

Shona Slang Used by Zimbabwean Sex Workers Operating from Inner City Johannesburg, South Africa

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses the linguistic origins, forms and sociocultural meanings of Shona slang in the casual speech of sex workers who ply their trade in brothels in Johannesburg. The slang, which manifests in the form of metaphors and obscene expressions is used to refer to sex related issues like sexual intercourse, HIV and AIDS, reproductive organs and risk taking. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with some sex workers as well as non-participant observation. The results of the study showed that the sex workers make use of a variety of conversational techniques to communicate with each other as well as with potential customers. These techniques include the flagrant use of obscene expressions as well as metaphors for purposes of coping not only with the dictates of their trade but also with the contradictions arising from conduct, which is anathematic to the Shona culture.