

Hidden oracies: Exploring language, identity, and ideology with African migrants in Australia

Dr Vera Williams Tetteh

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Bi/multilingual African migrants rely on oral-based or spoken heritage languages as well as socially learnt lingua francas for inter-generational communication and socialisation. However, most Western contexts focus on text literacy and formal language learning for migrants. As a result, not much attention is paid to those oral tradition based and informally learnt languages as resources for settlement. This paper comes from a collaborative study we have entitled the Hidden Oracies Project. The project aims to shed light on the diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds of African migrants that inform their languages learnt and brought into Australia for settlement. Drawing on a biographical approach to researching lived multilingual experiences (Busch, 2012, 2017) we have gathered data from four African families living in Australia who originate from countries across West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa and Central Africa. In the present paper we focus on one aspect of the study, that is, the use of biographical maps and their centrality to investigations about repertoires, identity, and ideologies within a migrant population in a multilingual and multicultural context. Specifically, we explore the families' lived experiences to show their emotive connectedness to their language(s), their language ideologies and how these translate into their attitudes in linguistic practices. Findings show use of 'core' languages to reflect emotive work and retaining intra-community identity, while 'peripheral' languages are used for engaging with other communities. Besides identity, the emotive connectedness to these 'core' languages act as the glue that help families become functional within the community. These findings have implications for settlement and language policy in Australia.

References

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