

ABSTRACT

Title: Gesture and Speech in the oral narratives of Sesotho and Mamelodi Lingo speakers

The gradual decline in the use of Black South African languages (BSALs) has been a concern for the past 20 years in both the South African civil population and academia. The last census data of 2011 informs this phenomenon by showing how language use has changed nationally over the years. In an effort to counter this decline, some researchers have called for the improvement of existing non-standard language varieties, which could serve to improve some of these decreasing Black South African languages (Ditsele, 2014). Non-standard language varieties are ‘languages’ largely spoken in black townships around South Africa. They are sometimes referred to as stylects, sociolets or speech varieties, due to their structures and functions (Bembe & Beukes, 2007). Applying a psycholinguistic approach, this study seeks to compare the standard language Sesotho to a non-standard language variety, Mamelodi Lingo. This study looks at the discursive behaviour focusing on speech and gesture.

Previous literature on South African language varieties focuses on the semantic and pragmatic description of the words in use (Calteaux, 1996; Hurst, 2008; 2015; Rudwick, 2005; Ditsele, 2014), and very few have incorporated co-speech gesture, which form an integral part of non-language varieties (Brookes, 2001; 2005).

The present study presents the results of an empirical investigation that compares 20 narratives produced by Sesotho and Mamelodi Lingo speakers. Using the methodology used in the elicitation of speech and gesture by Colletta et al., (2009; 2015), participants watched a speechless short cartoon and were then asked to retell the story they had seen to the interviewer. Using the language annotation tool, ELAN narratives were annotated for language complexity, length, and type of clause, syntax, as well as story grammar memory-recall. Narratives were also annotated for gesture: type of gesture and function of gesture. The focus was on the discursive performance of speech and gesture. Results show a significant use of meta-narrative clauses from the language variety compared to the standard language as well as a higher use of non-representational gestures by the non-standard language. The findings also show an interesting use of interactive co-speech gestures when retrieving lexical items that are not present in the repertoire of Mamelodi Lingo