

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.

INTRODUCTION

Slang can be defined as informal language that is used by a particular group of people. The aim is usually to exclude other people from the communication taking place between or amongst the people involved. Groups that can typically use slang include, the youth, criminals and men or women who find themselves in situations, which they have problems dissociating from. This study was motivated by the realization that language is the window through which one can have access to a people's culture and experiences. In other words, language is a carrier of culture. Culture contains the values, experiences and sensibilities of society. The analysis of language use by sex workers gives an insight into their experiences and how they perceive their activities.

The main aim of this paper is to examine the words and expressions that are used by a large body of Zimbabwean Shona speaking sex workers who ply their trade in selected brothels in inner city Johannesburg, South Africa. A study of this nature may help understand how sex workers conceptualize their activities. Most of the slang terms and expressions that are analyzed in this paper are usually not accepted as formal language by the majority of Shona speaking people. This is primarily because slang can be so vivid, forceful and expressive that its use is considered taboo in ordinary conversation. As earlier alluded to, it also often contradicts

the formalities and politeness of everyday language. This explains why Mawadza (2000: 93) argues that slang is a linguistic style that occupies an extreme position on the spectrum of formality. She further notes that slang is a kind of informal language that is regarded as being below standard to correct usage, and is socially less acceptable. Furthermore, slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use in order to establish group identity and solidarity (Mawadza 2000: 93). It can therefore isolate and even stigmatize those who do not belong to the particular groups using it.

Slang is something that nearly everyone uses and recognizes, but nobody can define precisely. It is more metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid, and shorter-lived than ordinary language (Fromkin et al. 2014: 319). Others see slang as a deviant and rebellious language. This perspective sees slang as language, which is improper, unsystematic, unacceptable language usage and unconventional vocabulary that diverges from that of standard lexicon (Mojela 2000). These are characteristics that have traditionally been used to delimit slang. Although Mawadzwa (2000) argues that this characterization of slang is a result of prejudice and misunderstanding, the researchers observed that most of the slang terms and expressions that are used by sex workers cannot be used in public or among people who respect each other. In fact, the language is largely socially unacceptable. This is why slang is characterized as language that is below stan-

dard usage. It is therefore seen as being below good or acceptable diction. Speakers who use slang are thus looked down upon, as they are perceived to possess poor vocabulary and inability to think critically. Slang has thus been regarded as subversive, even though, in reality, it may often simply encode a shared experience and normally functions as an alternative vocabulary replacing standard terms with more forceful or interesting versions, just for the fun of it (Mawadza 2000: 94).

Very few studies have been carried out on the origins, forms and function of Shona slang (see, for example, Chimhundu 1980; Mawadza 2000; Kadenge and Mavunga 2011), despite the existence of a large body of slang terms and expressions in the language. Mawadza (2006) presents an analysis of what she terms 'Harare Shona' slang terms while Chimhundu (1980) briefly describes what he refers to as 'Town Shona'. These scholars note that slang is transient and is generally used in groups, particularly among the youth. Furthermore, slang has not received scholarly analysis as a topic of research because its use changes rapidly or because it is not standard language. Thus, De Klerk (1995) says that slang has until recently been neglected by linguists and romanticized by its supporters as creative and vivid, unrestricted by the chains of a standard, or viciously criticized and condemned by prescriptivists as dangerously vulgar, non-standard speech. Yet it is a valid part of the linguistic and pragmatic competence of the individuals using it and as such deserves attention by linguists. This study explores the motivation for the use of slang among sex workers and their potential clients or customers. The analysis also offers insights into the morphological and phonological characteristics of terms and expressions that are under investigation.

Previous research has shown that the greatest number of slang terms is used by the youth, the group in society most inclined to celebrating heightened sensations and new experiences and to renaming features of the world (also see Chimhundu 1983; Eble 1992; De Klerk 1995; Mawadza 2000). Similarly, Labov (1972) says that slang terms are the feature of youth culture through which group identity is advertised, if not also guaranteed. Most sex workers who were interviewed in this study indicated that they started this practice when they came to Johannesburg during the height of the Zimbabwe cri-

sis, especially between 2006 and 2008. Some of them indicated that they were trained primary and secondary school teachers who expected to find teaching jobs in South Africa. However, they were disillusioned and frustrated because they could not secure the jobs that were they expected, so they ended up taking drugs and getting involved in sex work in order to earn a living. The frustration and disillusionment that the sex workers are going through comes out in the language that they use.

Some studies have indicated that men use slang more than women (Mawadza 2000: 95). However, this paper is focused on the analysis of the forms of slang that are used by Zimbabwean women who are involved in sex work. The study focuses mainly on the sociolinguistic and structural features of this slang used by the women in either their female-to-female or female-to-male interactions.

The importance and intentions of the user is frequently neglected in trying to characterize slang. According to Bailey (1985), the best way to finding a solution to a more universally applicable definition of slang is to describe it in terms of a register or variety according to use, a style whose distinguishing feature is the intention of the user of slang. It is from this perspective that slang should be defined according to who uses it.

Slang is believed to fulfill various functions for its users. There are a variety of reasons for the use of slang. Some scholars believe that slang users employ a particular linguistic variety for social identification purposes when they wish to indicate to others their origins such as the town from which they come. Mojela (2000) identifies the need to be seen as multilingual, prestige, brevity, euphemism and disguise as some of the most common ones.

This research shows that breaches of verbal taboos are very common in the speech of sex workers and this 'is typical of modern society' (Mashiri 2000: 55). It seems sex workers capitalize on the anonymity and the absence of institutionalized forms of speech censorship in the contexts in which they are operating. This violates the values and sensibilities of the Shona people because among the Shona people, as is the case in many African cultures, matters relating to sex, death, illness or the other's misfortune are considered as taboo or unspeakable (Mashiri et al. 2002: 221). In this study the re-

searchers demonstrate that sex workers mainly use metaphorical language when talking about the Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and this can be explained by the fact that they perceive the acronym HIV/AIDS as too direct, highly unsettling and face threatening. The following section discusses the data collection procedures that were employed in this study.

Data Collection

The findings that are presented and discussed in this paper are based on data which the researchers collected through participant observation and unstructured interviews from May to July of 2009 in two brothels, which are located in inner city Johannesburg, South Africa. The study is aimed at documenting, describing and explaining the slang terms and expressions that are used by Shona speaking sex workers who are operating in two brothels in Johannesburg. Most of the utterances that are analyzed in this paper were largely obtained from naturally occurring casual speech and in-depth interviews with selected sex workers in the brothels.

Usually the observation sessions were approximately two hours long and were carried out three times a week. In the process, the researchers elicited the slang terms and expressions that the sex workers used in order to lure customers, to negotiate payment and to address each other. The sex workers did not suspect that the researchers were not potential clients so they continued to converse as they usually do amongst themselves and with their clients. Additional data was collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews with ten randomly selected informants.

The interviews were carried out in order to elicit the meanings of the various terms, which the sex workers were using. This is primarily because the researchers were hearing some of the terms for the first time. Since some of the slang terms were familiar because they are also used in casual speech by Shona speaking Zimbabweans, the researchers had to carry out follow-up interviews in order to verify whether the terms and expression had maintained their meanings or there was meaning change due to new circumstances. There were many cases in which some expressions sounded familiar but after conducting interviews the researchers discovered that such terms have extended meanings in the context of sex work.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of this study. The researchers discuss issues around the conceptualization of the sex work business, sex and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, nicknames and violence, among others.

Conceptualizing Sex Work as a Business

Metaphors play a crucial role on how one thinks and talks about the world. The use of metaphors is pervasive in casual Shona conversations as it is the case in other languages. According to Idler (2012), there are several reasons why people use metaphors. One of these is the need to represent the abstract in a concrete way. This observation is accounted for by the cognitive view that metaphors are conceptual and provide members of a linguistic community with structure for perceiving and understanding the world. The cognitive force of metaphor comes from providing new information about the world, rather than a (re)conceptualization of information that is already available (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kittay 1987). This means that when people use metaphors they make use of available concrete phenomena to conceptualize abstract concepts.

The findings of this investigation show that sex workers conceptualize what they do as a business that involves financial gains that come through buying and selling transactions. This explains why they use metaphors such as *kutengesha* 'literally: selling' to refer to the process of providing sex services in exchange for money. When the researchers got to the brothel the sex workers asked them, "*murikuda kutenga here?*", literally translating to, "*Do you want to buy?*". The use of these kinds of expressions shows that sex workers see themselves as people who are into a form of commercial business, which involves the buying and selling of sexual services. Some sex workers refer to their brothels as *kuofisi* or literally, 'at the office'. This is because they view brothels as the workplaces. This term is assigned into the Shona noun class 17 because it is prefixed with the Shona locative prefix {ku-}. The locative prefix designates the place or location where the sex workers operate.

Sexual Intercourse

Sex workers often use metaphors that refer to the actual process of having sexual inter-

course. Examples of these metaphors include *kukwira* 'literally: riding', *kudya* 'literally: eating', *kupa* 'literally: to give', and *kutsemura* or *kubanzura* 'literally: to break'. The word *kukwira* indicates the positions taken by people during sexual intercourse, which normally involves the man being on top of a woman. In order to show that it is the woman who is ridden by the man, the sex workers use the term in the passive voice when they say *ndakwirwa* 'literally: I have been ridden.' The use of the passive morpheme {-w-} in this word indicates that the sex workers see men as the actors in the process of having sex. This is because usually sexual intercourse involves men going on top of women.

The term *kudya* has the connotation of someone benefiting in the process of having sex. This is because after eating one gets satisfied. The sex workers perceive this as being similar to the satisfaction that one gets after having sex. The metaphor *kutsemura* or *kubanzura* shows that the process of having sex involves separating two things, which in this context involves the penetration of the penis into the vagina. One of the terms that are used is *kutunda* 'literally: urinating', which is used metaphorically to refer to ejaculation. This can be explained by the fact that semen and urine use the same path when coming out of the body. Another metaphorical expression used by sex workers to refer to sexual intercourse is *kurova zvinhu* 'literally: beating things'. In this case the vagina is viewed in plural terms and it is seen as being 'beaten' by the penis during the process of sexual intercourse. This probably has its origin in the masculine conception of sexual intercourse wherein the male participant is seen as dominating his female counterpart. It is also noteworthy that all these words are verbal constructions because they are prefixed by the Shona noun class 15 {ku-} prefix, which is indicative of action.

Sex workers make extensive use of expressions that denote the duration of a sexual encounter. These include *damba refu* 'literally: long play' and *kadambu* 'literally: short time', which refer to having sex for a long time or a short time, respectively. These terms are used to denote the free choice, which a client has on the service that they prefer since these two are charged differently. The former service is more expensive than the latter. In some cases, the sex workers used expressions borrowed from the sermon discourse such as 'all night prayer' and 'short

time prayer' to mean receiving the services of a sex worker for the whole night and for a short time, respectively. The euphemistic use of expressions borrowed from religion seemed intended to sanitize sex work in the face of the societal stigmatization, which it is a victim of. Alternatively, it could be sarcasm directed at religion for its apparent failure to provide some members of society with their daily basic needs.

Expletives

Generally, people in any culture tend to have their own preferred way of talking as well as words and expressions they believe contain their distilled knowledge about life, acquired through experience over generations. The latter group includes 'offensive or taboo words a person should try to avoid in speech' (Chabata and Mavhu 2005: 257). Generally, obscene words are considered vulgar, taboo, impolite, insulting and derogatory. As a result, they are considered unspeakable words and expressions such that it is not expected that they will be uttered by a 'normal' person among the Shona speaking people. Their use goes against the norms of acceptable behavior for they either injure the dignity or hurt the feelings of the individuals of the social group in whose presence they may be used or to whom they may refer (Chabata and Mavhu 2005: 257).

The researchers observed that most of the obscene words that are pervasive in the language of sex workers refer to the physiology and anatomy of the human reproductive and excrement organs whose exposure to the public is taboo. Landau (1984: 183) defines obscenity as 'any reference to the bodily functions that gives anyone a certain emotional reaction, that of 'fearful thrill' in seeing, doing or speaking the forbidden. Thus, it is the existence of the ban or prohibition that creates the obscenity'.

Illustrative examples of such vulgar and taboo words that are pervasive in the casual speech of Shona speaking sex workers include *kusvirwa* or *kusvira* or 'having sexual intercourse', *mboro* or 'penis', *machende* or 'testicles', *mhata* or 'anus' and *duzvi* or 'human waste'. These words were found in expressions such as '*mhata yako?*', Or 'your anus', *vamwe vane tumboro tudiki asi vamwe vane mazi-hombe* or 'some men have small penises while others have big ones', *ukabata machende anobva angorutsa nechopaz* or 'if you touch his tes-

ticles he will immediately ejaculate' and *takauya kuno nekuda kwanamudhara Duzvi* or 'we are here because of the men called Duzvi'. *Mudhara Duzvi* is used in reference to some Zimbabwean politician whose political and economic policies they believe caused the Zimbabwean economy to take a turn for the worse, forcing some women into prostitution in order to make ends meet.

Although these expressions were found to be rife in the language of sex workers, they are socially restricted because they are normally not used in public without causing embarrassment either to the speaker or the listener. In other words, among the Shona people, just as in many African cultures, the use of obscene words and expressions in ordinary conversation is normally considered unacceptable, even between married couples. These are generally treated as sensitive words, and hence they may not be used without offending those who care about their cultural norms and sensibilities. Therefore, the question that arises is: why do sex workers use obscene words and expressions in their casual speech?

The answer to this question may be in the intention by the sex workers to reduce social distance among interlocutors, especially men (who are potential clients) and women (the sex workers). This can be accounted for by the fact that the sex workers capitalize on the anonymity of the brothel environment and the absence of institutionalized forms of speech censorship. The intention could also be to prove to the potential male clients how liberal or adventurous the sex workers are. From interviews with some of the sex workers, it emerged that there is a belief amongst some of them that men, especially those who are married, are bored by the restrictions which the home environment places on them. As a result, they find their bedrooms 'boring'. When they come to brothels, they are looking for fun that comes from the removal of all inhibitions including conversational ones. Brazen obscenity, they said, is one way through which they can find the fulfillment, which may be missing in their marriages. The challenge is on whether to continue to consider this kind of language that is restricted to sex work as obscene since it is used freely in this community. The use of such terms can be considered as a special kind of occupational discourse for the sex workers. Also, this kind of language is part

of their identity since when one hears them speak it is likely that they will identify them with the nature of their business.

Erection and Orgasm

The researchers' findings also show that there are a number of metaphorical terms and expressions that are used by sex workers when talking about the structure of erect male organs or male genitals and when men reach orgasm. Erection is metaphorically referred to as *kumira* 'literally: standing' and *kuita danda* 'literally: to become a log'. One of the sex workers said, *kana yemumwe ikamira inoita danda chairo* (literally: sometimes when one's penis erects it actually becomes thick and long). These words are used using the Shona class 15 infinitive morpheme {ku-} in order to capture the activity that characterizes the structure of erect male organs. The use of the Shona metaphor *kumira* captures the posture that is assumed by a penis when it erects. Also, the use of the metaphor *kuita danda* is indicative of the hardness and stability that characterize a hard piece of wood or log. The image of hardness and stability is transferred to a hard and erect penis. The expression *ane mboro yedonkey* (literally: he has a donkey's penis) was used to capture the size of a client's penis, which in this case is likened to that of a donkey. This imagery is used in order to show that some men have very large and long penises.

Sex workers have terms that they use when talking about the process of reaching orgasm. For example, one of the sex workers referred to orgasm as *kusvika* or 'literally: to arrive'. This captures the image of someone arriving after travelling some journey. This imagery parallels sexual intercourse with travelling with reaching orgasm being the equivalent of the climax of that journey, arriving at one's destination. Also used to refer to orgasm for both male and female participants in sexual activities is *kuuya* or 'literally: to come', which is a literal translation of the English expression 'to come', which refers to the state of reaching an orgasm.

HIV/AIDS and Its Symptoms

There are several terms and expressions that sex workers use in order to refer to HIV/AIDS and the impact of its symptoms. These may in-

clude expressions such as *chirwere* or 'literally: sickness', *chakauya* or 'a mysterious disease' and *matsotsi* or 'literally: thieves'. According to Mashiri, Mawomo and Tom (2002: 226), this kind of naming of the HIV/AIDS disease 'is a response to the fact that the disease is thought to be intractable and capricious, that is, a disease not understood. Such a disease is, by definition, mysterious'. These terms capture the devastation that HIV/AIDS causes on the sufferers and those who look after them. The use of these terms sounds like a warning to the people to be watchful of the presence of the indiscriminate scourge. The use of the term *matsotsi* emphasizes the fact that the HIV virus is like a thief, which attacks people silently and also reveals the threat that the virus imposes on everyone's life.

The researchers observed that there are terms that are used to refer to the physical symptoms that usually afflict HIV/AIDS patients. Examples of such metaphorical expressions include *magoodbyes* or 'literally: goodbye or bidding farewell', *ari parwendo* or 'literally: one is on a journey', *kuruma polony* or 'literally: biting polony', *vemiromo mitsvuku* or 'literally: those with red lips' and *go slow, kudya pakawora* or 'literally: to eat something that is decayed', *kuita manyoka ehospipe* or 'literally: to have continuous diarrhea like water coming out of hosepipe', and *kujuruja* or 'to harvest termites'.

Risk Taking

The data gathered for this study shows that sex workers see themselves as risk takers. They use expressions such as *tiri masoja* or *masomeki isu* or 'literally: we are soldiers', *tiri mawoveteranzi* or 'literally: we are war veterans' and *takazvipira* or 'literally: we are devoted'. The use of such terms as 'soldiers' and 'war veterans' shows that they see themselves as people who are fighting a dangerous war, which can cause death. One can only manage to continue in such activities if and only if they are devoted like soldiers who are fighting a war. The use of such expressions also shows the cynical attitude of the sex workers to their trade and the extent to which they are resigned to their fate as a result of the barriers to options in life thrown their way by the economic challenges in Zimbabwe.

It is largely true that what they do is like fighting a war since they sometimes face police

arrests since it is illegal to be a sex worker and they run the risk of getting raped by some of their male clients. In addition, they are risk takers because they run the risk of contracting the deadly HIV/AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. One of the interesting expressions from the sex workers was *tiri mawoveterenzi isu, we are going to liberate Zimbabwe in 2010* or 'literally: we are war veterans because we are going to liberate Zimbabwe in 2010'. The sex workers were expecting to make brisk business during the 2010 World Cup, the windfall from which they would use to bring the economy of Zimbabwe back to its knees through the remittances to their families back home. The sex workers see themselves as people fighting the Zimbabwean war from outside the country, in exile, to help improve the country's economy.

Protection

This study also established that sex workers are aware of the protective gadgets that they can use in order to protect themselves against contracting sexually transmitted diseases. All the words that were collected were used to refer to the male condom. No words were found that referred to the use of the female condom. Most of the words are borrowed from English such as *maplastics* 'literally: plastics', *maCDs* 'literally: CDs or Compact Disks', *masida* 'literally: CDs', *marubber* 'literally: rubber plastics', *majombo* 'literally: gum boots', *magamenzi* 'literally: garments', *magloves* 'literally: gloves', and *madzokono* 'literally: socks'. The use of these terms to refer to condoms reveals the sex workers' awareness of their protective function.

There is also the use of humor in drawing parallels between condoms and socks or gloves. By referring to condoms as '*magamenzi*' or 'literally: garments' the sex workers poke fun at members of the Apostolic Faith sects who are always wearing white clothes, which cover the whole body and are called '*magamenzi*', which is a Shona borrowing from the English word 'garments.' Just like members of the Apostolic Faith sects are always wearing their white clothes, by calling condoms '*magamenzi*' the sex workers could also be making reference to their insistence on their male clients wearing condoms each time they have sexual intercourse, which also indicates their awareness of the need to have protected sex in light of the HIV/AIDS menace.

Nicknames

Sex workers have nicknames for some of their workmates. These nicknames usually capture the behavior and physical characteristics of their referents. Examples of nicknames that refer to physical characteristics are *maglobe* 'literally: globes' to refer to a young girl with large and circular eyes, *mai mazemo* 'literally: Mrs. Sexual Desire' to refer to a lady who is said to like sexual intercourse a lot, *mai Munyoro* 'literally: Mrs. Wet' is used to refer to a sex worker who has unprotected sex while *Baba Munyoro* 'literally: Mr. Wet' is used to refer to a male client who prefers unprotected sex. The nickname '*Munyoro*' is derived from the Shona expression '*kuisa nyoro*' or 'literally: doing a wet one', which is used metaphorically to refer to the process of having unprotected sex. Clearly, the behavior of sex workers and male clients who are referred to as Mrs. *Munyoro* and Mr. *Munyoro* respectively, is looked at contemptuously because of the foolishness associated with having unprotected sex. One of the sex workers has the nickname *Slander* because she has a slim or slender body structure. One of them is known as *J-Lo*, which is the truncated form for Jennifer Lopez, the popular American hip hop musician who is well known for her sexually attractive hips. The girl has a huge and rounded figure and can dance very well. The nickname *Masex* 'literally: sexy' was used to refer to a sex worker who has very huge breasts. In the same vein, one of the sex workers with huge breasts was nicknamed *Mai Mazamu* 'literally: the mother of breasts'. Among the sex workers was a young girl who was said to be only fourteen years of age and her nickname is *Kavirgin* 'literally: virgin'. The use of the augmentative Shona class 12 prefix {ka-} captures the fact that the girl is small and slim. She is referred to as *Kavirgin* because among the Shona people, young girls around the age of 14 are expected to be virgins. The nickname *Niga* 'literally: nigger' is used to refer to a sex worker who dresses like a man.

Some of the sex workers have nicknames, which refer to their length of stay in Johannesburg. For example, the nickname *Mumberengwa* 'literally: coming from Mberengwa' was used to refer to one of the sex workers who had just come from Zimbabwe. Mberengwa is one of the poorly developed rural areas of Zimbabwe and people who come from this area, like any other

rural area, are said to be backward. This word is then prefixed with the Shona class 18 locative prefix {mu} to create the nickname *Mumberengwa*, which is used to capture the fact that the sex worker is still backward and naive, that is, she is not yet familiar with the sophisticated, new environment, which is Johannesburg.

Violence and Deceit

There are expressions that are used by sex workers in order to capture violent situations, which they encounter or those in which they deceive some of their clients as they ply their trade. They use expressions such as *kutsika konzi* 'literally: to step on one's cone' to refer to a situation in which they will have deceived a client, for example, through lying to the client or even stealing from them. They also refer to a similar situation as *kusurirana* 'literally: to puff at each other.' An example is when one sex worker said, *Ndakamusurira zvinonhuwa* 'literally: I puffed at him a lot of smell' to capture the pain that the victim of the sex worker's vitriol went through. The expression *ndakamumamisa* 'literally: I caused him to defecate' was used to refer to a situation when the sex worker had beaten either a client or a fellow sex worker. The Shona word '*kumama*' refers to the process of defecating and *kumamisa* is in the causative with the Shona causative suffix {-is-}. Both terms are considered obscene and are therefore not said in public in the Shona culture. The use of these terms by the sex workers in the brothels reveals the extent to which they considered the environment in which they operate as being free of all cultural inhibitions.

Interestingly, the sex workers see themselves as wild animals. This is shown in the use of expressions such as *tiri mabonga kaisu* 'literally: we are wild cats' or *tiri mboko kaisu* 'we are wild goats'. They are aware of the fact that their activities are looked down upon or not accepted in society. This also shows that they are different from other women because they cannot be tamed. In contrast, the sex workers' male clients are referred to as *mhene*: 'literally: duikers,' a metaphor used to refer to a rich man. Some of the expressions that they use in order to show that their behavior is wild is, *Ini ndakatsva mafuse kaini* 'literally: my fuses are burnt'. Usually when a fuse is blown up it shows that there is a short circuit. So, when sex workers refer to themselves as peo-

ple with blown up fuses it means that they are acknowledging that what they do is not socially acceptable and is a result of confusion.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that Zimbabwean sex workers plying their trade in the brothels located in inner city Johannesburg use a variety of linguistic devices to refer to specific aspects of their trade. Among these aspects are the act of sexual intercourse, sexuality, male and female reproductive organs, the prostitutes' clients, intra and inter-group relationships and some tenets of economic problems afflicting Zimbabwe, which in the first place drove most of them into prostitution. The stylistic devices used include slang in the form of obscenities, euphemism, nicknames, borrowing, general and war metaphors as well as humor. Amongst other reasons, these devices are used for purposes of disguising what the prostitutes might be talking about from their Shona-speaking clients, to build solidarity amongst themselves, to pour scorn on, or commend fellow prostitutes and to attract clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study established that despite putting up brave faces, most of the women from Zimbabwe working as prostitutes in the Johannesburg inner city brothels do not enjoy what they are doing. They have been forced into prostitution mainly by the economic meltdown back home, which has been prevailing for more than a decade now. In order to cope with the psychological trauma of some of the experiences which they go through, some of them use language, which they think projects them as macho. Two questions therefore arise. The first has to do with how these women can be assisted in terms of coping with the daily trials and tribulations of working as prostitutes in a foreign country, sometimes without proper immigration documentation. The second relates to how they are going to be reintegrated into society given that they have adopted a culture, which is anathematic to the Shona culture, especially in terms of language use. There are no straightforward answers to these questions as what drives different people into prostitution, how they practice it and

how they cope with its daily challenges is also complex, the commonalities notwithstanding. What is not in doubt, however, is the need to legalize the trade to allow for its practice in ways, which lessen the psychological trauma on those practicing it. Secondly, there is also a need for intervention perhaps by organizations such as SWEAT, and even the Zimbabwean and South African governments in terms of coming up with programs that ensure that the women do not see prostitution as an end in itself. Rather, opportunities could be created for them to venture into other forms of business. Perhaps that might also cause a change of linguistic behavior on their part to discourses, which do not perpetuate their dependence on prostitution and thus their vulnerability to the vicissitudes of the trade, especially in a foreign country. Legalization of sex work might also go a long way in removing the stigma attached to the trade and the discourse thereof. If society's perceptions of sex workers become positive, perhaps the sex workers themselves might begin to look at their work positively and thus stop looking at themselves as cultural outcasts. This might possibly go a long way towards enabling them to conform to cultural, in this case, linguistic expectations. There also are issues of human trafficking and illegal migration involved in the work of Zimbabwean sex workers operating in the brothels of inner city Johannesburg, some of who are minors. Some of the practices associated with this scourge are covered by the language used thereof. The ability by authorities to decode this language might be a step, albeit small, towards dealing with the problem. Lastly, more research on more aspects of language use by sex workers could reveal more insights into their experiences and how they perceive themselves and their business.

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