E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 7 Issue 10 2026 pp 3031 - 3042
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267108

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Identity and code-switching: The influence of isiZulu–Sepitori on First-Language isiZulu speakers in Soshanguve

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ABSTRACT

In a multilingual urban setting like Tshwane, a city in Gauteng, South Africa, code-switching is a common practice, yet its perceived impact on the identities of home language speakers remains under-researched. The aim of this paper was to establish the perceptions of isiZulu-Sepitori code-switching on the identities of home language (HL) speakers of isiZulu residing in Soshanguve. It focused on people who came to Tshwane with little or no proficiency in Sotho-Tswana languages (viz. Northern Sotho, Setswana and Southern Sotho). Using the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as a theoretical framework, the study used a qualitative research method, and open-ended questions included in a questionnaire were used to gather data. To access potential participants (n=14) in Soshanguve township, the researchers used snowball sampling. The study found that while code-switching between Sepitori and isiZulu is not perceived to fundamentally alter core ethnic identity, it is learned for positive, identity-related reasons such as social integration and belonging. Furthermore, isiZulu First Language (L1) speakers learn Sepitori for positive reasons, and it does not impact their identities. This study can add value to studies on 'code-switching', particularly from the perspective of how people perceive how the practice influences speakers' identities in South Africa.

Keywords: Sepitori, isiZulu, Code-switching, Home Language, Language and Ethnicity, Language and Identity

INTRODUCTION

Ditsele and Mann posit that the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) has a language policy in which eight languages have been declared official, namely: (ranked in descending order of demographic numbers): Afrikaans; Sepedi (also known as Northern Sotho, a reference henceforth used); Setswana; English; isiZulu; Xitsonga; Tshivenḓa; and isiNdebele. The City of Tshwane Municipality Household Survey.[1] They further posit that almost 38% of the entire population of the CTMM is either Setswana-speaking (L1) or Northern Sotho-speaking (L1), which makes them a larger group in CTMM. Mann and Ditsele further observed (from the CTMM Household Survey) that approximately two out of

[1] Thabo Ditsele and Charles C Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane," *South African Journal of African Languages* 34, no. 2 (2014): 159–65.

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PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received: 20th March, 2026 | Accepted: 19th August, 2026 | Published: 10th November, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Mkhize, Nqobile L., Yanga LP Myataza, and Thabo Ditsele. "Identity and code-switching: The influence of isiZulu–Sepitori on First-Language isiZulu speakers in Soshanguve." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.10 (2026): 3031 - 3042. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267108
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five CTMM residents are home language speakers of Northern Sotho and Setswana – 19.6% and 18.1%, respectively.[2] In addition, the other seven Black South African Languages, amount to 20%, which is a single-digit percentage for each individual. Code-switching (CS) is defined here as the alternation between two or more languages or varieties within a single conversation or utterance.[3] People often code-switch between languages in their conversations without even being conscious of it. South African townships inhabited by people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds are known to be melting pots of mixed cultures and mixed languages. In such environments, contact languages emerge from the first residents and later settle to be distinct varieties associated with particular townships; for example, Jozi Zulu and Jozi Sotho are urban and/or non-standard varieties of isiZulu and Southern Sotho associated with and spoken at many greater Johannesburg townships (e.g. Soweto, Alexandra, Kathu, etc.).[4] In Tshwane townships, some people communicate in an urban and/or non-standard variety called Sepitori, and this variety emerged out of contact mainly between home language (HL) speakers of Setswana and Northern Sotho (Schuring, 1985), and has settled into a distinct variety associated with Tshwane and neighbouring areas such as Brits (in the North West) and Bela Bela (in Limpopo).

Like other major urban areas in South Africa, Tshwane attracts people from different parts of the country, including the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, where a significant number of isiZulu HL speakers reside.[5] Upon arrival in Tshwane, isiZulu HL speakers learn Sepitori in order to function better through this *lingua franca.* It is reasonable to state that those with limited knowledge of Sotho-Tswana languages pick up Sepitori at a quicker pace as opposed to those with no knowledge of Sotho-Tswana languages. On the one hand, children born in Tshwane to families who speak isiZulu at home ordinarily pick up Sepitori from an early age, and the variety becomes part of their linguistic repertoire. It is also reasonable to state that speaking Sepitori outside their homes and isiZulu (or code-switching between isiZulu and Sepitori) at home inevitably influences their identity as isiZulu HL speakers. On the other hand, people who relocate to Tshwane in their late teens or early adulthood feel the pressure to learn Sepitori to function better in their daily interactions with residents. In picking up Sepitori, they initially code-switch between this variety and isiZulu. Over time, some may develop stronger competence in Sepitori to a point where they no longer code-switch between the variety and isiZulu, while others may not achieve similar competence levels and maintain the code-switching practice. Either way, the introduction of Sepitori in these speakers' lives has the potential to influence their identity as isiZulu HL speakers, particularly because isiZulu (a standard Nguni language) and Sepitori (a non-standard Sotho-Tswana language) are not mutually intelligible. Moving from this premise that 'influence' in these scenarios is an inevitability, the researchers were thus interested in how code-switching between isiZulu and Sepitori influences the identities of isiZulu HL speakers, who relocated to Tshwane in their late teens or early adulthood and who learned Sepitori when they had little or no proficiency in Sotho-Tswana languages upon arrival.

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of isiZulu HL speakers in Soshanguve regarding the influence of code-switching between isiZulu and Sepitori on their linguistic and cultural identity. By learning and speaking Sepitori, isiZulu HL speakers who understood little or no Sotho-Tswana languages before relocating to Tshwane in their late teens or early adulthood would inevitably learn more about the similarities and differences between their identities as isiZulu HL speakers and the identities of Sotho-Tswana people. It is these new discoveries that the researchers were interested in, and through this study, they established how code-switching influences the identities of isiZulu HL speakers.

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[2] Ditsele and Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane."

[3] Shana Poplack and David Sankoff, "Code-Switching. Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language," 2004, 589–96.

[4] Thabo Ditsele, "Testing the Impact of Known Variables on the Attitudes Held by Setswana L1-Speaking University Students towards Their L1," *Literator* 38, no. 1 (June 28, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v38i1.1301.

[5] Nontobeko Thobile Mbatha, "Attitudes Toward Studying IsiZulu at a University of Technology: A Survey of Undergraduate Students Taking IsiZulu as an L1 Major" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2017); Nontobeko T. Mbatha, Yanga L.P. Majola, and Zempilo S. Gumede, "Language Maintenance: Factors Supporting the Use and Maintenance of IsiZulu in Soshanguve," *Literator* 44, no. 1 (January 19, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v44i1.1930.

It is against this backdrop that this article seeks to achieve the objectives below:

- Establish what motivated isiZulu L1 speakers residing in Soshanguve to learn Sepitori when they arrived in Soshanguve.
- Determine their perceptions of whether and how communicating in Sepitori affects their use of and proficiency in isiZulu.

To achieve the above research objectives, the study posed the following research questions:

- What motivated isiZulu L1 speakers residing in Soshanguve to learn Sepitori when they arrived in Soshanguve?
- What are their perceptions of whether and how communicating in Sepitori affects their use of and proficiency in isiZulu?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code switching

Nicolas and Ntuli define code-switching as the act of switching between two or more languages during a conversation.[6] They argue that code-switching can occur when a word or phrase from one language is substituted with its counterpart in another, or when complete sentences in various languages are used in the same discourse.[7] According to Slabbert and Finlayson, "the cultural and linguistic richness of the multilingual communities within the townships of South Africa creates reservoirs of continually growing and changing code-switching data".[8] They also emphasised the fact that the growth of CS has stimulated academic research both nationally and internationally, with the result that CS today is one of the most topical subjects in sociolinguistics.[9] Therefore, CS has been normalised in most multilingual communities; in essence, it has become part of their lives. Babili, Mohela, and Ditsele examined code-borrowing that occurs in football commentary in Sepedi on Thobela FM, a radio station that broadcasts in Sepedi. The study's findings indicated that listeners saw code-borrowing as beneficial to the evolution of football vocabulary in Sepedi, implying the creation of Sepedi football terms derived from English counterparts.[10]

CS has been around for quite some time. Brown refers to it as the problematic nature of the relationship between individual and social behaviour. He further adds that the interest in African languages was strictly a structured perspective, which included phonetics, phonology, morphology, as well as historical and comparative linguistics, with a strong emphasis on what was regarded as toxic and unusual.[11] The act of CS was previously regarded as toxic, but times have changed, and language is dynamic; as such, it is only fair for the speakers of different languages to get a common, comfortable and easy way to communicate, even if it means mixing and switching languages. There are different perspectives from which CS in South Africa has been studied. For example, CS has been studied from a variety of theoretical and applied linguistics perspectives, which include linguistic borrowing, standard versus non-standard languages, applied commercial communication, sociology of language, interactional functions, structural constraints, and educational role. Studies that have been conducted on CS show that this is a very important matter that needs to be investigated, particularly between Black South African languages (BSALs), including their non-standard varieties.[12] Furthermore, Chowdhury's study on code-switching among youth and FM radio jockeys in Bangladesh demonstrated the significant contributions of radio disc jockeys and young individuals to the widespread practice of code-

[6] Ramona Kunene Nicolas and Nonhlanhla Ntuli, "The Discursive Strategies in the Spoken Narratives of Multilingual Sepitori and Sesotho Speakers," *Languages* 10, no. 5 (April 24, 2025): 89, https://doi.org/10.3390/languages10050089.

[7] Kunene Nicolas and Ntuli, "The Discursive Strategies in the Spoken Narratives of Multilingual Sepitori and Sesotho Speakers."

[8] Sarah Slabbert and Rosalie Finlayson, "A Socio-Historical Overview of Codeswitching Studies in the African Languages," *South African Journal of African Languages* 19, no. 1 (1999): 60–72.

[9] Slabbert and Finlayson, "A Socio-Historical Overview of Codeswitching Studies in the African Languages."

[10] Gabriel Babili, Kgabo L Mphela, and Thabo Ditsele, "Code-Borrowing and Its Effects on the Development of Sepedi: The Case of Soccer Commentaries on Thobela FM," *South African Journal of African Languages* 44, no. 2 (June 28, 2024): 135–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2024.2333153.

[11] H. Douglas Brown and Heekyeong Lee, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, vol. 4 (longman New York, 2000).

[12] Poplack and Sankoff, "Code-Switching. Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language."

borrowing. [13] Chowdhury's findings indicate that young listeners employ code-switching both intentionally and unintentionally. The study also revealed that code-borrowing was used to:

- Foster solidarity with the audience.
- Transition topics and underscore them through the use of an appropriate code.
- Reduce social and cultural distance.
- Address a conceptual or linguistic deficiency; and
- Convey another individual's emotions.[14]

Different people learn a second language (L2) for different reasons. Dornyei (2001; 2007) emphasises some motivational factors behind people learning a new language thus: "I believe it is important to restate that learning an L2 is different in many ways from learning other school subjects. Although an L2 is a ''learnable'' school subject in that discrete elements of the communication code (e.g., grammatical rules and lexical items) can be taught explicitly, it is also socially and culturally bound, which makes language learning a deeply social event that requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of the L2 culture". He further mentions that there are also scholars who view L2S as a mediating factor between different ethnolinguistic communities in multicultural settings. They consider the motivation to learn the language of the other community to be a primary force responsible for improving or hindering intercultural communication and affiliation.

L2 motivation research has been centred on the highly influential concept of integrativeness or integrative motivation. An 'integrative' motivational orientation concerns a positive interpersonal or affective disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community. It implies an openness to, and respect for, other cultural groups and ways of life; in the extreme, it might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one's original group) ideal self represents the attributes that a person would like to possess (e.g., hopes, aspirations, desires), and within this framework "integrativeness" can be seen as the L2-related attributes of the ideal self.

IsiZulu in Tshwane

IsiZulu is one of the official languages in South Africa and belongs to the Nguni language family, which also comprises isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele. Mbatha notes that according to the 2011 Census, isiZulu HL speakers are mainly concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal (77.8% of the province), and other significant HL speakers are found in Mpumalanga (24.1% of the province) and Gauteng (19.8 % of the province).[15]

According to the Language Policy of the City of Tshwane (2012:5-6), isiZulu is one of the eight (8) official languages in Tshwane. According to Ditsele, isiZulu is the fifth most populous language in Tshwane behind Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Setswana, and English.[16] According to the 2011 census, isiZulu accounts for 22.7% of South Africa's population and 9.5% of Tshwane's population. IsiZulu is one of the Nguni languages that has HL speakers in Soshanguve; however, it is not dominant in Tshwane.

The concept of Identity

For this study, identity is one of the factors that the researchers carefully and closely examined. Identity is one of those terms in our society that has been defined in many different ways, with some definitions raising questions. Akerlof and Kranton define *identity* as the behaviours of specific individuals. They further suggest that identity can explain behaviour that appears detrimental; this means that a person is given a particular identity or is classified in a certain way because of their behaviour.[17] Identity was once

[13] Sunayana Chowdhury, "Code-Mixing as a Strategy Used by Radio Jockey's on Radio-Mirchi 93.9 FM (Pune)‖," *The Criterion An International Journal in English* 3, no. 4 (2012): 1–13.
[14] Chowdhury, "Code-Mixing as a Strategy Used by Radio Jockey's on Radio-Mirchi 93.9 FM (Pune)‖."
[15] Mbatha, "Attitudes Toward Studying IsiZulu at a University of Technology: A Survey of Undergraduate Students Taking IsiZulu as an L1 Major."
[16] Ditsele and Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane."
[17] George A Akerlof and Rachel E Kranton, "Economics and Identity," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115, no. 3 (2000): 715–53.

considered the commonplace of a group of people who spoke the same language. This is a definition given with the assumption that if one speaks a certain language, they belong to that group, which was previously defined as a sign of belonging.

Brubaker and Cooper argue that identity does not require the use of identity as a category of analysis or to conceptualise identities as something that all people have, seek, construct and negotiate. They emphasise that identity should not be just that because that definition is just "blunt" and flat.[18] Identity is very closely related to various factors that are believed to make up who a person is. Language, ethnicity or tribe, gender, class and all other factors that are used to describe a person have a great influence on one's identity. Different people identify with what they think and believe is close and even dear to them.

Language attitudes

Language attitudes are the opinions, ideas and prejudices that speakers have with respect to language. These attitudes cannot be observed directly but are shown through behaviour. People who have a certain attitude towards a certain language will treat the speakers of that other language in a particular manner, either through avoidance or approach, or they may decide not to learn a certain language.[19] Language attitudes are not solely based on or focused on how one person views their language and the languages of others, but can also be about what one feels about their own language variety. According to Melander, it is very important to study people's attitudes. It is beneficial to sociolinguistics because it predicts a given linguistic behaviour: the choice of a particular language in multilingual communities.[20]

Ryan *et al.* define language attitudes as "any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different language varieties or speakers".[21] Majola, Gumede and Mbatha highlight that in places such as Umzimkhulu, the relationship between language attitudes and second-language achievement has concentrated on the motivational aspect of language attitude or on the attitudes towards native speakers of the target language, where people have different attitudes (positive and negative) towards the languages that they are expected to communicate with.[22]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communication Accommodation Theory

To conduct this study, the researchers adopted Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as a theoretical framework that underpins this study. The Communication Accommodation Theory is a general theoretical framework for both interpersonal and intergroup communication. This theory explains and predicts why, when, and how people adjust their communicative behaviour during social interaction, and what social consequences might result from such adjustments. According to Giles and Ogay, CAT suggests that individuals use communication in part to indicate their attitudes toward each other and, as such, is a barometer of the level of social distance between them.[23] This constant movement toward and away from others, by changing one's communicative behaviour, is called accommodation. There are different accommodative strategies that speakers use to achieve the goal of accommodating each other in communication. Convergence has been defined as a strategy where individuals adapt their communicative behaviours in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., speech rate, accents), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance length), and nonverbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutors' behaviour. Conversely, the strategy of divergence leads to an accentuation of speech and nonverbal differences between self and the other.[24] In the context

[18] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond" Identity"," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1–47.
[19] Patience Epps and Herb Ladley, "Syntax, Souls, or Speakers? On SIL and Community Language Development," *Language* 85, no. 3 (2009): 640–46.
[20] Linda Melander, "Language Attitudes: Evaluational Reactions to Spoken Language," 2003.
[21] Ellen B Ryan and Howard Giles, *Attitudes towards Language Variation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982).
[22] Yanga L.P. Majola, Zempilo S. Gumede, and Nontobeko T. Mbatha, "Language Maintenance and Shift among AmaBhaca of Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal," *Literator* 44, no. 1 (February 24, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v44i1.1927.
[23] Howard Giles and Tania Ogay, "Communication Accommodation Theory," 2007.
[24] Giles and Ogay, "Communication Accommodation Theory."

of this study, AmaZulu are perceived as those who switch to Sepitori to accommodate or be accommodated and accepted by people who speak Sepitori residing in Soshanguve.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and approach

The adoption of a case study was suitable for this particular study since it intended to investigate the different perceptions about the influence of isiZulu-Sepitori code-switching on the identities of isiZulu HL speakers in Soshanguve. The researchers used a qualitative approach in order to obtain the different views and opinions from isiZulu HL speakers from Soshanguve; their different experiences were studied using this approach. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it involves views from various people, perceptions and opinions regarding the CS that takes place among them, which is why the qualitative approach was chosen for this study.

Data collection

The researchers used a questionnaire with open-ended questions as the instrument to collect data for this study.

Participants and Sampling

The researchers chose to collect data from participants around the Soshanguve Township in Tshwane through the snowball method. Using snowball sampling, the researchers spoke with isiZulu HL speakers who resided in Soshanguve, who were originally from Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, and who then directed the researchers to other participants with the same description.

Data for this study were collected from fourteen (14) isiZulu HL speakers residing in Soshanguve who shared their views regarding their different perceptions about the influence of CS on their identities. The participants were chosen based on their demographic information. The researchers had to first check if participants were originally from KwaZulu-Natal or Mpumalanga. Since the researchers chose snowball sampling, the participants were very helpful in directing the researchers to the right people.

Respondents' profile

The profile of respondents is presented in terms of biographic information, namely, gender and age group. This profile also includes the location of origin since the study focused on the respondents from two origin locations (Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal), the number of years the respondents had been living in Tshwane, previous contact with Sotho-Tswana languages and their level of communication in Sepedi. The study was conducted among 14 isiZulu HL speakers who relocated from the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga to Tshwane in their late teens or early adulthood and code-switch between isiZulu and Sepitori. The researchers aimed to gather data from 14 participants, seeking to strike a balance between these variables:

1. **Gender:** female and male;
2. **Age group:** 18-20 years old, 21-25 years old, and 26-30 years old;
3. **Location of nurture:** KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga; and
4. **Number of years in Tshwane:** less than 2 years, 2-5 years, and 6 years and above
5. **Prior contact with Sotho-Tswana languages:** no contact at all, understood but could not speak, and spoke very little;
6. **Skills in communicating in Sepitori:** do not speak at all, good speaker and excellent speaker.

Data analysis

Data collected through the questionnaires were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic coding. Using an inductive approach, the researchers read the transcripts multiple times to gain familiarity with the content and identify emerging patterns. Open coding was initially applied to label meaningful units of text, which were then grouped into broader categories by axial coding. This process helped uncover

recurring themes related to language use, inclusivity, comprehension challenges, and the impact of signage language on health communication.

Ethical considerations

Before commencing the data collection for this study, the researchers implemented multiple ethical measures to safeguard participants' rights and well-being. The institutional research ethics committee at Tshwane University of Technology granted ethical clearance. All prospective participants received a comprehensive information leaflet outlining the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, and the anticipated duration of participation. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without adverse consequences. We obtained informed consent from each participant through a signed consent form before data collection. The researchers maintained anonymity and confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms (e.g., MP1, FP3) during transcription, analysis, and reporting. All collected data, including audio recordings and transcripts, were stored securely on a password-protected computer accessible exclusively to the research team. The open-ended questions were carefully designed to respect and accommodate participants' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thereby minimising potential distress.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The study was conducted among fourteen (14) isiZulu HL speakers who relocated from the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga to Gauteng, Tshwane, in their late teens or early adulthood and code-switch between isiZulu and Sepitori. Data will be presented, analysed, and discussed according to the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

Theme 1: Communicating in Sepitori

Under this theme, Questions 1, 2 and 4 were posed to the participants regarding their experiences with learning and using Sepitori.

Question 1: Early experiences with Sepitori. Most (86%) participants reported positive experiences when they started using Sepitori. They described feelings of accomplishment, confidence, and excitement about learning the language of the place they lived in. **MP3** stated, "It was the greetings and a few words, and it felt amazing because it was an amazing thing to know the language of the place I lived in." **FP3** added, "It was really a great experience... Saying things in Sepitori boosted my confidence." The remaining 14% reported challenging experiences, citing difficulties due to linguistic differences between isiZulu and Sepitori, and some participants received ridicule from others.

Question 2: Motivation to learn Sepitori. A majority (57%) of participants indicated that they were motivated by the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the desire to belong. They felt bound to learn the language to feel part of the community. **MP1** said, "The fear of missing out (FOMO) drove me to push and learn to communicate in Sepitori because this is one of the most-spoken languages where I stay." Some participants (14%) were forced by circumstances such as language barriers, while others (21%) reported that learning happened automatically due to shared living spaces with Sepitori speakers. Only a minority (7%) cited negative experiences and embarrassment as driving factors.

Question 4: Impact on life. An overwhelming majority (78%) of participants stated that the ability to communicate in Sepitori positively changed their lives. They reported increased confidence, improved social relationships, and a sense of fitting into Pretorian society. **FP3** noted, "Being fluent in it has allowed me to be confident when speaking to any Pretorian." **MP9** added, "I feel if you can speak Sepitori, you can then claim that you are from Pretoria." The remaining 22% said nothing had changed significantly, viewing Sepitori simply as another communication tool.

Synthesis of Theme 1

The findings reveal that learning Sepitori is largely a positive and empowering experience for isiZulu HL speakers. The motivation to learn is driven by a strong desire for social integration and belonging, consistent with Dornyei's concept of integrative motivation, where learners adopt a new language to interact and identify with the target community.[25] The fact that some participants learned the language automatically through shared spaces supports the notion that language acquisition in multilingual settings is often a natural, socially driven process. Furthermore, the positive life changes reported by most participants underscore the role of language in facilitating social cohesion and personal confidence, a key tenet of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), where convergence leads to social approval and reduced social distance.[26]

Theme 2: Switching between isiZulu and Sepitori

Under this theme, Questions 3, 5 and 9 explored participants' experiences and language preferences when code-switching.

Question 3: Comments received when switching. The responses of the participants were mixed. A total of 29% received negative comments, including ridicule and criticism. **MP7** said, "They usually say we do not understand what I am saying." Another 22% did not receive comments, 14% received mixed reactions, and 14% received positive and encouraging feedback. The remaining 21% did not respond.

Question 5: Language preference in switching. A majority (79%) of participants reported speaking more isiZulu than Sepitori when switching between the two languages. The primary reason was that isiZulu is their native language, and they felt more comfortable and proficient in it. **MP5** said, "isiZulu because it is my native language." **MP9** added, "I am not proficient enough in Sepitori." A minority (14%) spoke more Sepitori to ensure they were understood by their interlocutors, while 7% switched equally between both languages depending on their conversation partner.

Question 9: Concerns about preserving isiZulu. A significant minority (43%) of the participants encountered people who suggested that they did not preserve isiZulu when switching to Sepitori. **MP1** said, "Yes, there are people who assume that I am leaving my culture and roots." **FP4** noted, "Some saw me as a person who is not proud enough to speak her home language." However, the majority (57%) had not encountered such suggestions, indicating that code-switching was largely accepted.

Synthesis of Theme 2

The findings reveal a complex linguistic landscape in which code-switching is met with varying degrees of acceptance. Negative comments and criticisms, particularly the perception that using Sepitori constitutes a loss of cultural identity, highlight the symbolic value of language as a marker of ethnicity.[27] This aligns with Akerlof and Kranton's notion that identity is tied to behaviours and linguistic choices.[28] The preference to use more isiZulu than Sepitori suggests that while participants have adopted the new variety, their core identity remains rooted in their home language. This supports CAT's explanation that while convergence (adapting to Sepitori) is used for social integration, maintaining divergence (using isiZulu) helps preserve one's original identity.

Theme 3: The influence of Sepitori on isiZulu language and cultural identity

Under this theme, questions 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11 explored the perceived impact of Sepitori on participants' cultural identity and language use.

[25] Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda, “Teaching and Researching Motivation,” 2001.
[26] Giles and Ogay, “Communication Accommodation Theory.”
[27] Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond" Identity".”
[28] Akerlof and Kranton, “Economics and Identity.”

Question 6: Use of Sepitori at home. A majority (57%) of participants reported not using Sepitori when visiting their villages or townships in KwaZulu-Natal or Mpumalanga, citing that people back home do not understand it. The remaining 43% included some Sepitori words, though only some people understood them.

Question 7: Concern about language shift. Most (71%) participants were not concerned that their improving Sepitori would cause them to speak less isiZulu. **MP1** said, "I believe that every language should be given a chance." **FP5** stated, "I will never speak another language more than my mother tongue." However, 29% expressed concern, with one participant noting that Sepitori is "just a street language" that could "destroy my proper ways of speaking isiZulu."

Question 8: Exposure to African languages for children. Responses were varied: 42% agreed it is better to expose Black children to at least one African language, 50% disagreed, advocating for exposure to multiple cultures in a diverse nation, and others did not disclose their stance on ex-Model C enrolment.

Question 10: Influence on Zulu identity. A majority (71%) reported positive influences on their identity. The participants felt that they were adaptive, intelligent, and proud to learn a new language. **MP2** said, "I see me as a Zulu-born speaker but understand that it is important to learn other languages." **MP7** noted it made him realise the importance of exposure to other languages. The remaining 29% said Sepitori did not influence how they see themselves as Zulus.

Question 11: Reactions of people at home. The responses were mixed: 57% encountered negative reactions, including accusations of not preserving their culture, being laughed at, or being told to "go back to Pretoria." **MP7** said, "They ended up saying I am not preserving my mother tongue." However, 29% received positive reactions, some people wanting to learn Sepitori words, and 14% did not receive comments as they did not use Sepitori at home.

Synthesis of Theme 3

This theme reveals a nuanced picture of identity negotiation. The finding that most participants feel their Zulu identity remains intact despite learning Sepitori supports Blackledge and Pavlenko's argument that identity is not fixed but is performed and negotiated through discourse and interaction.[29] The fact that participants can confidently navigate between their home language and Sepitori without feeling a loss of identity suggests a hybrid or complementary identity, rather than a zero-sum game. Furthermore, the concerns expressed by some about language preservation and the negative reactions from people back home reflect societal pressures and the symbolic power of language as a cultural marker. The overall positive perceptions of identity change reported by most participants align with CAT's assertion that accommodation strategies like convergence can lead to positive outcomes such as social integration and reduced social distance, while still allowing individuals to maintain their core ethnic identity.

Overall Synthesis of Findings

Across all themes, the study reveals that while code-switching between isiZulu and Sepitori is a complex practice met with both acceptance and criticism, the overall perception among isiZulu HL speakers is positive. The primary motivator for learning Sepitori is the desire for social integration and belonging, and most participants do not perceive this process as threatening their core Zulu identity. Instead, they view it as a practical adaptation to their multilingual environment, which enhances their social confidence and communicative competence.

DISCUSSION

The study findings reveal that there are more positive perceptions about the impact of CS between isiZulu and Sepitori on the identities of isiZulu HL speakers. The participants were not strongly influenced by the different perceptions that society might have on the matter. The findings support

[29] Adrian Blackledge and Aneta Pavlenko, "Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts," *International Journal of Bilingualism* (Sage Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2001).

Ditsele's findings, which suggest that Sepitori is a growing language, and more people are getting comfortable with it.[30] Ditsele and Mann described Sepitori as a language of Tshwane, which is evident when one looks at the responses that also suggest that more people have accepted it and it keeps on growing in terms of usage in Pretoria, despite it not being an official language and even among those who do not identify with it, for instance, participants of this study.[31]

The findings showed that there are people (few) who are still sceptical about the influence of Sepitori on their identities; however, they are still willing to learn terms of this language. The language policy of Tshwane includes isiZulu as one of the eight (8) official languages of the City, but it is important to note that it is not the most spoken language, especially in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, where isiZulu HL speakers mostly originate. Therefore, the experience of CS raises eyebrows for the HL speakers of isiZulu who are new in Tshwane from KwaZulu-Natal or Mpumalanga. Based on the data collected, it is safe to say that the perceptions of CS are positive, and that people understand their different identities differently. The introduction of a new language or learning a new language does not tamper with one's identity or the tribe they identify with. As Blackledge and Pavlenko suggest, people are not born with an identity, but they are influenced by their interactions with others and their environment.[32] People who are born and raised by isiZulu speakers, surrounded by an isiZulu-speaking society, are most likely to identify themselves as amaZulu, and when they learn a new language at a later stage in life, they do not stop identifying themselves as that, despite the different opinions that may be thrown at them.

The findings also show that most of the isiZulu HL speakers who code-switch between two languages (isiZulu and Sepitori) are positive about CS because they feel like they belong when they can use the Tshwane language (Sepitori) with other people besides their own people. Therefore, there is a sense of belonging that comes with being able to juggle between two languages for someone who comes from a society dominated by their own HL. The power of language then plays a big role for those who are social butterflies. Wood and Eagly point out that females consent more to what they feel develops them or benefits them, although male dominance in some families has played a role in this.[33] Moreover, the findings showed that Sepitori is a language that is mostly used by males, resulting in the conclusion that there is no negative impact caused by CS between isiZulu and Sepitori on the identities of isiZulu HL speakers. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence shows that males in the isiZulu culture are known to be very culturally observant and would not do anything that may seem as if they are losing their identities. Furthermore, CS has no impact on the identities of the isiZulu HL speakers, as they remain proudly amaZulu who are learning a new language to survive in a different society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that educators and policymakers in multilingual urban areas such as Tshwane should recognise the value of urban contact varieties like Sepitori within educational settings. Rather than dismissing it as "street language," Educators can use Sepitori as a pedagogical tool to support learning and social integration among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Secondly, community and cultural organisations are encouraged to implement initiatives that frame multilingualism as an asset rather than a threat to cultural identity. Such initiatives may include public campaigns and workshops designed to foster positive attitudes toward code-switching and language learning, thereby mitigating social stigma and negative perceptions experienced by some speakers. Finally, future research should investigate the long-term effects of code-switching on language maintenance and shift. Longitudinal studies following isiZulu HL speakers over extended periods could yield deeper insights into the stability or evolution of positive identity perceptions and assess whether Sepitori use results in measurable changes in isiZulu proficiency over time.

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[30] Thabo Ditsele, " Perceptions of Black South African Languages: A Survey of the Attitudes of Setswana-Speaking University Students Toward Their First Language" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2014).

[31] Ditsele and Mann, "Language Contact in African Urban Settings: The Case of Sepitori in Tshwane."

[32] Blackledge and Pavlenko, "Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts."

[33] Wendy Wood and Alice H Eagly, "A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Behavior of Women and Men: Implications for the Origins of Sex Differences.," *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 5 (2002): 699.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to establish how code-switching (CS) between isiZulu and Sepitori impacts the identities of isiZulu home language (HL) speakers residing in Soshanguve, Tshwane. The study specifically targeted isiZulu HL speakers originally from Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal who relocated to Tshwane in their late teens or early adulthood. This study demonstrates that language acquisition and code-switching in multilingual urban settings can serve as a positive force for social integration without necessarily leading to identity loss. The isiZulu HL speakers in this study have successfully navigated their linguistic and cultural environment, adopting Sepitori for practical and social reasons while maintaining a strong connection to their isiZulu heritage. This finding challenges the notion that adopting a new language or engaging in code-switching inevitably threatens one's cultural identity. Instead, it suggests that multilingualism and linguistic adaptability are valuable assets in South Africa's diverse society, allowing individuals to belong to multiple communities while preserving their unique cultural roots. The study thus contributes to the growing body of literature on language, identity, and code-switching in South Africa, offering a more optimistic perspective on the dynamic interplay between language use and identity construction in multilingual contexts.

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