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Ethno-Regional Ideologies And Linguistic Manipulation In The Creation Of The Youth Language Leb Pa Bulu

Abstract:
Leb pa Bulu, the Acholi-based youth language practice that has emerged in northern Uganda over the past decade, is today spoken by various groups of youths in both urban and rural areas. Despite the fact that speakers creatively manipulate language on a phonological, morphological and semantic level, Leb pa Bulu deviates significantly from other Ugandan youth language practices in terms of their role as social driving forces of linguistic differentiation. The linguistic practice is neither "street-related" nor geared toward a criminal image, as found among numerous other communities using a distinct youth language. Moreover, groups of youths in which Leb pa Bulu is employed resemble a loosely woven landscape of networks rather than an exclusive 'community of [shared] practice(s)' (CoP) with strongly inclusive in-group knowledge. This mainly has to do with Leb pa Bulu's social function, serving as more of an ethno-regional tool of differentiation from the Bantu-speaking southern parts of the country in the quest for ideological distinctiveness than as an intra-community 'anti-language' with inherent 'resistance identities'. The present paper is the first preliminary description of this variety of Acholi, taking historico-political, ideological and linguistic parameters into account.

Keywords:
Youth language practices ◆ Acholi/Lwo ◆ manipulations ◆ language ideology ◆ distinctiveness ◆ ethno-regional identity

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1 Introduction

The study of youth language in Africa has increasingly been investigated over the last two decades in terms of identity concepts which manifest themselves linguistically in youths' deviating linguistic practices (see, for instance, Hurst (2008) on Tsotsitaal speakers' identity in RSA, Ferrari (2009) and Rudd (2008) on Sheng speakers' identity in Kenya, and Nassenstein (2014) and Wilson (2012) on Yanké(e) identity in DR Congo.[1] Moreover, the academic studies have primarily focused on communities of practice and social networks (based on Eckert's, inter alia 2000, 2012 and Milroy's 1980, 2004 frameworks) and on 'style' as a social semiotic system in the process of meaning-making, "expressing the full range of social concerns in a given community" (Eckert 2012: 87). Linguistic manipulations have therefore been repeatedly analyzed as devices of stylistic elaboration (see Kießling & Mous 2004, Nassenstein & Hollington 2015) in various case studies all over the continent.

Map 1. The Acholi-speaking area in northern Uganda

[1]The data were collected in Gulu (northern Uganda) in February 2015, methodologically based on elicitation and a short period of ethnographic fieldwork. As an ethnographic approach, participant observation was chosen as the main technique in the field, with the data mostly collected in bars and in conversations with speakers in the municipal market. Elicitation was especially used when the first author, who extensively works on Acholi with a focus on discourse and conversation analysis, realized that the corpus of recorded data also revealed examples of youth language (Leb pa Bulu). The second author works on Ugandan Bantu languages and youth language practices and joined in after some initial recording sessions.

Leb pa Bulu[2] is an Acholi-based youth language practice (Nilo Saharan, Western Nilotic, Southern Lwoo; for recent studies on Acholi see for instance Hieda 2014), which has emerged over the last ten years in the city of Gulu, from where it has continuously spread across the Acholi-speaking northern districts (see *Map 1*) of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. Within the Ugandan setting, numerous studies have focused on Bantu-based youth languages, while only Storch (2007) provides preliminary insights into a Southern Lwoo/Western Nilotic language practice among young speakers of Adhola, labeled *'Jaap'*. This has primarily to do with the predominance of the Luganda-based youth culture (*Luyaaye*, spoken and performed by *Bayaaye*), identity and language in public discourse, as a communicative choice in social media and as an emblematic semiotic resource used in the music industry. Phenomena such as Leb pa Bulu as an Acholi-based linguistic practice, on the other hand, are associated with more remote areas of the country, i.e. the northern parts. Unlike the Luganda-based Luyaaye in Kampala (Namyalo 2015), Lusoga-based Luyáýé in Jinja (Nassenstein, forthcoming) and Ruyáýé in the Western parts of the country (Nassenstein & Bose 2015), Leb pa Bulu speakers do not consider the usage of the variety as an expression of 'resistance identity' with which they oppose themselves to speakers of standardized and more prestigious Acholi, societal norms or traditions. This, paired with the observation that Leb pa Bulu spread across rural as well as urban areas, leads to the hypothesis that youth language as a communicative in-group practice in northern Uganda seems to serve other social purposes than the above-mentioned youth languages. The aforementioned factors, together with deeper sociolinguistic insights into speakers' communities, ideologies and attitudes, will contribute to the hypothesis that the context of youth language usage is mainly characterized by ethno-regional demarcation and ideological differentiation. In the following paragraphs, the historical and language policy-related factors that have favored the emergence of Leb pa Bulu will be discussed before the linguistic creation of the language is analyzed. Speakers of Leb pa Bulu employ phonological, morphological and semantic means of manipulation and differentiation and make use of broad global repertoires in order to expand the lexical frame of their language, using and 'borrowing' lexemes from US Hip Hop and various African languages. The fluid contact scenarios contribute to young speakers' rich and

[2]*Leb pa Bulu* stands for 'language of the youth', or, 'language of the male youth'. This is interesting insofar as *Leb pa Bulu*, unlike other African youth language practices, is reportedly used by male and female speakers to the same extent. It remains to be investigated elsewhere whether male and female speakers use the label *Leb pa Bulu* in the same way in metalinguistic discourse.

complex repertoires, within which Leb pa Bulu is included as a meaningful semiotic register of identity and indexical ideology.

2 Sociolinguistic overview

The following sections reveal the sociolinguistic features relevant for the development of Leb pa Bulu as ethno-regional equilibrium. The desire of Acholi speakers to demarcate themselves regionally as an ethnic entity in contrast to other language groups within the country, especially the Bantu-speaking areas in the south, has historical origins which also lead to an ideological differentiation of speakers of Leb pa Bulu. This levelling and the semiotic process (iconization) involved, play a remarkable role in the creation of Leb pa Bulu and the self-perception of speakers, as shown in the following paragraphs.

2.1 Perspectives on community, identity, and innovation: youth and their practices in Acholiland

Throughout the development of a youth language, common social practices, as well as linguistic parameters, are important features of language use, manipulation and linguistic identity of the speakers. Youth languages – like language in general – are not rigid and are indeed subject to constant change. Linguistic change has been described by various scholars, particularly Labov (2001: 382–383), who has coined the term "saccadic leaders" to describe how speakers themselves actively control their language, and how they act as "language engineers who are remodelling the language" (Dimmendaal 2011: 249). Eckert (2012) illustrates the epistemological development of research on linguistic change in the study of variation in terms of waves building up on each other. While the first (based on Labov 1966, 1972) and the second wave (Milroy 1980, Milroy & Milroy 1985) deal with social meaning and how macro-sociological categories display the expansion of linguistic change through social space, the third wave is based on a stylistic perspective which attributes active and deliberate social-semiotic moves to speakers. Hence variation in language can be seen as "a reflection of social identities and categories to the linguistic practice in which speakers place themselves in the social landscape through stylistic practice" (Eckert 2012: 94).

Therefore, it is common for adolescent speakers and teenagers to define themselves through their speech style and their linguistic, as well as, social practices. They distinguish themselves from others within society with regard to age, gender or social class. Ethnicity, as stated by Kießling & Mous (2004: 315), is not included among the most

relevant social parameters, due to the typically ethnically diverse urban and rural background in which youth language practices usually develop.

As a reaction to strong dissociation practices as well as the divergent social background of speakers, negative and stigmatized images, such as crime or typical "street topos", are often attached to youth languages. However, this does not hold true for the Acholi youth language—its use is mainly determined by the age of the speakers, although speakers who are older than the average adolescent speaker are not excluded.[3] In villages, youth slang can be associated with a negative image by elders, but it seems that this bad reputation is mostly ascribed to youths in town and to the general negative attitude towards an urban lifestyle, of which youth language is just one aspect. However, the use of Leb pa Bulu is also spreading among teenagers and young people in the villages and can be mostly understood in rural settings of northern Uganda, as well.

Table 1. Contrasting sociolinguistic parameters in Luyaaye and Leb pa Bulu

	Exclusively urban-based	*'Street topos' & criminal image*	*'Resistance-/Anti-Identity'*	*Functioning as multi-/interethnic bridge*	*Focused on shared social practices (CoP); i.e. sports, music, specific clothing styles etc.*	*Male-dominated (gender)*	*Strong in-group regulation (ephemeral & exclusive nature)*	*'Leaders' as innovators*	*Negative societal attitudes*
Luyaaye[4]	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	**x**	✓	✓
Leb pa Bulu	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	(?)	(✓)

In town, the use of Leb pa Bulu is not only frequently met but, more interestingly, not bound to any specific common practices, although the latter have been described as a as a typical and important social phenomenon within youth culture (Nassenstein 2014). These

[3]A common feature, however, is that words which start being used by older speakers are dropped by younger speakers soon after.
[4]The sociolinguistic parameters listed are based on Namyalo's (2015) observations on Luyaaye as well as on hitherto unpublished data collected by the authors.

so-called "communities of practice" (CoP) are defined by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) as

> …an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which this membership engages.

The CoP therefore share the same social values, practices and rituals within the community – a feature that is not found in the group of Leb pa Bulu speakers. Moreover, there are no guarded boundaries to separate the Acholi speech community from the youth language practice, i.e. even outsiders can start speaking the youth variety. Hence, it is not necessary to have any shared in-group knowledge to be part of the Leb pa Bulu-speaking community. Thus, the characterization of a "community of practice" does not apply here.

Table 1 shows how the sociolinguistic features of Leb pa Bulu differ from those of other youth languages by comparing it to Luyaaye, the Luganda-based youth language spoken in Kampala: although Leb pa Bulu is mostly urban-based and originates from town, it spreads – albeit slowly – to the villages in northern Uganda. Despite the fact that Leb pa Bulu spreads all over Acholiland, there are no innovative "saccadic" leaders, in Labov's sense, in the diffusion of new expressions. Rather, new terms are taken from Nigerian movies, comedies or the radio.[5] Several musicians like Judas, Smokey or Lumix use Leb pa Bulu for their lyrics, while the latter avoids Luganda in his songs, despite the fact that he lives in Kampala. Nevertheless, the spread of innovations is a slow and rectilinear process, so that the people who influence Leb pa Bulu have to be seen as "incremental leaders" rather than "saccadic" leaders (Labov 2001). The way that new expressions enter the language does not give Leb pa Bulu a high degree of exclusivity and thus, no demarcation from other Acholi speakers is created through relexification. In conformity with the lack of linguistic relexification, demarcation through non-linguistic practices also does not occur. Speakers of Leb pa Bulu represent a community contrasting with standard Acholi speakers, despite the fact that they do not have any common practices that they share, apart from the language itself. Speakers are neither referred to as criminals, nor do

[5]The radio as a medium which is also used in the villages plays an important part in spreading the youth language to remote areas as the only medium where presenters use the local language, whereas other media such as TV mainly broadcast in the official languages, English and Swahili, or Luganda.

they try to represent a 'resistance identity' within the Acholi speech community, i.e. they do not have any negative societal attitudes and neither sex is excluded from the group of speakers.

2.2 History and language policy: the emergence of an ethno-regional equilibrium

If neither common practices nor social networks play any role in relation to Leb pa Bulu, if speakers do not incorporate a social resistance against standard Acholi speakers within the community, if they do not seek to dissociate themselves from other speakers, what are the reasons for young Acholi speakers to establish a fresh linguistic variety?

The urban setting of Gulu town is ethnically not as diverse as those in other well-known areas where youth languages are established, such as Kampala (Luyaaye), Nairobi (Sheng) or Kinshasa (Yanké). Thus, Leb pa Bulu cannot be considered an "interethnic bridge," as youth language practices are characterized by Kießling & Mous (2004: 315). Certainly it has not yet been investigated whether the use of Leb pa Bulu functions as a counterpart to other Luo-based youth languages within the region (e.g. Jaap, or a Lango-based youth language), by which young speakers distinguish themselves within the northern Luo group. However, it seems more probable that the youth language is supposed to function as an ethnic equilibrium, a means of ethnic levelling. Instead of providing a way for adolescents to demarcate themselves *within* the speech community, it seems to create a vacuum of a northern Luo identity, which acts as a counterbalance to the two other large regional groups of identification in Uganda, the southern group (Baganda) and Uganda's "westerners."

So what is the reason for the uncommon characteristics of a northern Ugandan youth language, which has so few correlations with other youth language varieties? The answer lies in Ugandan history and in the historical formation of the Luo group itself. Unlike other youth languages, there is no inner conflict taking place in the Acholi community, neither in the form of inter-generational nor of inter-social struggles which would result in the use of a youth language. This fact explains why there is no strict boundary to outer parties within the Acholi community, such as age restrictions, and no extreme gender segregation among speakers of the youth variety.

The reason stems from an outer conflict, an ethnic struggle of self-representation as one "Luo" entity in opposition to the Bantu-speaking groups in southern Uganda as well as to a third "western" group, since President Yoweri K. Museveni came to power in 1986.

Instead of creating a social boundary within the speakers' own language group, Acholi-based Leb pa Bulu seems to create an ethnic boundary with the other large ethnic groups in the country and to present a united entity towards them. Storch (2007: 12–13) demonstrates important linguistic aspects of another youth language in the region, Jaap. This youth variety of Adhola, a practice related to Acholi, reinforces these assumptions. Storch states that it is easier for other loanwords to enter Jaap than those from Bantu languages. Furthermore, if a Bantu word enters, it automatically becomes "luoized," e.g. noun class prefixes are omitted. The same phenomenon of luoization occurs in Leb pa Bulu, involving several strategies that are to be further explained in section 3.2. Together with a counterpart creation to Luyaaye youth language, which has been predominant in music and social media for a long time, the creation of Luo-based youth languages therefore seems to have been established out of an intrinsic motivation to be perceived as a single "northerner" entity within Uganda, an identity that Luo-speakers give themselves, and which is manifested in the social element of Leb pa Bulu. This self-identification as "northerners" has its roots in the historical developments within Uganda over the last centuries.

According to Atkinson (1999), the roots for a Luo and therefore also an Acholi ethnic group were already laid in the precolonial period of the country. Ancestors of the Acholi belonged to three language groups (Central Sudanic, Eastern Nilotic, and Western Luo) each with their own individual culture and rituals. By the end of the 18th century, a new social and political order had spread in northern Uganda, leading to a language shift to Luo in the area. Yet, the perception of the clans as one entity was still an extrinsic one. It was first created by Sudanese traders coming to the area in the 1850s, who realized the close relationship of the language of the area to Shilluk. Thus, they called the people *shuli*, which later evolved into *cooli* and, eventually, into *Acholi*.

In contrast to Atkinson, who shows a connection between the common use of Luo as a language and the emergence of one major system out of many single and separate chiefdoms, Amone & Muura (2014: 241) state that the Acholi in precolonial times still existed as single clans and chiefdoms, and that there was, therefore, no "wielded authority over the entire people and there was no political or any other system that brought all Acholi people under one realm."[6] Amone & Muura (2014) claim that, although the name for one entity had already been given by the traders, the Acholi as a social group have been a

[6]An overview of clans in northern Ugandan Acholiland before colonialism can be found in Amone & Muura (2014: 240).

construct of British colonialism. During colonial rule, the British not only took their part in creating a northern identity, but also created an ethnic differentiation by classifying each ethnic group into martial or non-martial. Contemporaneous with that, the people of the north were classified as follows:

> Generally speaking, the British divided the Uganda protectorate into two, namely labour and production zones. Governor Geoffrey Archer divided the Protectorate into productive and non-productive areas where by the latter would provide labour for the former. The division was based on presumed natural qualities of the people of northern Uganda and those of the south. The people of the north were regarded to be strong, muscular and hard working while the southern peoples were perceived as weak, lazy but intellectually superior. The accuracy of those accolades is debatable. However, it is known that the British colonialists put up infrastructures like roads, telephones, banks, schools, health centres etc. mainly in the southern part of Uganda especially in Buganda. Lack of infrastructures could be the factor that discouraged both private and public investments in the northern half of the Protectorate. Again this is subject to debate. The British did not wish to encourage any degree of unity among the different communities of Uganda. Keeping them at variance meant that there would be no nationalist movement for independence (Amone 2014: 143).

Mamdani (1983: 10) went even further, saying that "every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or nationality character. It became a truism that a soldier must be a northerner, [and] a civil servant a southerner (…)."[7] Another reason for this division was that it was in the rulers' interests not to create a strong unity among the inhabitants of the country, as this could lead to unified opposition to the British colonial rule. Given the fact that the population in the north was smaller than in the south, it was a strategic move to give military power to this smaller group of people, making them less dangerous for potential armed resistance than the Baganda or Banyoro could have been (Amone 2014). Considering the aforementioned explanations, it becomes clear that the ethnic differentiation in the country had already been initiated prior to the country's independence in 1962.

After independence, Milton Obote, who became President of Uganda in 1966, politically propagated Swahili as the international language, as can be seen in a speech he gave in 1967 at Makerere University in Kampala:

[7] Cf. also Amone (2014: 144).

> So the adoption of any of our present languages in Uganda may just go to endorse our isolation; we cannot afford any kind of isolation. We are surrounded by five countries. We can easily talk with them, and as they say here, walk across Rwanda village [sic!], walk across Congo village, walk across Sudan, Kenya and Tanzania and drink water by the simple words "mpa maji"—"give me water." It is possible today for the people of Uganda to communicate with the people in the neighbouring countries in broken Swahili but it is not possible for the people of Uganda to communicate with the neighbouring countries in broken Luganda (Obote 1967).

Idi Amin, who came to power after Obote's first rule, initiated a country-wide debate in 1973 on the choice of a national language, splitting the country again into the common colonial structures:

> The Luganda/Swahili opposition has threatened to carve Uganda into two major camps of language choice or two major ethnic blocks: Bantu-versus-non-Bantu, the latter being the chief supporters of Swahili alternative […] (Pawliková-Vilhanová 1996: 169).

After Amin's reign, Milton Obote seized power again and reigned from 1980, until he was overthrown by General Bazilio Olara Okello in 1985, who seized power for two days before giving way to Tito Okello, with whom he had prepared the coup. Tito Okello, an ethnic Acholi, stayed in power until the beginning of 1986. While Idi Amin was an ethnic Kakwa (Decker 2014) with family from the north-western West Nile region, speaking an Eastern Sudanic language but promoting Kiswahili, Obote was a Langi and spoke Lango, a Southern Lwoo language genetically close to Acholi. Due to Obote's efforts in the advancement of Swahili, Lango played a minor role and so did Okello's language Acholi. However, Idi Amin's pressure on Langi and Acholi elites as a preventive measure against political unrest strengthened the in-group identity of "Luo" communities as they accepted ascriptions of Otherness.

This continued to increase at a steady rate during Museveni's reign. After Yoweri K. Museveni's takeover in 1986, the north-south, or Bantu versus non-Bantu, opposition strengthened and was extended to include a third ethno-regional component, the Ugandan west, incorporating the western elites with predominantly ethnic Banyankore. The trichotomous view of (a) the Buganda Kingdom, Baganda people and the Bantu language Luganda, and of (b) the seemingly monolithic northern "Luo" groups from a (c) "west-

ern" perspective, promoting local Ankore elites and favoring other western communities such as Bakiga, Banyoro and Batooro, added to the perception of ethno-regional differences, especially during the so-called "Ugandan Bush War." This term describes the operations of Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) against Obote and Okello's followers in the early 1980s. The same divisions recurred during the long lasting war in northern Uganda (the NRA against Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, the LRA).

This shows that post-independence, ethno-regional demarcation continued: the language of the Acholi and other Luos in the north was never considered politically convenient at the level of language policy. Further, the population in the north of the country was, in fact, promoting another Bantu language, Swahili, for the national language rather than the dominant language Luganda, spoken in their own country's capital. This ethno-regional demarcation continues to resonate today:

> […] the Baganda who were victims of British imperialism were also perpetuators of their own form of imperialism in the rest of Uganda. This factor alone alienated Buganda and the Baganda from the rest of Uganda to the extent that up to today they are still viewed with a lot of suspicion in the other parts of Uganda (Amone 2014: 142).

If one looks at everyday life in Uganda nowadays, this ethnic dissociation manifests itself in mutual biased perceptions that the various groups have of each other. Economically, people in the north who do not speak a Luo language are not given equal opportunities. For example, a hair salon in Gulu had to close its doors, because neither the owner nor the employees spoke Acholi or English, but only Luganda. It should be mentioned here that in Gulu town, there is no problem about using another language than Acholi to communicate, but the alternatives should be either English or Swahili, and this ideological mindset among the inhabitants of the town sealed the fate of the hair salon.

The bars and clubs of the capital are a rich source of ethnographic data, where so-called "quiz nights" with different competing groups are a common form of entertainment. The perception of westerners, northerners and southerners as homogeneous groups is frequently reflected in the self-designation of the teams attending the quiz: the sarcasm and irony are clearly perceptible when competing quiz groups name themselves "northerners" [nɔʀzanas], a self-mocking label adjusted to a "typical Acholi" pronounciation. When analyzing naming practices and the (re)production of ethnic labels in public quizzes (through participant observation), even offensive group names such as *Incest – we do*

cousins, nephews, nieces would occasionally be chosen by a group of young Acholis, as a mocking criticism of the marriage customs of the westerners.[8] There is an intrinsic motivation to be perceived as a single group of "northerners" by the rest of the country, and to be discerned as being in a homogeneous equilibrium to the others.

2.3 Language ideologies

Language ideologies, as the ways in which speakers perceive and shape their language behavior and as the entirety of their underlying motivations to use a specific kind of language as a tool for either social cohesion or social distance, can be defined as associations "with underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation" (Verschueren 2012: 7). Despite the fact that language ideologies constitute an essential component in sociopragmatic research and variationist studies (Irvine & Gal 2000, Irvine 2001, Kroskrity 2010, Riley 2011, Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity 1998, Verschueren 2012; and, with a focus on ideologies and the media, Johnson & Milani 2010), few explicit studies on youth language ideologies have so far been provided.

Ag & Jørgensen (2012: 525) discuss youths' "ideas about structure and use" in the context of fluid 'polylanguaging,' which stands in clear opposition to Europe's more conventional understanding of languages as separable entities, which is increasingly being deconstructed in sociolinguistic theory. According to Ag & Jørgensen, youths would divide their ways of speaking into "integrated speech" as a more standardized form of expression and into "ghetto language/street language" (p. 530) when referring to spoken interaction with peers. These two metalinguistic labels are employed by youths to refer to two diverging registers, driven by language ideologies and bound to a specific social context. While Leb pa Bulu speakers also use different registers of Acholi, their underlying motivation for switching from one to another is grounded in ethnic and regional differentiation. Wyman, McCarthy & Nichola's (2014) volume comprises diverse papers on First Nation youths and their ideologies of language shift, heritage language and language use beyond conservative ideologies of language endangerment and revitalization, by includ-

[8]While these practices were recorded in a popular bar in the neighborhood Nakawa in Kampala (in February-March 2015), similar strategies of 'Selfing' and 'Othering' could be witnessed during quiz nights elsewhere in the country, where participating groups would repeatedly think in ethno-regional categories, (re)producing colonial and hegemonic stereotypes and presuppositions on a micro level. Despite the cheerful tone and playfulness in social interaction in the given settings, the negotiation of identities and ethnic labels in Ugandan quiz nights reveals a profound societal schism.

ing for instance Hip Hop practices to express a glocalized Navajo identity (see O'Connor & Brown 2014).

In a study of Turkish-speaking youths in Athens and London, Lytra (2015) draws on Irvine & Gal's (2000) three semiotic processes that characterize language ideology, namely (1) 'iconization,' (2) 'fractal recursivity' and (3) 'erasure,' in order to dissect young speakers' beliefs and views about their own and more standardized vernaculars in the two cities. While all three semiotic processes seem to play an important role in Lytra's study, for instance in multilingual classrooms, Hollington (2016) applies Irvine & Gal's (2000) threefold division to Yarada K'wank'wa, a youth language practice from Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). In Ethiopian youth language, iconization and fractal recursivity seem to be of prime importance, as youths' stylistic distinctiveness (see also Irvine 2001) create an iconic and indexical mirror of identity, and also to a salient degree of internal heterogeneity with "various regional and social groups, which can be regarded as subgroups of the Co[f]P" (Hollington 2016: 140). Thus, the ideological motivation of 'fractal recursivity' is "the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level […] [f]or example, intra-group oppositions […]" (Irvine & Gal 2000: 38). This does not play a major role in Leb pa Bulu, due to less diversification within the community of speakers that is not necessarily divided into further subgroups; nor does the semiotic concept of 'erasure'. The latter describes "[t]he process in which ideology […] renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible" (ibid.), framing speakers' perception of the Other as a homogeneous entity which is based on ignoring the inconsistencies and internal discrepancies of a multifragmented picture of the Other. Leb pa Bulu speakers' ideology is not primarily based on this principle, despite the fact that speakers tend to lump non-speakers of Southern Lwoo languages all together (thus, Baganda, Basoga and western peoples as "Bantu"), as those from whom they wish to differentiate themselves. The most essential semiotic process found in Leb pa Bulu is 'iconization,' which

> involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence. This attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection (between linguistic features and social groups) that may be only historical, contingent, or conventional (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37).

Iconizing linguistic innovation and the elaboration of youths' speech behavior can be considered as an esoterogenist strategy of linguistic differentiation in Leb pa Bulu. It stands in contrast to Luganda and the prevailing attitude(s) of power, oppression and epistemic hegemony of the centralized capital toward northern Uganda, as well as to Luyaaye, the youth language practice prominent in social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube and Ugandan popular music by Bobi Wine and M33. As well as youths' ideological quest for *levelling* Bantu and Luo youth identities, they aim to establish a semiotic practice that can stand as a flagship of northern Ugandan youth culture and ethno-regional affiliation, linguistically *balancing* hegemonic constellations. Styles such as Leb pa Bulu can be considered as "social semiosis of distinctiveness" that are "ideologically mediated" and constitute a "system of distinction" (Irvine 2001: 21-22). They are usually "connected with aesthetics," for instance through poetic means of manipulative and aesthetic elaboration (ibid., 22). By creating and practising Leb pa Bulu as a distinctive style, youths display the broad internal variability of the lump extrinsic label 'Luo.' Moreover, youths distance themselves on a pragmatic level, through vulgarisms, swear words and positive politeness strategies, from the complex negative politeness patterns found in Luganda. Complex greetings and welcome ceremonies as well as the use of numerous modal particles found in standardized Luganda stand in clear contrast to the emblematic register used in Leb pa Bulu (Storch 2015, p.c.),[9] and to speakers' ideology.

3 The linguistic construction of Leb pa bulu

In the following paragraphs, speakers' creative strategies are analyzed in terms of their phonological, morphological and semantic manipulations of standardized Acholi, aiming to achieve stylistic distinctiveness. Manipulative strategies as well as creative practices of expanding the lexicon allow speakers to shape a specific communicative style in order to cope with other, primarily Bantu-based youth language practices in Uganda in terms of creativity, trendiness and also, as a clear expressive display of regional identification with Acholi as a modifiable and flexible repertoire and "group language" (Lüpke & Storch 2013: 17).

[9]Storch (2014) also mentions xenophilia as a recurrent form of open-mindedness toward strangers and outsiders in many communities that speak Western Nilotic languages, whereas the Luganda-speaking community, with its complex politeness patterns and a lot of required in-group knowledge, is rather more hermetic. The predominance of xenophile communities in contrast to more hermetic Bantu communities also explains the loose in-group regulation among Leb pa Bulu speakers.

3.1 Phonological manipulations

The phonemes of Leb pa Bulu (see *Table 2)* deviate from the standard Acholi variety in their number. Additional phonemes found in the youth language are the alveolar fricatives, the voiceless /s/ and the voiced /z/.

Table 2. Phoneme inventory of Leb pa Bulu

	Labial		**Alveolar**		**Post-alveolar**	**Palatal**		**Velar**		**Uvular**
Plosive	p	b	t	d		c	ɟ	k	g	(q)
Nasal	m			n			ɲ		ŋ	
Trill			(ɾ̥)	ɾ					(ɣ̥)	
Fricative			s	z	ʃ					
Affricate	(pɸ)	(bw)								
Lateral				l						

The occurrence of these sounds can be explained in two ways. First of all they fill a "missing slot" in the phonetic inventory of standard Acholi, which is otherwise only filled when speakers use ideophones (Rüsch 2013); fricatives also exist in neighboring Southern Lwoo languages. Secondly, they can easily be explained by the fact that many loanwords from other languages such as English, which have these phonemes, are integrated in the youth language through fluid contact scenarios. Examples for these extra phonemes are, among others, *si* 'girl', *dizo* 'design', and *shodi* 'shorty.'

Leb pa Bulu makes use of several phonological and phonotactic manipulations. A regular strategy is the suffixation of a word-final *-o*, as is also common in many other youth languages, and is described by Kießling & Mous (2004: 322). The suffix can be preceded by truncation (or clipping), or can occur on its own. The suffix is semantically empty and presumably originates from the North-American West Coast slangs, which draw heavily on Latin-American terms. The derivation from Spanish can also be seen in the use of the plural suffix *-os* which is frequently used, especially for concepts usually occurring in the plural, such as *pentos* 'peas' or *kwɛ̀ntos* 'rebels.' An overview of manipulations with examples is shown in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Phonological and phonotactic manipulations

Form	Gloss	Manipulation/Source
bizu	'business'	clipping and dummy affixation -*u* (and vocalic metathesis), from English *business*
broste	'brother'	dummy affixation -*ste*, from English *brother*
dizo	'design', 'style'	clipping and dummy affixation -*o*, from English *design*
gale	'girl'	dummy affixation -*e*, from English *girl*
kido	'child', 'kid'	dummy affixation -*o*, from English *kid*
mamzo	'mother', 'mum'	dummy affixation -*o*, from English *mum*
si	'girl'	Acronym, American Hip Hop slang, English *chick (c)*
siga	'cigarette'	clipping, from English *cigarette*
sisto	'sister'	clipping and dummy affixation -*o*, from English *sister*

3.2 Morphological manipulations

While in standard Acholi the morpheme *là*- is very productive when deriving nouns from verbs, adjectives or ideophones (*tìyò* 'work' → *làtìc* 'worker', *ràc* 'bad' → *làràc* 'bad person', *cwícwí* 'squeaking sound (of a bird)' → *làcwícwí* 'whining person'), this does not hold for Leb pa Bulu to a great extent. There are only a few examples found in which the morpheme *là*- is prefixed to a word, all of which are also used in the standard variety (e.g. *làywàc* 'drunk person, drunkard'). Young speakers tend to use other strategies, such as coinage of new words or calquing. The practice of naming certain people or character traits, which, in standard Acholi, is frequently connected with the use of the prefix *là*-, is substituted by semantic strategies in the youth language. A few examples from the standard variety, such as *làywàc*, are found, but there seem to be no combined strategies of prefixing *là*- to a loanword or coined term.

However, new terms can generally be morphologically embedded. Thus, possessive pronouns as well as demonstrative pronouns can be suffixed to coined and calqued terms.

The suffixes follow the same phonological rules as in standard Acholi, whereby they drop the initial nasal *-n-* after a consonant (examples 1–4).

(1a) *bade-ná*
friend-1sgPOSS

'my friend/buddy'

(1b) *bade-z-á*
friend-pl-1sgPOSS

'my friends/buddies'

(2)	*si-nì*	*ò-bàlò*	*wìy-á-ɔ̀*
	girl-DEM	3sgS-injure.PAST	head-1sgPOSS-COMPL

'I am crazy in love with this girl' (lit. 'this girl injured my head')

(3)	*bade-ní*	*pé*	*tìn*	*dò*
	friend-2sgPOSS	NEG	today	ATT

'your friend is not here today'

(4)	*à-nɛ̀nɔ̀*	*chick-á*	*town*
	1sgS-see.PAST	girl-1sgPOSS	Town

'I saw my girl in town'

A striking feature of Leb pa Bulu is its resistance to Bantu influence: very few Swahili loanwords and even fewer Luganda words occur in Leb pa Bulu. There are rarely loans from any Bantu language, and Luganda in particular does not serve as a common source for new words. Whenever a loanword from Luganda does occur, its national and international frequency in use cannot be denied – a fact which can be explained in terms of the historical and sociopolitical development in Uganda (cf. sections 2.1–2.3). The distancing from the "Bantu opposition" in the south goes even further. Any word that makes its way into Leb pa Bulu due to high frequency in use or importance is manipulated in a specific way, i.e. any typical Bantu characteristics such as noun class prefixes are omitted, so that the structure of the word does not resemble Bantu anymore.

Storch (2007: 12–13) has already described this phenomenon as an ideologically motivated strategy of manipulation in the youth language Jaap, based on Adhola, and called it "luoization."

> Even though the language is strongly influenced by Swahili, the noun morphology seems to remain unaffected by contact with Bantu – unlike Dholuo, where a transfer of Bantu noun class structures is very salient. This simply reflects Jaap group identity as being Northern Ugandan Luo in opposition to Central Ugandan Bantu. […] Consequently, Luoization of Swahili loans and avoidance of Bantu number inflection are common choices in multi-ethnic Jaap speaker's [sic] discourse behaviour. (Storch 2007: 13)

The most concise examples in Leb pa Bulu are the elision of class prefixes/augments (see *Table 4*) and the verbalization of greetings (see examples 5a–b).

Table 4. Ideologically motivated elision

Form	**Gloss**	**Manipulation/Source**
mupii	'football'	Elision of augment and clipping, from Luganda *omupiira*
zeyi	'old man'	Elision of NCP1, from Luganda *muzeeyi*

(5a) *ì-poa* *mòt?*
2sgS-cool calm

'Everything okay? /Are you cool?'

(5b) *à-poa* *mòt*
1sgS-cool calm

'Everything alright. / I'm cool.'

The luoized words can be easily embedded into the Leb pa Bulu structure and thus represent the ideological demarcation from the south by morphological means. It is assumed that the absence of *là-* as a derivational morpheme (*lò-/lù-* in the plural) could also result from the resemblance of this morpheme with (Bantu) noun class prefixes. This assumption is not only supported by the fact that the prefix *là-* does not occur in the creation of words, but also because it is clipped, in cases where a word is manipulated, such as *kwɛ̀ntos* 'rebels', which originates from the Acholi word *làkwɛ̀nà* 'rebel; messenger.' In this way, speakers are not only using manipulative morphological strategies to luoize

words originating from Bantu, but they also truncate the Luo prefix *là*- to avoid any resemblance with Bantu noun class structure.

3.3 Semantic manipulations

As well as phonological and morphological forms of manipulation, a range of semantic manipulative techniques are also employed in Leb pa Bulu. Semantic manipulations often reveal insights into youths' complex patterns of creativity as well as into their worldview and beliefs. The range of deliberate semantic manipulations in Leb pa Bulu includes metaphors, metonymies and some onomastic synecdoches, as well as euphemisms and dysphemisms.

Table 5. Metaphors

Form	Gloss	Manipulation / Source
diary [dajiri]	'female breasts, bosom'	metaphor; Engl. *dairy* 'milk products' with phonological hypercorrection
dɔ̀yɔ̀ gwánà	'to vomit'	metaphor; in std. Acholi *dɔ̀yɔ̀ gwánà* 'to weed cassava (and bend over)'
ém gwɛ̀nɔ̀; cala; lobas / lágwɛ̀t pàìpáí	'gun' / '(long) shotgun, rifle'	metaphors; in std. Acholi *ém gwɛ̀nɔ̀* 'chicken thigh', *cala* '?', *lobas* '?'; *lágwɛ̀t pàìpáí* 'instrument to remove papayas (from a tree)'[10]
gɔ̀yɔ̀ fire; gɔ̀yɔ̀ màc; cèlò dɛ̀l; càm c [sí]	'to have sex'	metaphors; in std. Acholi *gɔ̀yɔ̀* 'to beat'; *màc* 'fire'; *cèlò* 'to smash, *dɛ̀l* 'flesh'; *càm* 'to eat', Engl. *c(hick)*
kacúpà	'skinny jeans'	metaphor; Luganda/Kiswahili diminutive prefix *ka*- (NC12), *cúpà* von Sw. *chupa* association with the shape of a bottle turned upside-down (see example 6 and *Figure 1*)
kɛ̀yɔ̀, tɔ̀ŋɛ́yɔ̀	'to go, to leave'	metaphors; in std. speech *kɛ̀yɔ̀* 'to burst'; *tɔ̀ŋɛ́yɔ̀* 'to cut oneself'
military tea	'beer'	metaphor; Engl.
nyɛ́nyɛ́	'policeman'	metaphor; in std. speech 'cockroach'

[10]The metaphoric use of terms for war equipment raises the questions of whether, and if so in what ways, war in northern Uganda has contributed to semantic changes in war-related terminology, and also to pragmatic changes such as taboo concepts and politeness strategies. This may be investigated elsewhere.

The use of metaphors is a common semantic strategy of figurative speech employed by youths in order to expand the lexical inventory and to express creativity. While metaphors are a basic component of everyday language (Lakoff & Johnson 2003), they reveal deep insights into conceptual systems of cognition and perception, and also serve as a link between thinking and doing, and thus, carrying out social action. Youths' social practices are characterized by multimodal semiotic systems that they incorporate through non-verbal, paraverbal and behavioral communication (for instance, by following dress codes, "throwing signs" and encoding their surrounding landscape with new meaning). Metaphors are, in youths' repertoires, thus not restricted to language use but refer to all forms and means of ritualized expression. In Leb pa Bulu, metaphors include common perceptions of sexualized or genderized speech (especially from a male perspective), body parts, money, matters of (life)style and the consumption of narcotics, just to name a few.

Figure 1. The metaphor *kacúpà* ('skinny jeans') in Leb pa Bulu

(6)	*Jal,*	*lɔ̀ŋ*	*ka-cúpà*	*tyɛ́*	*cìlíng*	*àdí?*
	guy	pants	DIM-bottle	COP	money	INTERROG

'Hey man, how much are the skinny jeans?'

In the course of this study, due to Leb pa Bulu's esoterogenist[11] function as ideological expression of differentiation, particular attention was given to metaphoric ethnicizing terminology. Surprisingly, only one example could be ascertained: *dinklɛt* 'young Sudanese'. It is a compound of *Dinka* and the diminutive form *-let* as used in English *piglet* (see example 7), partly motivated by a negative image of Dinka people (and South Sudanese refugees in general) in society. The obvious scarcity of ethnicizing terminology as a strategy of 'Othering' can be explained by redundance: Leb pa Bulu is already an ideological tool of differentiation itself. Further explicit terminology of ethnic differentiation

[11]Esoterogeny, a term used by Ross (1996) for Oceanic languages, is explained by Dimmendaal (2011: 359) as a situation when "speakers of a language add linguistic innovations that increase the complexity of the language in order to highlight their distinctiveness from neighbouring groups".

is not necessarily needed, and all ‘Others’ are referred to as *anam* ‘people from beyond’, a term also used in standardized Acholi.

(7)	*K’`-ì-nɛ́n*	*kìt-á*	*dinklɛt*	*bòr*	*kɛ̀d-ɛ̀!*
	first-2sgS-see.IMP	way-REL	Sudanese	long	COM-3sgO

‘Look at that young, tall Sudanese!’

Metonymy, equally important in the deliberate construction of Leb pa Bulu, can be understood as

> a conceptual process in which one conceptual entity, the ‘target’, is made mentally accessible by means of another conceptual entity, the ‘vehicle’, […] either of the two conceptual entities related may stand for the other (Panther & Radden 1999: 2).

There are several metonymies found in Leb pa Bulu, which either denote a ‘part of whole’ or a ‘whole of part’ concept, of which two are listed in *Table 6*.

Table 6. Metonymy

Form	**Gloss**	**Manipulation / Source**
lapore àdɛ́k	‘marihuana’	metonymy; lit. ‘three leaves’
gɔ̀nyɔ̀ dyɛ̀l	‘let’s eat; give me food!’	metonymy and metaphor; lit. ‘to untie the goat’

An onomastic synecdoche can be understood as “the case where a name stands for a concept that is usually associated with it” (Kießling & Mous 2004: 325), a frequent phenomenon in youth languages such as Sheng, Nouchi, Yanké and others. In Leb pa Bulu, there are only a few cases of onomastic synecdoches, as listed in *Table 7*.

Table 7. Onomastic synecdoche

Form	**Gloss**	**Manipulation / Source**
bin ladən	‘full beard’	onomastic synecdoche; from the proper noun *Osama bin Laden*
làkálàgwɛ́c	‘fighter jet’	onomastic synecdoche; term for the bird species ‘swallow’

'X-phemisms' is a term suggested by Allan & Burridge (2006: 29) under which euphemisms and dysphemisms (and orthophemisms) are subsumed, and which can be defined as concepts of "cross-varietal synonymy." *Table 8* lists two examples of euphemistic and dysphemistic speech in Leb pa Bulu.

Table 8. X-phemisms

Form	Gloss	Manipulation / Source
sitting facility; boysquarters	'behind, bum'	euphemisms / orthophemism; from Engl. (see example 8)
nyɔ̀k	'boy, guy'	dysphemism; in std. speech 'male goat'

(8)	*K'`-i-nέn*	*kɔ̀ŋ*	*sitting facility*	*pà*	*chick-kì!*
	first-2sgS-see.IMP	first	bum/behind	POSS	chick-DEM

'First take a look at this girl's bum!'

3.4 Contact phenomena and lexical expansion

Codeswitching and borrowing are often mentioned as being among the most salient contact patterns among youth language practices, as well as other "more stable" forms of language. However, codeswitching – which has often been mentioned in early accounts dealing with Sheng (Mazrui 1995) and Tsotsitaal (Slabbert & Myers-Scotton 1997) – has rather hastily been accredited a predominant role in contact scenarios. While 'codeswitching' suggests switching between easily definable and delimitable codes mastered by an individual, the realistic picture of a youth language speaker's holistic repertoire is rather a fluid pool of choices, that are by no means completely delimitable or separable, nor restricted to fixed linguistic entities. Moreover, linguistic categories are merged or 'referred to' as forms of language, and speakers can equally metalinguistically choose between more standardized or trivialized forms of language.

While borrowing constitutes a common tool for enriching and expanding one's repertoire, the choice of which language to borrow from is an ideological one that marks speakers' orientation. It is bound to fashion and social media, and can equally result from a certain affiliation to ethnic or social groups. Leb pa Bulu reveals a handful of borrowed lexemes from Kiswahili, such as *sule* 'school,' originally derived from German *Schule.* While the lexeme is realized as *shule* in standardized Swahili, it has undergone palatal fronting in Leb pa Bulu, a widespread phenomenon affecting loanwords in Southern Lwoo. While

borrowing from standardized Swahili is scarce (and mostly restricted to widely-known terms such as *malaya* 'prostitute', *nyama* 'meat' and *kazi* 'work'), there is a lot of lexical borrowing from the Kenyan youth language practice (and new widespread language) Sheng. Examples include *-poa* as a new verb stem 'to be fine, to be well' (from *poa* 'fine, okay'), *sawa* 'okay, fine',[12] *demu/dem* 'girl' and others. Through the music and video industry, social media, and Kenyan predominance, Sheng is beginning to spread in northern Uganda and seems to avoid the negative emotions formerly associated with Kiswahili as being "influential but unpopular as it is associated to Idi Amin's reign" (Storch 2007: 13).

While borrowing from English occurs across all semantic domains (*chick* 'girl', *lika* 'alcohol', *bucks* 'money' or the ritualized greeting *ize?–ize!* from 'easy'), lexical borrowing from Luganda remains – as already discussed—remarkably scarce. The few lexemes borrowed from Luganda include *jajja* 'elder, grandparent' and a handful of other words.

Another more prominent example of borrowing concerns the kinship system. Instead of borrowing separate terms that relate to family members, a broader register of kinship terms was adopted from English and incorporated into youths' repertoire. Thus, Leb pa Bulu speakers use *sisto* and *broste* (for 'sister' and 'brother'), *kido* ('child'), *mumzo* ('mother, Mum'), *gale* ('girl, girlfriend') with *zeyi* ('father, Dad') as the only exception, derived from Luganda *muzeeyi* ('old man, elder') (see section 3.2). Moreover, terms such as *ma shodi* (derived from *my shorty* for 'my girlfriend, my bitch') and *buddena* [bʌdɛnʌ] or *buddez-a* [bʌdɛzʌ] 'my buddy, buddies' are frequently used as in-group markers. The form *good buddena* [gʊd bʌdɛnʌ] is commonly used to denote 'close friend'. The use of English terms of address as well as their phonological adaption (*sister* → *sisto, my shorty* → *ma shodi*) corresponds with emblematic typographic realizations of addressing others in digital discourse, as found among speakers of Ugandan English on social media like Facebook, Whatsapp among others. The borrowing of kinship terminology is a frequent phenomenon among geographically close languages, as pointed out by Comrie (2000: 84) for the borrowing of Kobon kinship terminology among Haruai speakers in Papua New Guinea. Borrowing of kinship terminology takes place out of a need to maintain social balance and to avoid taboo breaking, especially in terms of in-law terminology. Moreover, borrowing kinship terms can at times be considered as a metatypical process,

[12] *Sawa* constitutes a Sheng term with a very high degree of borrowability, and seems to be popular among youths all over Uganda. Its emergence has been ascertained for Kisoro in the far southwest of the country (found in the regional Hip Hop style *Amahoro Fleva,* performed in Rufumbira), as well as in Luyaaye in Kampala, and among Rutooro-speaking youths in Fort Portal in the mid-northwest.

based on speakers' frequent and parallel use of several languages, which then have an impact on each other's structure. In contrast, borrowed terms in Leb pa Bulu are linked to US Hip Hop music, where terms such as *shorty, bro, sis* and so on are used as peer-group markers of inclusion. Gendered referential terminology for 'girl' and 'boy' are also often derived from American Hip Hop discourse and display a broad range of polysemy with *chick*, *c* [sí], *sina* (see example 9), and the more dysphemistic *agó* for 'girl, bitch, slut'. The male equivalent would be *nyɔ̀k* 'boy' (in standardized Acholi 'male goat') as a dysphemism, and *nyérɛ̀ / jàl* [ɟal] as more neutral terms.

(9)	*à-nɛ̀n-ɔ̀*	*c [sí] na / chicka*	*nì*	*ì*	*town*
	1sgS-see	girl	DEM	LOC	town
	'I saw my girl(friend) in town.'				

This 'global fluidity' in contact scenarios—often labeled 'polylanguaging' (Jørgensen 2008) 'translingual practices' (Canagarajah 2013), 'translanguaging' (García & Wei 2014) or 'metrolingualism' (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010) in current sociolinguistic theory, with slight conceptual variations—is of prime importance in contact situations of youth language practices worldwide. These practices relativize the ties between language, community and defined place, and have steadily become more important in the course of analyzing mobile identities and globalizing linguistic practices. What Canagarajah (2013: 26) refers to as "contact zones" (a term taken from Pratt 1991) and defines as a shift "from communities to the spaces where diverse social groups interact," is the underlying foundation of modern linguistic practices among youths. New "contact zones" such as translocalized interaction through social media, music and the influence of mobile leaders cause fluidity and add to translingualism across language practices. In the present example this occurs in regard to US Hip Hop terminology, which constitutes a salient feature in African youth language practices.

Instances of this kind of borrowing can be found in most youth languages, notably in Yanké (Kinshasa, DR Congo), where English lexical items are then integrated into Lingala and French discourse, but also among speakers of Engsh (Nairobi, Kenya; Kioko 2015), and Zimbabwean Slang (Hollington & Makwabarara 2015). In Leb pa Bulu, patterns of global fluidity from American English include – in addition to the kinship system—several expressions for 'money' (instead of standardized Acholi *céntè*, originally derived from Luganda *ssente*) and several terms for 'house, home', among others (see

Table 9). Most of these terms are reportedly adopted from rappers such as Chris Brown and Lil Wayne, as well as from so-called 'black movies' made in Hollywood.

Table 9. US Hip Hop terminology

Form	**Gloss**	**Manipulation / Source**
crib, hood, base, homebase	'home, house'	US Hip Hop
d.m.c.	'car'	metaphorical-dysphemistic *dangerous mechanic condition* (origin unkown)
dizo	'style, look'	US Hip Hop
dou, dimez, bucks	'money'	US Hip Hop
flow	'musics, vocals'	US Hip Hop
ize	'okay, cool, easy'	US Hip Hop
moní	'money'	Nigerian Hip Hop
ride, wheel, tyre	'car'	US Hip Hop

The use of numbers, among mainly male speakers, to conceptualize women's body shape metaphors can also be counted among these fluid practices. Playing with digits or numerals seems to be a common phenomenon in young speakers' interaction in many settings and has to be understood as a multimodal approach of encoding and decoding surrounding space. The compression and reduction of complex concepts, which are then referred to through digits, can also be found in domains other than youth language, for instance when bars are named after area codes or country codes.[13] However, youths tend to use numerals in more creative and more meaningful ways, as also reported for Latina gangs in California (Mendoza-Denton 2008), who pair gestures and hand signs with certain numerals that stand for principles of gang formation. In Leb

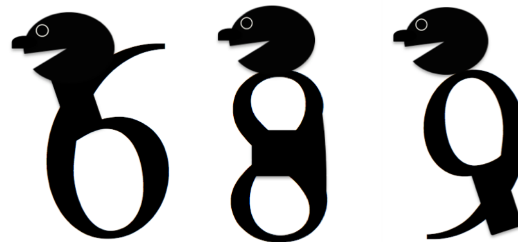

Figure 2. Numerals as figurative metaphors for women's body shape

[13]For instance, *243* is the name of a popular bar in Kinshasa, DR Congo, and *256* the name of one in Kampala, Uganda.

pa Bulu, numerals refer to women's body shape as a concealing technique in male speech, consituting a genderization of style in discourse. Apparently women rarely understand what their male counterparts converse about when dropping digits, and no analogous practice is reported for gender-specific women's talk. Speakers can refer to a woman's body shape by using the numerals 6, 8 and 9. While 6 (figure six/boysquarters) is used as a metaphor for women with a well-built or protruding behind, 8 (figure 8) describes women with both large bosom and a well-built behind and 9 (figure 9) refers to women with a large (or protruding) bosom (see *Figure 2* and examples 10a–c).

(10a) *nyákò-nì* *tyɛ́* *kì* *figure* *six*
woman-DEM COP COM number NUM

'this girl has a well-built behind!'

(10b) *... kì* *figure* *eight!*
…COM number NUM

'… a curvy body!'

(10c) *... kì* *figure* *nine!*
… COM number NUM

'… a large bosom but no behind!'

The metaphorical repertoire of typographic numerals for women's body shapes is by no means an exclusive feature of Leb pa Bulu, and can therefore be considered a result of fluid practice. It has been in use for at least several years with exactly the same meaning, mostly around campus and expressed in English, as stated by students of Makerere University Kampala (Storch 2012, p.c.), with no connection to youths in non-academic social strata in northern Uganda. Most likely, students from Makerere are the ones to have introduced the terms in their circles of friends back home in Gulu, from where the metaphorical use of figures has spread across northern Uganda.

Similar tendencies have been reported by Mulumbwa (2009) for Kindubile, the Swahili-based youth language practice from Lubumbashi in southeastern DR Congo, where linguistic items have entered from Yanké. Also, Yabacrâne, a Swahili-based youth language from Goma, Eastern DR Congo, has witnessed a similar cross-geographical fluidity of lexemes from Yanké (Nassenstein 2016). These practices that spread across matrix lan-

guages seem to be generally characteristic of African languages that are no longer bound to traditional notions of 'languages' as stable entities, but have to be understood more as fluid systems of translingualism, mobility and high adaptability.

Table 10. 'Floating lexicon' in Leb pa Bulu (and other Ugandan youth languages)

Form	**Gloss**	**Manipulation / Source**
demu, dem	'girl, girfriend'	Sheng *demu*
nwa, (kaya)	'marihuana'	Indoubil (Lingala-based youth language from the 1960s, today used all throughout western and northern parts of Uganda): *nwa* 'marihuana', *likaya/makaya* 'tobacco' (in Yanké 'marijuana')[14]
okada	'motorcycle taxi'	used in Nigerian Nollywood movies, derived from the name of a domestic Nigerian airline
zeyi (*/ zende / kazende / kazeyi*)[15]	'elder; grandmother, grandfather'	Luganda *muzeeyi* 'elderly man'
jàl [ɟal]	'guy, boy, man'	realized in Sheng, Yabacrâne, Ruyáyé, Luyaaye, Luyáyé etc. as *chale, chari, chare, shali* etc.; most probably going back to the English first name Charlie as an onomastic synecdoche[16]

In South African Tsotsitaals, a certain 'floating lexicon' (Hurst 2015) re-appears in all different urban varieties of the language throughout the country, revealing a certain cross-geographical emergence of the same terminology, even though no direct language contact scenarios can be ascertained. Rather, the acquisition of new terms can be assumed to happen across social media and/or through mobile speakers such as Hip Hop musicians, who commute between urban centers across the country. Leb pa Bulu and other Ugandan youth language practices also reveal a 'floating lexicon' which comprises a handful of terms that are used both in the capital Kampala and in the western and northern parts of the country (see *Table 10*).

[14]The term *kaya* is also used in Jamaican to denote 'marihuana', and is the title of Bob Marley's 1978 album.
[15]All these are equivalents of the same term across different youth language practices in Uganda (Luganda-based, Teso-based, Lusoga-based, Runyankore-based etc.).
[16]Alternatively, it is possible that it originates from the common Western Nilotic root **jal* 'visitor, traveler; somebody from', as discussed in Dimmendaal (2001:103).

In Gulu, terms that can be traced back to geographically remote areas are *kaya* and *nwa/noa* for 'marijuana, weed' and *okadaman* 'motorcycle driver.' While *kaya* originates from the standardized Lingala word *likaya/makaya* 'tobacco (leaf),' it has taken on the meaning of 'marihuana' or 'weed' in Leb pa Bulu. *Nwa* is a term that goes back to early urban youth language in Kinshasa (see Sesep 1990). Both terms have also become part of the inventories of Swahili-based youth language practices in Eastern DR Congo. Due to the fact that marihuana often crosses the border from Congo to Uganda and most drug sellers are Congolese, both terms have also entered Leb pa Bulu speakers' repertoire, without them consciously being aware of the terms' origins. Moreover, the emergence of both terms hints at possible trajectories of drug trade routes from Congo to Uganda, as neither term is used among Luyaaye speakers of the youth language in the capital Kampala. The lexeme *okadaman* is derived from the Nigerian term *okada,* which often occurs in Nollywood movies – again, a sample of translingual mobility across language practices. *Okada* is nowadays a common term among speakers of Ugandan English in Kampala, and can be seen as related to the Ugandan English expression *bodaman*. The term *boda* for 'motorcycle taxi' is reportedly derived from the 'border' area between Kenya and Tanzania where these taxis first circulated.

4 Concluding remarks

Young Acholi speakers implement the youth language practice Leb pa Bulu as a creative tool to diversify Acholi in urban and rural areas of northern Uganda.[17] As discussed, speakers' pursuit of distinctiveness and differentiation from standardized Acholi arises from both extrinsic and intrinsic underlying ethno-regional fragmentation. The aim is to distance their communicative style (or, as coined by Hurst 2008 'stylect') from Buganda and Bantu-speaking Uganda as well as from Luyaaye, the Luganda-based youth language practice from Kampala. Linguistic practices as esoterogenist tools among youths, drawing on historical factors that reach back into Idi Amin and Milton Obote's reigns, as well as Museveni's rule until the present, display young speakers' agency in processes of meaning-making and linguistic differentiation. Moreover, this reveals their role in rethinking language ownership, despite official language policies and ascribed labels of identity, ethnicity and preset guidelines of language use.

[17] This is also stated by Storch (2005: 33) as "with regard to the standard of documentation, Lwoo is extremely diverse", marking a diversity to which Leb pa Bulu as a distinctive style of youths actively contributes.

The elaboration and spread of Leb pa Bulu in northern Uganda can therefore be best explained as an intrinsic expression of collective identity of Southern Lwoo youths against the Ugandan south and hegemonic power constellations. Further, it is based on the insufficient extrinsic differentiation of Southern Lwoo (due to outsiders' perception of Acholi, Lango, Kumam, Adhola, Labwor, Chopi and Alur as one single label "Luo", or as "northerners"). Speakers employ creative linguistic means in order to elaborate their linguistic practices and reveal salient features of global linguistic fluidity. This phenomenon adds to current sociolinguistic theory in deconstructing "language": moving away from an understanding of languages as stable, separable entities toward a more fluid understanding of speakers as having repertoires that contain and combine all of the speakers' linguistic resources and mark their linguistic choices (cf. Matras 2009, Lüpke & Storch 2013). Both urban and rural youths' repertoires in northern Uganda are characterized by global influences, drawing on Lingala designations for marihuana, American Hip Hop terms and words originating from Nigerian means of transportation. These practices emphasize the necessary redirection of scholarly focus toward a more fluid understanding of these concepts.

Further research on Leb pa Bulu as well as on other Southern Lwoo youth varieties still has to take into account whether any structural or sociolinguistic distinctions exists among youth language practices in the north or whether speakers are more or less united/homogeneous, with similar ideological ties and linguistic strategies. Speakers' knowledge about neighboring communities' practices (e.g. Leb pa Bulu speakers' potential knowledge of the differences of Leb pa Bulu and Lango-based youth language practices) should also be taken into consideration in further studies. Moreover, the study of youth language ideologies needs to be expanded and prioritized. This will be a great contribution to further advance ongoing research in language variation.

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Appendix A

Abbreviations

1sg	first person singular
2pl	second person plural
ATT	attitude marker
COM	comitative
COMPL	completive
COP	copula
CoP	community of practice
DEM	demonstrative
DIM	diminutive
Engl.	English
IMP	imperative
INTERROG	interrogative
LOC	locative
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NC	noun class
NCP	noun class prefix
NEG	negation
NRA	National Resistance Army
NUM	numeral
PAST	past tense
POSS	possessive
Sw.	Kiswahili