The emancipated Coloured face through a metalinguistic lens: Language variation and the South African identity

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In pursuit of emancipating linguistic (and pragmatic) investigations, Ameka and Terkourafi (2019:72) quote an Ewe proverb which likens knowledge to a baobab tree in that it "cannot be embraced by one person or by a pair of hands". In consideration of the call for recognising and systematically including perspectives from the Global South to disentangle them from an "Anglocentric metalinguistic discourse" (Levisen, 2019:101173), this proposed study aims to provide a possible answer through the exegesis of face, identity, linguistic variation, and metalinguistic reflections in a South African context. Spencer-Oaty (2007) postulates that theories of identity apply to the analysis of face. Based on that premise, where Goffman (1967:5) defines face as "image of self", and Brown and Levinson (1987:61) refer to face as "public self-image", it becomes compelling to explore how a decolonised, emancipated identity is expressed through language variation. Moreover, Joseph (2013:38) emphasises that, in examining the interplay of face and identity, understanding how a speaker's identity is perceived by others is more crucial than determining whether the speaker is actively projecting an identity. Building on this insight, this paper seeks to investigate the connection between language variation and the Coloured South African identity through a metalinguistic lens. It focuses on the social media trend "I am…of course…" and examines posted content from two ethnic sub-varieties of South African Coloured English: Durban-Coloured and Cape-Coloured. Through content analysis of the video posts, and discourse analysis of the comments under those posts, this study explores how in-group and out-group identities are reflected on and constructed. Inspired by African regional variational pragmatics and post-colonial investigations, as demonstrated, for example, by Farenkia (2012) and Anchimbe (2021), and building on the work of Toyer and Peck (2023), Savedraa et al. (2021), Dowling et al. (2020), and Mestrie (2007, 2012), this study aims to answer the question: *How do metalinguistic reflections in social media content shape and express the emancipated identity of Coloured South African English speakers?* In answering the proposed question, the aim is to contribute to a richer, decolonised understanding of the African emancipated identity.

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