourse markers in the speech of the respondent in the above anecdote – respondent ‘S’. The interview was divided into two sections – the section in which general questions were being asked (the line marked ‘Other’), and the section in which his body posture and mannerisms were observed to change, when Tsotsitaal was introduced into the conversation (marked ‘Tsotsitaal’).



**Figure 5 Logical connectors and discourse makers** (Deumert et al. 2006)

<sup>41</sup> Developed by the researcher alongside Associate Professor Ana Deumert as part of an analysis of Logical Connectors and Discourse Markers in the data. The information was presented as part of a paper at the LSSA/SAALA conference in Durban, 2006 (Deumert et al. 2006).

As the above graph shows, there was a dramatic increase in discourse markers during the Tsotsitaal segments of the interview, in particular the marker *uyabo* or *uyabona*, which equates to 'you know' – a marker which checks, or maintains hearer attention (de Klerk 2006). This interestingly does not demonstrate an increase in borrowing – *uyabo* is from Zulu and *uyabona* from Xhosa, both Nguni languages.

*Uyabo* features in the Cape Town data quite significantly. In one focus group a respondent was asked to read a passage aloud. When *uyabo* featured in the passage, the respondent replaced it with *uyabona*. This caused a debate: some of the respondents argued that *uyabo* is a Tsotsitaal term, while others argued that it is merely casual. One stated you would never use it in an essay, another gave the opinion that it would be acceptable in Johannesburg (it is a Zulu term). All were in agreement that it is not formal Xhosa. Finally, they all agreed that someone from Gugulethu would use the casual, non 'formal' version *uyabo*. Therefore, it was on the one hand associated with Tsotsitaal, and also more broadly perceived as an informal urban township term.

Q1: You said [read as] *uyabona* instead of *uyabo*... Why?

P: Ayikho into ethi *uyabo* es' Xhoseni!

[ 'There's nothing that says 'uyabo' in Xhosa! ' ]

...

P: That's what I'm saying *ayiyoxhosa le* [ 'this isn't Xhosa, ' ], it's some sort of Tsotsitaal.

Y: But in Joburg you could speak like that.

N: It's like *uyabona* but it's too long to say *uyabona*?

I: Yah.

N: It's casual. *Uyabo*? But it's -

Z: It's not necessarily iTsotsitaal.

...

N: But then you can use it in a conversation...

P: Yah.

Z: Like I would say so but I don't consider myself as someone who speaks Tsotsitaal but I say *uyabo* or *ukhubone*?

...

Q1: Let's say in Gugulethu, would they be more prone to say *uyabo*, *okanye* [or] *uyabona* or *uyaqonda*?

P: Obvious *uyabo*

All: [laugh]

The 'style' which seemed to be linked to the use of Tsotsitaal was therefore typified by two things:

- An increase in discourse markers
- Body language and gesticulation, or a particular 'performance'

While we must be cautious with the use of discourse markers, due to the context (for example, the speaker in figure 5 was not speaking Tsotsitaal amongst friends, but rather, trying to explain and demonstrate something to an audience, which in itself may have caused a change in language use) their use certainly does seem to indicate some kind of shift. Perhaps this is best understood as a shift in audience–speaker relations, which was equally evidenced by a shift in body language as by the discourse markers. Calteaux comments on a similar phenomenon in her study in Tembisa. She describes how:

As soon as someone starts speaking Tsotsitaal you can see that his behaviour changes. The way he dresses also changes, as he will no longer wear the type of clothes that he used to wear, but will wear the type of clothes which associate him with the behaviour of tsotsis. He will also change the way he walks, and start using a lot of hand signals and body language... (Calteaux 1994: 157)

We began to consider that Tsotsitaal was not merely a linguistic phenomenon; that it was inseparably linked to a particular 'style', and ultimately to an identity,

which impacts upon the behaviour of speakers. I argue in this chapter that the coupling of the style and language concepts is best described by the term ‘stylelect<sup>42</sup>’.

### 6.3 Style / Register

‘Style’ in sociolinguistics relates to variation within the speech of an individual (Coupland 2007: 7). It is processual – it describes the process of speech, when a speaker makes a choice from his/her language resources during a particular speech interaction (Coupland 2007: 3). Style early on was conceived of as a kind of ‘formality scale’ in general stylistics and later as a ‘carefulness scale’ in sociolinguistics by Labov (Labov 1972). Joos’s *Five Clocks* model (1967) illustrates the kinds of variation being considered in these scales:

- **Frozen:** Usually printed text that is reproduced intact.
- **Formal:** The standard sentence syntax and word choice of work and school (Joos 1967), so for example, English for Academic Purposes.
- **Consultative:** Two-way conversation with strangers, necessitating politeness and provision of background information.
- **Casual:** Two-way conversation with close friends or family. Slang usage common.
- **Intimate:** Language used with close friends or lovers.

**Figure 6 Formality scale** (Joos 1967: 108)

Style is still associated with this kind of linear scale: ‘we characterise styles as varieties of language viewed from the point of view of formality’ (Trudgill 1992).

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<sup>42</sup> A **dialect** ‘describes the speech habits (pronunciation, lexicon, grammar, pragmatics) characteristic of a geographical area or region, or of a specific social group’ (Swann et al. 2004: 76). This definition is quite broad, but suggests the term dialect is most often used in connection with regional speech. Similarly, **sociolect** refers to a variety of a language, which is differentiated on class rather than regional lines (Swann et al. 2004: 178). The morpheme ‘lect’, from Greek *lego* ‘to speak’ is therefore used to describe the relationship of style to language in Tsotsitaal – rather than geographical, or class –speech, it is style–speech.

In this sense, Tsotsitaal would be viewed as a 'casual' style. Joos in fact defined urban black speech as the sixth clock, somewhere between casual and intimate speech (Linn 1973). However this is a rather simplistic conception of language use being dictated by a 'type' of interaction.

Coupland argues that as a result of these early conceptions, variationists have had a structuralist approach to style (Coupland 2007: 11). Michael Halliday attempted to expand the concept of style (or 'register' in his work) to encompass a wider 'multi-functionality' (Coupland 2007: 12). Yet there has been a misrepresentation of style in Halliday as part of a pair, where dialect is according to "who the speaker is' in a regional or social sense' and style is according to "what use is being made of language" (Coupland 2007: 12). Coupland argues that this has led to variationists measuring, quantitatively, the distribution of variants according to 'manufactured' situational factors (Coupland 2007: 14-15), as dialect variants are measured according to social criteria of speakers in variation research (Coupland 2007: 5).

Coupland states that Halliday's original concept of 'register', or style, was more complex than this simplified model. Register in Halliday is influenced by the three concepts of field, mode and tenor (Halliday 1964). Language organisation at a particular moment depends on:

- ideational or experiential meaning, which Halliday terms 'field'
- textual and sequential meaning, which Halliday terms 'mode'
- and interpersonal meaning, which Halliday terms 'tenor'

Coupland explains: 'Ideational selections will show up as topics, things, facts or reports, most obviously in the grammatical structure of nominal groups. Textual selections will relate to choices of communicative mode/manner, sequencing, deixis and so on. Interpersonal selections will relate to social distance between speakers, expressions of attitude, communicative 'tone' and so on' (Coupland

2007: 12-13). Register or style in Halliday is therefore the 'semantic organisation of linguistic choices taking account of communicative purposes and circumstances' and Coupland concludes therefore that register or style in this sense is inherent to all acts of speaking (Coupland 2007: 13).

The misinterpretation of register has led to a narrow sense of the term, which aligns closely with terms such as jargon or argot and relates primarily to the vocabulary (Romaine 1994: 20). In actual fact, register in Halliday (1964) is a process of speaker choice in conversation and according to context. Romaine (Romaine 1994: 21) states that while dialects are 'varieties of user', registers are 'varieties of use', but rather than a narrow formality scale they involve 'the situation or context of use, the purpose, subject matter, and content of the message, and the relationship between participants'. Similarly, Labov's (1984) definition of style was such that: 'we mean to include any consistent... [set of] linguistic forms used by a speaker, qualitative or quantitative, that can be associated with a... [set of] topics, participants, channel, or the broader social context'. This re-take on Halliday's definition opens the field of style up to every linguistic interaction.

According to Coupland (2007: 2), dialects are geographical social styles which are becoming increasingly redundant sites for study in the contemporary climate of globalisation and mass media. Although regional and local dialects still exist, Coupland argues that they form a part of what he calls 'styling': the *use* of particular social styles to create meaning in social exchanges. In his words: 'We need to understand how people *use* or *enact* or *perform* social styles [including dialects] for a range of symbolic purposes' (Coupland 2007: 3). Following Jakobsen (1960), he argues that language has creative potential and that style is about meaning making – the choice of language to achieve social meaning. Social meaning in Coupland refers to:

...how we impute meaning to, and take meaning from, our cultures, our communities, our personal histories, our social institutions and our social

relationships. Cultural values and norms, social power and status, intimacy and distance are all social meanings. Then there are the meanings we invest in our own and other people's social positions and attributes – selfhood, personal and social identities, social stereotypes, prejudices, conflicts and boundaries (Coupland 2007: 18).

Meaning is therefore about joint construction in communities, and Eckert (2000) argues that in this case, sociolinguistic research into the constitution of meaning needs to concentrate on levels where individual and group identities are being constructed within social organisations. Here, 'we can observe the emergence of *symbolic processes that tie individuals to groups, and groups to the social context in which they gain meaning*' (Coupland 2007: 49, from Eckert 2000: 34-35). This implies that if Tsotsitaal can be seen as an identity construction and an assemblage of symbolic processes, then the wider socio-historical context of the township must be considered if the production of meaning is to be adequately described.

#### **6.4 Performance and Ideology**

Another, more common-sense understanding of style is that of a 'style' of clothing often accompanied by a 'lifestyle', e.g. 'punk'. These kinds of relatively fixed identity constructions may also be linked to particular ideologies, body language, habits and preferences. The area in which this understanding of style crosses over with the linguistic definition is in the area of 'performance'. Coupland suggests that if we agree that speakers have agency in terms of constructing meaning through variation and alongside a 'metalinguistic awareness', then speakers *perform* speech, meaning that they design their speech 'in the awareness...of alternative possibilities and of likely outcomes' (Coupland 2007: 146). In other words, speakers are *constructing* personas and contexts through speech. While a clothing style is a relatively static identity marker, body language is what Butler describes as a 'symbolic social sign' (Butler 1990), which may also undergo variation dependent on context and resultant performance.

A choice of style, both in language, and in other forms of ‘symbolic social sign’, is a manner of performance of social meaning and has ideological implications for the speaker. Styles are associated with ‘different meaning orientations, different discourses’ (Coupland 2007: 88; Lee 1992: 166). In Coupland this means that styling is a ‘performed discursive practice’ (Coupland 2007: 145). If we open this up to a more common-sense definition of style it is arguable that the performance of style, including non-linguistic markers such as clothing and gestures, is also discursive practice which ultimately results in the constitution of social reality, both in terms of the production of individuals and the broader society.

## 6.5 Stylect

This thesis is combining the two meanings of ‘style’ – linguistic and extra-linguistic – and posits that Tsotsitaal is a lexicon (lect) inseparable from a discursive practice (style) which results in the construction of a relatively stable social identity and a relatively stable linguistic identity. The term ‘stylect’ is proposed to encompass this concept<sup>43</sup>.

Another anecdote may motivate this term by illustrating the concrete link between the speaking of Tsotsitaal and its style markers. The first respondent to look at the questionnaire was the domestic employee of an acquaintance. She was the only female respondent of the questionnaire data, and was from Khayelitsha. Female speakers of Tsotsitaal were often referred to negatively in the attitude survey data, and while Nontle had grown up around speakers of Tsotsitaal (she kept phoning her brother to remind her of specific terms), she was not fluent. As we went through the various phrases, I noticed that if she could not remember the translation, she would pause for a minute. Then, a normally quiet, ‘shy’ woman in my presence, she would suddenly sit up, click her fingers, or start pointing at me as she spoke the phrase, as if ‘performing’ the conversation, or as

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<sup>43</sup> Thanks are extended to the UCT Thursday Writers’ Circle, and in particular Vicky Iglesdon, for the suggestion.

if she were imagining the conversation in its totality. These moments were *always* accompanied by gestures and a raised voice (and laughter!). It seemed that only the performance allowed her to remember the phrases, indicating the context-dependent nature of the code and its absolute reliance on other markers.

Speech, or linguistic style, is designed in dialogue with a particular context (Coupland 2007: 80), and in order for Nontle to speak Tsotsitaal, she had to imagine that context. In the context of use, the non-linguistic markers in Tsotsitaal are as essential as the language. The question was posited earlier, 'what gives Tsotsitaal its strong linguistic identity'? Across South Africa, people recognise Tsotsitaal, even if they do not speak or understand the particular geographical variety. This is possible because alongside linguistic markers such as lexicon there is an accompanying performance, which still falls within what Butler (1990) termed 'symbolic social signs', and what Derrida (1976) terms the 'text' in that everything *with meaning* is within the text.

A style in the narrow sense of sociolinguistics describes speakers' choices, which is an aspect of any language use. Variation in this sense is of course an aspect of Tsotsitaal. It is inherently variable within itself: geographically; within a community; lexis; and grammar. It is variable depending on the addressee, or the context of use, for example, if a speaker is talking to his mother, his girlfriend, his best friend, or a gangster. There are different levels of Tsotsitaal – the Tsotsitaal an older woman may pick up could be a very 'light' version in comparison with the Tsotsitaal a gang member would use with his fellow members. Returning to the continuum concept, someone using Tsotsitaal will choose (perhaps even relating to formality) what elements of the language to employ in a particular situation – perhaps they may speak 'deep' Tsotsitaal when engaged in criminal activities but a 'light' version when they are at home (Calteaux 1994). Using Coupland's definitions, these can be seen as styles<sup>44</sup> of Tsotsitaal, while the

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<sup>44</sup> Another 'style' of Tsotsitaal may be the 'social subvariety' of Iscamtho which Calteaux noted in Tembisa. She states that it differs from conventional Tembisa Iscamtho: '...in terms of its peculiar function, namely that it is used by young men when proposing to a young woman. A further distinguishing

process of producing these different types of Tsotsitaal can be termed 'styling'. Returning to his argument, he states that '...variationist sociolinguistics has worked with a limited idea of social context – and styling is precisely the *contextualisation* of social styles' (Coupland 2007: 5). While within Tsotsitaal there is variation dependent on context, Tsotsitaal *itself* at a meta-level is also a type of variation dependent on context, and evidenced by such things as lexical choices and perhaps a shift in 'tone' or 'tempo' - variation in the speech of the individual, which creates social meaning (through difference from the norm), and which itself is the extent of the essential linguistic attributes of Tsotsitaal.

However, this linguistic variation, and even variation in other symbolic signs, does not explain the full manner in which meaning is produced in Tsotsitaal, which is also through referencing a subcultural identity, linked to the construct 'Tsotsi' (discussed in chapters three and four). This identity has existed for around 70 years and lends the Tsotsitaal subculture stability. The socio-historical and ideological aspects which underpin this identity similarly stabilise the 'linguistic identity' mentioned above. In other words, Tsotsitaal is not a 'language', it is a highly variable code, 'born' of styling, which is stabilised by a style (in the sense of a discursive practice) relating to a particular socio-historical identity construction.

## 6.6 Genre

*[S]peech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language. There is not a single new phenomenon (phonetic, lexical, or grammatical) that can enter the system of language without having traversed the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification. (Bakhtin 1986)*

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feature is the high tempo at which the speech takes place' (Calteaux 1994: 224). Ntshangase suggests the name 'Isamtho' is derived from the Zulu *ukuqamunda* 'which means to talk volubly' (Ntshangase 2002: 407).

As we saw in section 6.3, concepts such as style or register as a scale of formality are too linear to describe language use in contexts (Coupland 2007: 14). Speech accommodation/ audience design consider context to a certain extent, particularly the ways in which speakers design speech '*in relation to their audiences*' (Coupland 2007: 54). Concepts such as accommodation towards the prestige form of a language, or upward convergence have been put forward as reasons for variation in the speech of an individual (Fischer 1958). In the case of a subculture, this would encompass linguistic responses such as divergence from a dominant group (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977). Speech accommodation and similar approaches involve less linguistic/language variation data than earlier approaches such as Labov; they are relational or interactional: they consider how people respond in interactions. However, Coupland argues that these frameworks still have limitations and that there is a need to move beyond even the relational in linguistic research (Coupland 2007: 58). In audience design and accommodation theory, whether marked or unmarked, initiative or responsive, all convergence is to boost social attractiveness. In this case, as Coupland asks: '*Who, actually, is style for?*' (Coupland 2007: 80). Different approaches have seen style simplistically as seeking approval; as offering 'mutual benefit to participants'; or as the maximisation of communicative effectiveness. Coupland argues however that rather than seeing speakers or listeners as targets or beneficiaries, it is more useful to consider 'contexts and their relational configurations' (Coupland 2007: 80) which can encompass concepts such as identities and power. Furthermore Coupland argues that audience design and accommodation theory are unclear about 'agency'; that while sometimes stylistic convergence is automated, there are moments where "design' is a fully appropriate concept, when speakers (consciously or not, and whether or not they can account their strategies metacommunicatively) shape their speech in anticipation of particular social outcomes' (Coupland 2007: 79). Therefore, he concludes, responsiveness is too limited an explanation.

Bell's (2001) audience design considers the impact of topic in interaction, arguing that, '[s]tyle-shifting according to topic or setting derives its meaning and

*direction of shift from the underlying association of topics or settings with typical audience members*' (Coupland 2007: 61). While Coupland states that there is a 'difficulty in attributing stylistic tendencies to topics' (Coupland 2007: 67) he explains that 'Bell is making the interesting claim that, although response to an audience is primary, whole social situations can carry the imprint of how they are, we might say, 'peopled', and that this is what makes them meaningfully different' (Coupland 2007: 61). Bell's (2001) suggestion that an assumption of 'typical audience members' in an interaction dictates style shift, is actually an inversion of the theory that 'typical audience members' have tested, modified and agreed upon relatively stable formats for communication. This is genre theory.

Genres, for two reasons, are a useful way to visualize how Tsotsitaal operates to constitute meaning (and through meaning, identity).

- Genres can encompass an ideological or cultural framework, which is missing in speech accommodation and audience design models, and ties to Foucault's concept of power in discourse.
- Genres confer greater agency on a speaker and can explain processes of identity construction, and styling as creative design.

In formal terms, such as 'academic genres', genres are considered to be 'highly structured and conventionalized constructs, with constraints on allowable contributions not only in terms of the intentions one would like to give expression to and the shape they often take, but also in terms of the lexicogrammatical resources one can employ to give discursal values to such formal features' (Bhatia 1993: 23). They are usually considered in highly structured communicative practices such as literary forms or academic conventions. Bakhtin, however, argued that similar structures exist in speech, and he coined the phrase 'speech genres' to encompass both oral and written utterances. These, he said, were 'relatively stable types' of language utterances, which are however

extremely heterogeneous and can include ‘short rejoinders of daily dialogue (and these are extremely varied depending on the subject matter, situation, and participants)’ (Bakhtin 1986: 60). He describes how these genres develop over time according to what he terms spheres of activity, or what we may understand as discourses: ‘each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex’ (Bakhtin 1986: 60).

Returning to the thesis methodology, we can conceptualise language as a struggle centred around flows of power in Foucault’s terms. This aligns with Bakhtin’s work which focused on struggle in language:

At the heart of everything Bakhtin did...is a highly distinctive concept of language. The conception has as its enabling *a priori* an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere. This Zoroastrian clash is present in culture as well as nature, and in the specificity of individual consciousness; it is at work in the even greater particularity of individual utterances. (Bakhtin & Holquist 1981: xviii)

Speech genres provide a framework in which this battle takes place, through ‘generic-stylistic testing and modification’ meanings cohere around relatively stable speech acts, but these meanings are not fixed. The struggle according to Michael Holquist, manifests in the ‘coming and dying of meaning’ (Bakhtin & Holquist 1981: xviii).

According to Bakhtin (1981), ideology in a language is handed down through utterances and genres. He posits that languages are stratified into not only dialects but also what he describes as ‘socio-ideological’ languages, within which he includes genres. This stratification, he theorises, maintains language’s dynamism due to the centrifugal and centripetal forces:

[S]tratifaction and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. (Bakhtin & Holquist 1981: 272)

The construction of genres within social contexts means that genres are jointly achieved, as well as continuously contested and shifting. They are both stable, and constantly developing. According to Bakhtin (1981) our voices are filled with others' speech. This returns us to Coupland's concept of stylisation. There are three main areas in which style and genre overlap in Coupland:

- (1) Genres explain how styling connects to social/culture: 'To understand speaking and styling as sociolinguistic processes, we have to entertain a notion of social organisation that brings together situational and cultural contexts...' (Coupland 2007: 16).
- (2) Genres explain the *interactional*: '... [genre] specifies social positions, roles and responsibilities for social actors...' (Coupland 2007: 16). Therefore genres structure social interactions.
- (3) Genres are partly pre-figured, partly constructed by speakers. They involve consensus and discourse. '[A speech genre] is often initiated through some subtle process of discursive negotiation whose result may be some sort of consensus...' (Coupland 2007: 16). This relates back to how 'context (as in the concept of genre) is in part a socially structured phenomenon that speakers have to subscribe to and that they often live out in their talk. But context is also, in part, the product of their discursive operations' (Coupland 2007: 18).

Coupland states that 'style is part of the process of genre-making, but also part of the process of genre-breaking' (Coupland 2007: 16). So in a sense, style imputes agency to speakers, which allows for continuous shift and realignment of genres with socio-political, cultural and ideological factors.

Coupland furthermore demonstrates that genres can be rather vague but relatively stable social styles such as conversation or argument (Coupland 2007: 15). The main criterion for genre in Coupland is 'that participants have some significant awareness, as part of their cultural and communicative competence, of how the event-types they are engaging with are socially constituted as ways of speaking' (Coupland 2007: 15). Tsotsitaal can therefore be seen as a genre in itself, a relatively stable social style that has a 'sphere of activity'. It additionally contains genres within it. Tsotsitaal and its genres are ideological; they recall the sociopolitical and cultural construction of its speakers. In Bakhtinian terms, Tsotsitaal can therefore be seen as a new, urban, ideological, heteroglossic formulation (Bakhtin & Holquist 1981: 271).

Bakhtin helps to explain both the variation within a community in Tsotsitaal: that while genres are consented to within a specific social context, contestation means that stratification takes place; and the stability of the linguistic identity over time – the genres of Tsotsitaal relate to the socio-historical (ideological) context. The identities, histories and social meaning that Tsotsitaal refers to are pre-configured. We are born into always and already-there social constructs evidenced in Tsotsitaal by the longevity and consistency of social contexts and identities which have been associated with the use of the code.

The methodology section (chapter two) described how the process of identity construction takes place through discourse in language, or 'texts'. At this point it is worth noting the reflexivity in this concept – how Tsotsitaal at the same time creates, and is created by, a self-referential identity. Here again we see how, as discussed in the methodology, language actually constructs reality, and how this is done through context, or, we may alternatively describe this as 'discourse' (in a linguistic rather than Foucauldian sense<sup>45</sup>), when context includes ideology,

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<sup>45</sup> Discourse in a linguistic sense refers to historical, ideological and political themes which are produced and reproduced through language. This is in contrast to Foucault's relative focus on underlying power flows.

history, and politics. This similarity between an expanded concept of language in use (styling) or style as discursive practice, and discourse, led Coupland to state that his treatment may have made style seem like 'the whole of discourse' if it were not for his focus on accent/dialect. This thesis however is not restricted in this sense, and has been able to consider the 'whole field of making social meaning' in the context of Tsotsitaal. Discourse (both in the linguistic sense and in the sense of the underlying determination of flows of power), is where we see the 'interplay between textual and contextual processes, such as histories of social relationships, [or] ideologies of language' (Coupland 2007: 11). Chapters three and four traced this history in Tsotsitaal, and identified the field of use as a broad subculture, defined by style in a non-linguistic sense. The genres of this subculture are the interface between textual and contextual processes.

The concept of a stylect comprised of speech genres therefore not only encompasses the link between the style and the language – a 'lexicon of style' that constitutes Tsotsitaal, and the extra-linguistic practices which constitute identity through difference – but also recalls the domain of use: the subculture and its discursive constitution.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Coupland's discussion of the treatment of style in relation to variationist sociolinguistics calls for discourse analysis as a way to approach the 'contextualisation of social styles' (Coupland 2007: 5). He describes social styles as inherited resources through which people discover and make personal and interpersonal meaning (Coupland 2007: 3). Jean Jacques Weber (Weber 1996: 3), adapted by Coupland, said

...meaning and stylistic effect are not fixed and stable, and cannot be dug out of the text as in an archaeological approach, but they have to be seen as a potential which is actualized in a (real) [participant's] mind, the product of a dialogic interaction between author, the author's context of production, the text, the [participants] and

the [participants'] context of reception – where context includes all sorts of sociohistorical, cultural and intertextual factors (Coupland 2007: 177).

This description portrays a suitably complex conceptualisation of context. But meaning is not only produced through linguistic stylistic effect. As previously mentioned in the methodology section, in discourse, nothing is outside the 'text' because everything has meaning. Although the concept of style in Coupland is discussed in a linguistic sense, he illustrates the concept of linguistic style as a choice from an available repertoire by making an extended comparison between linguistic style, and clothing style. He speaks of responsive style – dressing to fit in, and initiative style – dressing to be different. He argues that a choice (of clothing or linguistic style) has connotations at a political and ideological level for the speaker/wearer. Using the clothing metaphor, he shows how some linguistic styles are 'tasteless or garish', others 'dated or dull' and concludes by pondering whether the choices available (both linguistic and in terms of the contents of a wardrobe) are actually ours in the first place, or whether they are pre-loaded with social meaning through use by others (Coupland 2007: 82-83). At the same time, creative styling means identity is continuously being invented. The choice of repertoire (not only linguistic, but also in other dimensions of style) is broad, consisting of '*...virtual repertoires* – stylistic creations of the imagination' and can draw equally on styles from the media as those in our direct experience (Coupland 2007: 84). Additionally Rampton's work looked at 'Crossing': when speakers use linguistic resources from other repertoires (often, in Rampton, across ethnicities) (Rampton 1995).

The young men who speak Tsotsitaal are the drivers of the new forms of Tsotsitaal, and peer groups creatively style new words and concepts into the variety. Tsotsitaal can be seen as vibrant and developing, through contestations in social contexts – negotiation over genres and the constitution of event-types. This is discursive constitution, and where identities are being constructed. Coupland argues that '*...discursive social action is where culture and social identities 'live' and where we can see them taking shape. The styling of social*

identities against a backdrop of social norms and 'collective social memories' is the heart of the process' (Coupland 2007: 108). Tsotsitaal operates in dialogue with social norms, and is comprised of collective social memories: yet the style/lexicon – the 'stylect' - is dynamic and developing hand in hand with the social identities of its speakers in the townships of post-apartheid South Africa. Continued research into this phenomenon can provide valuable insight into the social contexts of those communities.

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## **Chapter 7      CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1      Conclusions**

The research set out to unpack what Tsotsitaal is and does through an analysis of data gathered in the Cape Town townships of Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and Imizamo Yethu, and through an extensive attitude survey conducted from Cape Town to the old Transkei. Furthermore, the analysis took place alongside a broader conceptualisation and situation of the code, its history and the discourses which brought it into being.

The Cape Town data identified the syntactic frame as Xhosa in the townships under consideration. A Xhosa-based variety of Tsotsitaal is a new contribution to the body of work surrounding the code, and adds to previous debates over the nature and composition of Tsotsitaal. The argument has been presented that the linguistic features of Tsotsitaal are primarily lexical, and that the lexicon is highly variable. There do, however, appear to be a core set of terms which are common across varieties. Beyond this, Tsotsitaal is constituted by substantial lexical innovation.

While this in itself could relegate the code to 'slang' status, it is argued that the linguistic identity of Tsotsitaal in fact hinges around non-linguistic features, such as clothing, body language, and lifestyle, which may be termed the 'style' of Tsotsitaal speakers (although the style is further stratified) and which lend stability to the code around which its identity has cohered for the last seventy years. 'Stylelect' has been proposed to describe the relationship between the code and these non-linguistic style markers.

Tsotsitaal is not a 'language'; it is a lexicon and a style which reproduces a particular social statement of identity. This statement references, yet has eclipsed, its historical constitution by apartheid discourse. The historical

construction however, remains emblematic of the way that Tsotsitaal is perceived, and there is a limited concept of the code and its speakers as criminal.

The main community of use is that of young black male township residents, which encompasses a large diversity of identities. The style, or identity construction through performance of a range of practices, both linguistic and non-linguistic, produces difference in terms of the referential norm for these users. They identify their youth in dialogue with a respectable older traditional generation. They self-identify as urban and modern, and they interact culturally with a global identity discourse which speaks across the diaspora.

Kiessling and Mous (2004: 332) argued that urban youth languages such as Tsotsitaal involve 'belonging' and 'locality': that the local language community in a sense creates 'a new "locality," which cuts across obsolete boundaries of ethnic languages and contradicts the purism of the colonial language regimes'. Tsotsitaal in use cuts across a range of ethnic languages and contradicts purism of English and Afrikaans by incorporating them into its lexicon. The new 'locality' is the domain of a broad subculture across South Africa, not restricted by the multiplicity of home languages. A 'language' of sorts, herein called 'stylect', has emerged that speaks to a particular community in terms, or practices, of mutual understanding.

The 'meta-concern' of this thesis, and what it will lead to in terms of future research, is the constitutive power of language; the role of powerful language in the construction of identity. While traditional genres such as academic writing offer a top-down construction in dialogue with pre-determined roles in society, in the case of Tsotsitaal it is very much a bottom-up construction – the work of people in their everyday lives producing 'genres' – common methods of communication that signify or reference a group project of identity building.

These group projects are part of the fabric of post apartheid South African society, and are worthy of continued and invested research from a broad

spectrum of disciplines (linguistics, sociology, economics) and across a broad range of communities. They have implications across a range of identities, and social phenomenon and trends should remain in the spotlight during the decades following transition to democratic rule.

A discursive approach such as the one undertaken in this thesis is useful in identifying power formations, and identities which are embedded in contemporary society and which are contingent on discourses. Bloke Modisane (1986: 70) wrote, of the era of high apartheid, '[o]ur lives were the pieces on the board being manipulated by a man-made fate, children born into a social position and playing out a patterned destiny; I seemed to see us all, black and white, on the draughtboard, manoeuvred into a trap, and devoured by South Africa, one colour against the other'. These discourses are still embedded in South African society. In his book *The Number*, Steinberg (2004b) describes the narrative of his central character – his political stance which co-opts the influence of apartheid to explain his life of crime and incarceration. His narrative 'places him at the cusp between crime and politics, between childhood and adulthood, between being a coloured boy from Hanover Park and a black man under apartheid... he is doing with his personal history precisely what a nation does with its own; it freezes a moment in time, paints it in bold and gaudy brush strokes, and uses it as a device to explain where it has come from and why it has turned out the way it has' (Steinberg 2004b: 143).

Through identification of these embedded discourses, we may be empowered to break the ties to them, and in this way to end the reproduction of the objects of which they speak: the reproduction of negative narratives which are to an extent a legacy of apartheid. This would provide the opportunity to transcend a destiny that sometimes seems to be unchallengeable.

## 7.2 Recommendations

This research has been concerned with unpacking the construction of young male identities. The focus on one gender has left a significant gap in terms of this research, which requires serious consideration. While there is a sense of agency in the identity construction of young males in this study, the status of female speakers of Tsotsitaal, and the impact of Tsotsitaal-produced masculinities on females in the township, are both areas for concern. Female speakers have occupied an ambiguous position throughout the interview data: there is a tension between girls who speak Tsotsitaal and the tradition of *hlonipha* which may negatively impact on the identities of young urban females. By extension, the construction of females in 'traditional' roles must also come under question. Inequality here will affect the future of South Africa for generations, and warrants further research.

Some questions worth consideration include: What are the available narratives that are being reproduced about young Xhosa women in the expanding Cape Town townships? What are the constraints on available roles for young females? What positive and negative qualities are the 'tomboys' who speak Tsotsitaal being invested with? What are these developments in township lifestyles doing to traditional practices such as 'hlonipha'? Unfortunately a proper treatment of these questions was outside the scope of this thesis, but these questions are open for future investigation.

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## Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

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Hello, my name is Ellen, I work at the University of Cape Town, and I am trying to research Tsotsitaal in Cape Town. People have done research on Tsotsitaal in Johannesburg, but this is the first study to look at Cape Town Tsotsitaal!

I need people who can speak Tsotsitaal to answer this questionnaire, and for every filled in questionnaire I will pay (R-). The questionnaires need to be brought back to me by -.

I just need you to write down how you would say the sentence if you were speaking Tsotsitaal, however you speak it. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, just translate each sentence into the way you would say it if you were speaking in Tsotsitaal with friends. Write it down *exactly* the way you would say it. If you can't say it in Tsotsitaal, that's no problem, just write 'NO TRANSLATION'.

You do not need to give me your name, but please give me the following information:

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Male or female? \_\_\_\_\_

Where were you born? (Town and province) \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in Cape Town? \_\_\_\_\_

What township do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_

What languages can you speak or understand? (Please tick) Xhosa  English

Afrikaans  Zulu  other: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE TRANSLATE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES INTO TSOTSITAAL

1. Get out of the car.
2. Don't go to town today
3. I've never been to Jo'burg.
4. I'm not going.
5. Siphon won't go.
6. Only Siphon can lift that heavy rock.
7. I've found this bag on the road. Now let's find out the owner.
8. I used to work in Belville but I'm working at Muizenburg now.

9. I had already paid, but he said I hadn't.
10. I went to work on Friday.
11. The snake bit him and he died.
12. There was a fire.
13. If she's not careful, she'll get into trouble.
14. Even if he comes today, I won't give him the money.
15. She will be very happy.
16. She might go to the beach tomorrow.
17. You must let me explain.
18. We can go to the city if you have enough money.
19. When you go to the shop, I would like some cigarettes.
20. She has a new blue car.
21. I want a large cold beer.
22. Sipho has a beautiful cousin.
23. I don't like that guy.
24. Why?
25. Because he isn't polite.
26. He told me that he was going to join a new gang.
27. When will you return my car?
28. How do you think you will get back home?
29. I don't trust the man that you were speaking to.
30. The woman that you saw is my sister.
31. The taxi goes too slowly.

32. In the house you will find a warm coat/ jacket.
33. The girl from Qunu was at Mzoli's yesterday.
34. She was arguing with him.
35. He's busy washing his car.
36. If Maria is not at home, leave a message for her.
37. You...
38. You all...
39. Why did you go away to Jo'burg?
40. Where is Siphso?
41. Is Siphso coming?
42. What happened?
43. Did Siphso give you the money?
44. Yes he did.
45. No he didn't.
46. Who is he?
47. Who are you?
48. How are you?
49. Go away!
50. That's worth 10/100/1000 rand

51. Hello
52. Goodbye
53. Sun
54. Moon
55. Stars
56. Water
57. Fire

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- 58. Shoes
- 59. Sweater
- 60. Trousers
- 61. Shirt
- 62. Hat
- 63. Mother
- 64. Father
- 65. Sister
- 66. Brother
- 67. Cousin (female)
- 68. Cousin (male)
- 69. Grandmother
- 70. Grandfather
- 71. Friend (male/female)
- 72. Girlfriend
- 73. Boyfriend
- 74. Husband
- 75. Wife
- 76. People
- 77. Person
- 78. Pig
- 79. Cow
- 80. Talk / chat
- 81. Hair
- 82. Eyes
- 83. Ears
- 84. Hand
- 85. Brain
- 86. Mind
- 87. Voice
- 88. Vagina
- 89. Penis
- 90. Rain
- 91. Wind
- 92. Sleep
- 93. Awake
- 94. Walk
- 95. Woman
- 96. Man
- 97. Freedom
- 98. (The) Struggle
- 99. (non-violent) Resistance

University of Cape Town

## Interview Guidelines

Each interview should last between 45 min and 90 min.

### 1. General background

Where were you born? Tell us something about your life back home. Is it very different from your life here?

[In the context of this question gather information on the respondent's date of birth, family history, ethnic affiliation, educational and work experiences, languages learnt and spoken at home, place of residency (rural/urban)]

### 2. Coming to Cape Town

When and why did you come to Cape Town? What was it like to come to Cape Town? What kind of difficulties did you encounter? And what was easy?

### 3. Being in Cape Town

Tell us about your experiences and life in Cape Town. (Ask the respondent about particular difficulties he/she encounters, problems, but also positive experiences)

Tell us about study/work and your study/work experiences? What is different about Cape Town and your home [the Eastern Cape]?

### 4. Languages

What languages do you use most commonly in Cape Town? In which context? With whom?

Tell us something about the way you see these languages. Are they important to you? To your sense of self? Your (ethnic) identity?

In Cape Town there seem to be three dominant languages these days, isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English, do you know all these languages? Do you use them? Do you feel confident using them?

Do you speak slang? If so, in what circumstances? (e.g. when they are not being understood/ when speaking with friends)

Does the slang have a name, what do you call it and who uses it? Is some of the township slang 'secret' – only available to particular people?

Have you heard of Tsotsitaal? If so, in what situation have you heard of it/ heard it used?

What kinds of people use tsotsitaal? What languages is tsotsitaal made up of? Do you know any words or phrases of tsotsitaal? Do you use words or phrases of tsotsitaal?

### 5. Culture

Do you still practice cultural traditions in Cape Town? Can you tell us about them?

### 6. Social Networks

What kind of people do you usually interact with in Cape Town? People from your home area? (daily, weekly, monthly, never)

Tell us more about the people you know here – friends, colleagues, acquaintances, neighbours.

### 7. Belonging and the linguistics of difference

Are there terms which you use when you refer to internal/ external migrants? Do you know of any other terms?

## Summary Information

(To be captured by the interviewers during the course of the interview)

1. Name (first name only) and gender (m/f) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Year and place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

3. Year of arrival in South Africa/ Cape Town \_\_\_\_\_

4. Reason for coming to Cape Town \_\_\_\_\_

5. Previous place(s) of residency \_\_\_\_\_

6. Current place of residency \_\_\_\_\_

### 7. Languages spoken and self-assessed level of proficiency

Name of language	Level of proficiency	Literacy	Context language were learnt	Do you ever use this language in Cape Town?
	1. very well 2. well 3. can communicate 4. just some words 5. only passive/can understand	1. speak only 2. speak and read 3. speak, read & write	1. home 2. school 3. friends 4. work 5. other (please specify)	1. every day 2. once or twice a week 3. once or twice a month 4. never


[Use this grid to elicit attitudes towards the different languages in the qualitative interview. Make sure you cover ALL languages]

**8. Education** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Past and current employment status** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. Connection to home**

Do you interact with people from your home? \_\_\_\_\_ daily/weekly/monthly/never  
 Do you speak to people back home? (family/friends) \_\_\_\_\_ daily/weekly/monthly/never  
 If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_ telephone (cell/land line)  
 internet (email/chat)  
 other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you send money/goods back home? \_\_\_\_\_ yes/no  
 If yes, how do you send? And how often? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you visit back home? Yes/No (If yes: once a month/twice a year/once a year/every few years/never)  
 When where you last back home? \_\_\_\_\_