

# Language attitude research among mobile speakers from anglophone Africa

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Mobile speakers of English – particularly those from anglophone Africa – have been covered in relatively few studies in language attitude research (e.g. Githiora 2008; Mutonya 2009). Given that mobility is an essential part of present-day realities and the “sociolinguistics of globalization is perforce a sociolinguistics of mobility” (Blommaert 2010: 28), it would be desirable to increase research interest in such contexts. It is, however, necessary to adapt research designs and methods to the specific demands of migration contexts. It has for instance been pointed out that attitude research among African migrants should turn away from a focus on the former colonizers’ languages and varieties (Githiora 2008: 19) and that evaluative adjectives should be adapted to the specific context (Mutonya 2009).

This paper uses experiences from a language attitude study among educated Kenyans and Nigerians in Germany and the UK to address the following questions:

1. Which challenges does a focus on mobile speakers from anglophone Africa pose in language attitude research?
2. Which methods and approaches might be helpful in handling these challenges?

In the present study, an indirect and a direct approach were employed to elicit language attitudes: A verbal guise study with authentic vocal stimuli representing varieties of English from seven countries was combined with semi-structured interviews. Evaluative adjectives for the verbal guise study were elicited in a pilot study.

A mixed-methods approach is generally considered useful in order to obtain comprehensive results (e.g. McKenzie 2010: 52), but it turned out to be of unexpected value for this project because more emphasis could be put on the interviews when it became clear that the research participants were more comfortable with personal interviews than survey-based research. A research design that offers such flexibility is particularly important in migration research (Bose 2012: 288). In-depth interviews also offer researchers an opportunity to establish the necessary trust with the research participants. This is essential in dealing with migrants who might be afraid of giving away sensitive information or of being misrepresented in scientific publications. Furthermore, mobile speakers are not necessarily organized in fixed groups, which makes it difficult to recruit participants for quantitative research. Qualitative research approaches can serve as a door opener to gain access to further participants. In order to successfully analyse language attitudes in mobility contexts, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and a flexible research design therefore seem to be called for.

## References

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