This paper gives an overview of findings from my dissertation study on youth involvement in English language shift in the Mankweng area of Limpopo Province, and the effects of this involvement on their processes of identification. The participants included 48 Mankweng-area high school graduates aged 18-25, who filled out two questionnaires and joined in focus group and individual interviews. In this paper I focus on the role of language use in the ability to self-locate across spaces and social relational networks of one's choosing.

First, I summarize the findings of the dissertation as a whole in order to place the focus of this paper in context.

The first finding was that almost all of the participants valued the ability to simultaneously (a) maintain connection to family and community (also called "roots") while also (b) achieving a middle class lifestyle, a necessity of which was learning to use English well. Doing (a) and (b) successfully was repeatedly called "balancing" in the data.

Secondly, participants generally wanted to present themselves as "balancing", and thus relied on what I have called a justificatory metadiscourse of necessity to explain their choices about using linguistic codes. Following Austin's (1958) discussion of excuses, the data suggest that these justifications were meant to put into play the issue of responsibility and agency for linguistic code choices and their potential entailments for identification.

Thirdly, the data suggest that "balancing" seemed to hinge on two major factors, namely 1) the felt/perceived strength of *familial and communal relations* AND/OR *ethnic affiliation*, collectively referred to as "roots" and 2) the ability to self-locate across spaces and social relational networks of one's choosing. Concerning (1), discourse about "roots" did not always imply discourse about ethnicity. What the discourse suggested was that ethnic affiliation arose in familial and communal relations. Further, some ethnicities were perceived as "stronger" than others. Concerning (2), the focus of my paper today, mobility seemed to have two forms: the virtual mobility afforded by English language expertise, and the physical mobility to move across spaces and social relational networks. For example, youth in the village farthest away from Mankweng were both the most pessimistic about the probability of having (2) and achieving (b) and the least concerned about the effects of mobility on balancing, while participants from the two villages adjacent to the university showed the opposite trends. There was also the digital mobility afforded by cell phone usage, though these findings are still preliminary, despite their potential importance. It seemed, then, the more threatened the participants felt/perceived their "roots" to be, the more protective they became of them, and in particular, participants could perceive mobility as

threats to their rootedness. Those living close to Mankweng in Nobody Ga-Mothiba and Mamotintane considered their immobility and limitation to living with their families helpful in maintaining a desirable social persona of being "balanced" – which was not the case for the Sebayeng participants. What struck me as interesting was that this concern appeared to be shared by most of the participants attending the university. In a twist, then, it also appeared that those participants living at home in these close-to-urbanization villages of Nobody Ga-Mothiba and Sebayeng felt they had an advantage over those living on the campus, i.e. those without the benefits of the "rootedness" of home.

Given the historical and sociocultural contexts of language use and education in the area, specifically, the very recent history of European hegemonic social institutions and policies, the fluidity of social configurations and the agency of youth to control them is a clear sign of rapid social change. This is especially so given the highly planned nature of Mankweng's co-genesis with the university in 1959, which was meant to control this fluidity, not create the very conditions for it. But in fact that is the current situation today, a situation the founder of apartheid education, Werner Eiselen, and the formulator of higher education policy, MDC de Wet Nel, simply did not envision. This fluidity has its structural potentiators: the repeal of pass laws in 1986, the Constitution of 1996, the freedom to demand more English education under the 1997 LiEP and the government's slow but real accommodation of those demands. But a closer look at the dynamics behind linguistic code choice illuminates the ideological factors at work, and the role of language ideologies in particular. For example, when youth return home from their boarding schools or the UL speaking English, or when migrant workers return home or pass through having adopted urban styles, these one must ask how and why certain ideological dynamics are put into play.

Returning to the theme of this paper, the separation of function issue – using code A or B here with these people for these purposes in these modes -- was, I saw, key, as it related strongly to the ability to self-locate oneself in physical space and in social relational networks. In other words, historically, few people in the area had access to adequate English language education, or even the opportunity to consume and participate in mass media forms requiring knowledge of English. The lack of mobility of local inhabitants – e.g. as migrant laborers, or boarding school/town school learners -- limited the degree to which English could widely infiltrate and establish itself as part of everyday linguistic practice. It was and to a large extent is still perceived as a "white" language, but importantly, also ideologically bundled with labor roles and their sociocultural and legal regimentation along white/black lines. You spoke Afrikaans and English with these white people here for these purposes. Those who defied these

conventions often suffered social, political and physical consequences. The ability to move, work and build relationships was already severely regimented by pass laws, land acts, etc. But it was ideologically regimented as well.

Enactment of colonial and apartheid social policies in Limpopo uprooted families, re-zoned villages, forcibly removed people from their ancestral lands or out of South African cities into barren "homelands", systematically under- and mis-educated black African children, and led to violent conflicts.
Looking at how high school educated youth are involved in English shift in a former "Bantu Town" such as Mankweng and environs sheds some light on these legacies while responding to other recent foci of research interest, such as the renewed study of ethnicity in South Africa, youth identification post-apartheid, and digital literacies among youth in postcolonial societies.

In the discourse data, the participants appear to be all too aware of the social stakes of using the wrong linguistic code in the wrong situations. The data suggest that they understand the important tension of balancing that inheres in the indexical potential of *speaking* with a particular linguistic code to strongly identify oneself. Code choice events—including instances of codeswitching and reports thereof -- can serve as *sites of* (or in my terms points of engagement with) ideological production, maintaining the potential to index someone as possessing whatever qualities of English are ideologically attributable to people.

To theorize how the participants appear to manage the complications of "balancing", I specifically focus on code choice as a non-referential index of sticking to roots (viz. by choosing to use one's "home language") or "going for English" (by choosing to use English). I use the term "balancing", taken from the discourse of several participants to describe the sort of pragmatic juggling act of code choices and the potential indexicalities thereof that participants must manage. The *indexical potentials* both generated in interactions and typical of particular *ecologies* can have important consequences for identification, semiotically endowing an individual with a particular *persona*. That is, an individuals' code choices function as non-referential indexes of stances, attitudes and ideologies that in turn index something about them.

Attention to balancing thus means attention to the cultivation and evaluation of personae, and to the semiotic mechanisms of identification. I combine the terms *genre* and *lifestyle* to provide a theoretical handle on how using certain codes indexes a person as living their lives according to coherent *genres,* which in Hanks' terms constitute "modes of practice" (1996, p. 246). *Lifestyle genres* can be considered categories of indexical potential, with code choice being a principal type of activation of this potential (Eckert, 2008). The two major lifestyle genres

that emerge from the data are, somewhat unsurprisingly, "English" and "Roots", fitting the directive of "stick to roots but go for English". The following from Monica Heller (cf. Auer, 1995) illustrates this connection between code choice and what I call lifestyle genre well:

> The juxtaposition of codes entails the juxtaposition of two semiotic systems; these can also be seen as (at least) two different ways of organizing worldview, symbolic and material resources, and cultural, economic, and political practices (Heller, 1995, p. 374).

Both survey and talk data thus far show that participants make sense of their own language practices and the link thereof to identification by way of this dichotomous set of lifestyle genres: "Roots" (e.g. African, local/rural, black, traditional, spoken word) and "English" (e.g. non-African, translocal, white, modern, "written" word). "Balancing" means managing the often competing indexical potentials inherent in these lifestyle genres, a process which entails real social consequences for identification.

That is not to say that this dichotomizing corresponds to reality: a great deal of ideological work is going on in such a formulation. Thus the coherent division between English and Roots as lifestyle genres and the ostensibly neat correspondence thereof between English and home language cannot be taken at face value.[1] Nonetheless, in this data set, the participants consistently *do* make such correspondences, ideologically (re)producing the indexical link between code choice and lifestyle genres. At the same time, however, the data suggest that the participants are not captive to such a formulation. I propose across both this and the next analysis chapter that the participants may be using these genres as reference points while forging a new category of indexical potential through new patterns of code choice. As Susan Gal has observed,

> Language shift only occurs when new generations of speakers use new connotations of the linguistic variants available to them in order to convey their changing identities and intentions in everyday linguistic interaction" (Gal, 1979, p. 21).

This innovation, which goes against the assumed and "presupposed", can be a "major vectorial force in formal linguistic change" (Silverstein, 1996, p.267; cf.

---

[1] As Woolard suggests, "each and every particular (linguistic code choice) is not necessarily best understood by direct reference to different social worlds associated with the two languages" (2004, p. 79).

Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 47). That is, the data suggest that not only are participants using English more, but in new contexts and in new ways: changes which represent an expansion of linguistic repertoire, and which invariably affect English's functional differentiation from African languages in use. Even as the participants challenge this ideological link through their adaptive choices, the non-referential indexical potentials created by using English must be managed.

In sum, the household and the village are still places where use of English is relatively foreign. The adjacent university community provides a stark contrast: English there is expected, congruent with an ideology of modernity reinforced by the built environment of the modernized campus. The university requires English for institutional functions while virtually none of its students or staff speaks English as a first language. Investigating non-campus participants' discourse for assumptions about UL students' language practices, and the UL students' assumptions vice versa, provides insights into how code choice events can serve as sites of ideological production.

Inasmuch as different languages are more likely to be spoken in different places with different people, achieving an even distribution of such opportunities is considered important to "balancing". Yet just as with "Roots", the geographical mapping of linguistic functional differentiation has an important basis in European hegemonic history. Colonial laws severely limited land tenure, employment opportunities and mobility of black South African citizens, and the apartheid government only intensified this oppression, forcibly removing many from urban areas to rural "homelands" (Delius & Schirmer, 2001). Under apartheid, forced removal and relocation of black South African citizens into non-sovereign "homelands" made a largely fabricated, primordialist ethnicity an official badge of individual and group identification. Space, language, history and group identification all shared the same ethnic label. Further, labor relations were strictly regimented toward white "trusteeship", such that a black person's relationship with a white person was legislatively and indeed operationally segregated. This segregation was reinforced through language ideological practice: Afrikaans was taught and learned in schools, but only in later grades, and only enough to satisfactorily communicate with one's white boss. The apartheid system of separate development deemed English either useless or dangerous, though this sentiment was hardly new among white European hegemony, as explained in chapter 4. An overall effect of these social policies has been that English has not been widely spoken in the region, and until fairly recently, that has not started changing. Thus a fairly consistent geographical mapping of linguistic functional differentiation has obtained: one speaks a certain language with these people over here for certain purposes, and another language over there with those people for other purposes. One participant makes

the example of speaking "Pedi" at home but English in town at his trade school. This pragmatic compartmentalization gives him confidence to indeed "balance" genres of lifestyle, as long as he lives in his village and works in town:

01 --   15: Because when I when I enter my gate at home I speak Sepedi,
02 --   when I go to school I speak...so you can see that **I can keep them**
03 --   **balanced...**so that's how it goes in in language... **but if I can go to**
04 --   **stay** in town and not come back home. No I'm going to inherit the
05 --   culture **of English. But if I stay here at home**… like now if you can
06 --   go around and pick a girl who's was born here…
07 --   14: (slight laugh)
08 --   15: …didn't go anywhere to anyplace … the girl is Mopedi his …
09 --   her culture she's a Pedi, sh-she's not glued to any other culture than
10 --   Mopedi. **But if she could at least try to maintain both, she could**
11 --   **go to a college or something or or w - or u- university where**
12 --   **English is spoken on a daily basis I'm telling you ... and come**
13 --   **back home ... I'm telling you...she can also balance those things**
14 --   but but if only she can **stay at home**… you can you can watch these
15 --   students in university they they speak English.

But area and campus youth share some disagreements on how to achieve this "balance", given the diversity on the modernized campus of the university, a situation that challenges the "rural-urban" divide, and indeed those geographical boundaries of the former apartheid homelands and colonial locations. If globalization and urbanization can be broadly understood as accelerated economic and social diversification and expansion in alignment with translocal trends, the Mankweng area is a key regional site of such processes. The gradually increasing mobility and educational attainment of youth coupled with persistent rural economic stagnation have destabilized the above mappings, such that the influence of living in one community or another on structuring indexical potentials must be rethought. That is, the data suggest that the balancing scenario discussed by 15 (>>ppt) cannot apply to campus participants, and as more English is spoken by youth, less in other rural areas as well. This section subsequently explores the participants' code choice events in this time of change.

Participant 15 is confident in his ability to "balance both", not questioning the causal relation between speaking a language and acquiring a culture implicit in my question. But there is a clear mapping of functional differentiation apparent in his code decision matrix: he speaks this language here with these people, he speaks this other language over here with these other people. In town, he "has" to speak English (line 20), there is no choice, and there's "no way" he's going to "treat my mother with my stupid English" (lines 21-22).

In South Africa, and particularly Limpopo Province, these metapragmatic discussions have a particular importance. As aforementioned but cannot be stressed enough, lack of rural infrastructural development and planned resettlement was colonial and state policy in the Limpopo region for decades, and this policy separated white and black Africans from each other, as well as blacks deemed to be of a certain ethnicity. Mankweng was a rural township set up by the apartheid government for blacks living in Polokwane, Tzaneen and other regional towns (McCusker & Ramudzuli, 2007).

This leaves the family as the focal point for the cultivation and preservation of "roots". A key question to consider here, connecting both the themes of holding onto "roots" and placing oneself in situations to speak English, is whether participant 15 would be able to "balance both English and Pedi at the same time" (line 15) outside of the indexical ecology of "home": i.e., if he was not living with his family in the village, with his friends, regularly experiencing local sights, sounds, smells, landscape, and so forth. Further, the household is the anchoring, centering institution (Blommaert, 2007) which strongly orients one to interact with others at "home" in particular ways. Would participant 15 be so confident about his ability to "balance" if he did not live at home with his mother in Nobody, and/or if his mother had "weak" Pedi roots like participants 32 and 33?

In sum, location matters, as it is an important semiotic resource and *actant* for people to forge identifications and self–understandings. As Basso (1996) has pointed out, landscape and ecology play key roles in processes of identification. Ideologically and semiotically, if a place and its physical features comes to index a certain type of person who speaks a certain type of language, then this can come to have, in Hacking's terms, "looping" effects, whereby cultural processes are semiotically naturalized (Hacking, 1995; 1999, p. 106ff.). Physical features and configurations are imbued with indexical potential either by design or other ascription, influencing the kinds of *abductions* (Gell, 1997) which people make in a way that is ideologically regimented (Silverstein, 1996; Keane, 2003, p. 419).