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Young white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa: A case of liminal identity?

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Abstract: Studies on post-apartheid South Africa have revealed the persistence of important social challenges in this country. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, the ethnic diversity and the co-existence of the eleven official languages seem to play an important role in the identity formation of South Africans and the development of intergroup relations. Against the background of key socio-historical events, this article investigates the situation of young white Afrikaans South Africans. It is hypothesized that individuals belonging to this particular ethno-linguistic group represent a case of *liminality* or liminal identity. Data from two recent research projects on social categorization and language preferences (2012–2014) together with the results of an ongoing study on the role of social distance in the South African context (2014–present) are used to illustrate the current social situation of the young white Afrikaans group and analyse implications for its identity.

Keywords: liminal identity, white Afrikaans speakers, youth, social distance, South Africa

1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, the multifaceted nature of identity has been studied from various standpoints. From the sociolinguistic point of view, the role of language in the process of identity formation, both in terms of self-identity and social identity, has been widely recognized (Rampton 1995; Lanehart 1996; Bucholtz 1999; Reyes 2002; Álvarez-Mosquera 2012). Language has the capacity to act as an identity marker in the social arena. In fact, not only do speakers use language to accentuate their membership within a particular social group, but through language, speakers might unwittingly reveal aspects of their social background, such as geographical origins, social class, and educational level.

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From a socio-cognitive perspective, then, language acts as another feature that bears upon the social categorization process. That is, speakers' linguistic behaviour might help the perceiver to categorize them into a social group (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Ko et al. 2006; Croft 2009; Cutler 2010). Conversely, when perceiving a feature (in this case a linguistic feature), we consciously or unconsciously evoke certain characteristics that are attributed to speakers of a specific social category (Hastie et al. 1990: 246; Pettigrew 1998: 80; Moskowitz 2005: 119). Underlying is the fact that our brains are designed to provide maximum information with the least cognitive effort, storing information related to different categories according to our own experiences (Rosch 1978: 28; Turner et al. 1994: 455; Moskowitz 2005: 121). Therefore, language can play an essential role in forming/marking identities as well as in perceiving/categorizing them.

Starting from this intricate relationship between language and identity and its relevance to the social categorization process, this study aims to provide a better understanding of the social dynamics in South Africa, focusing on a particular ethno-linguistic group: young white Afrikaans speakers. This study does not claim to be representative of all members of this linguistic group, as the complexity of the sociolinguistic situation in South Africa makes it simply impossible. However, the data obtained against the background of this theoretical framework will shed light on the intricate social situation of many young white Afrikaans speakers, in an original attempt to determine if they represent a case of liminal identity, that is, if these speakers find themselves in a temporary state of flux as they are trying to disassociate from unwanted traits associated with the social group they belong to (see Section 3).

In order to fully appreciate the significance of this paper's approach and results, it is necessary to provide a brief socio-historical overview, paying particular attention to the ethno-linguistic situation in South Africa and especially to those historical events that led to the negative perception of white Afrikaans speakers. South Africa, as a multi-ethnic country, comprises a wide variety of cultures, languages, and religions. Its pluralistic nature is reflected in the constitutional recognition of eleven official languages. This multilingual reality is the result of a series of historical events which are still central to understanding today's society. First, although there is a tendency to address South African history in colonization terms, it is important to note that Bantu-speaking communities from central Africa started to settle in this region, displacing (to the South) and absorbing native Khoisan speakers (Khoikoi groups and San groups) hundreds of years before the arrival of

the first Europeans (Mesthrie 1995: 3; Peirce and Ridge 1997: 178; Vossen 2013: 434–447). Despite the limited impact of Khoisan languages on today's South Africa (which is dominated by European and Bantu languages), the Khoisan legacy is remarkable, especially for the coloured group in their attempt to redefine their identity in post-Apartheid South Africa (Adhikari 2009). Second, the first Dutch settlements in the Cape Town area in 1652 were followed by the arrival of the British in 1795 (Kamwangamalu 2003: 228–231). Afrikaans (predominantly derived from Dutch but also influenced by languages from the Malay slaves and local Khoisan languages) and English became the languages of power while their speakers were competing for land and resources (e.g., gold and diamond mines), resulting in the Anglo-Boer wars and conflicts with Xhosa, Zulu, and Sotho groups. Finally, Indians (and their languages) had been brought as indentured slaves into the country since the 1860s to work in the sugar, tea, and coffee plantations in Natal, increasing the racial and linguistic scope of the country.

From a political point of view, the growing racial segregation under the Dutch and British rule led to the establishment of the apartheid in 1948, where a white minority (around 20%) institutionally controlled a larger majority (80%). Of special interest for this study is the enforcement of the Bantu Education Act (1953) to further separate and prevent African language speaking students from developing ambitions outside their communities. The relentless pressure of the government to enforce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for specific subjects after the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 eventually led to the violent Soweto uprisings (1976). As Kamwangamalu (2003: 230) points out, this historical event reinforced the view of Afrikaans as the language of oppression, and it boosted the status of English, which was widely accepted as a lingua franca, as the language of advancement (see also Greenfield 2010: 519). After the arrival of democracy in 1994, South Africa started a complex process of social transformation. The following statistics show the demographic distribution in the two historical periods and illustrate the magnitude of this social change.¹

¹ This significant population growth was accompanied by an important social transformation that was meant to consolidate the transition towards a democratic system. In addition to many other changes at the local and national level, this process entailed a mass migration of black citizens to urban areas previously designated as *white*, a slow desegregation of public and residential areas (Finchilescu and Tredoux 2010), and the implementation of policies of affirmative action and social redress designed to foster social and economic equality from 1994 (Adams et al. 2012: 378–379).

Apartheid (1948–1994):

Population (Census 1960): 16 million (Statistics South Africa 2012a)

- Black: 68.3%
- White: 19.3%
- Coloured 9.4%
- Indian/Asian: 3%

Democracy (1994–present):

Population (Census 2011): 51.7 million (Statistics South Africa 2012b)

- Black: 79.2%
- Coloured: 8.9%
- White: 8.9%
- Indian/Asian population 2.5%
- Other 0.5%

Democracy in South Africa led to the official recognition of eleven languages including English and Afrikaans and nine indigenous African languages: Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Xhosa, Zulu, and Venda. Although the Department of Education recognizes the benefits of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and promotes additive multilingualism and programs for the redressing of previously disadvantaged languages (South African Legal Information Institute, n.d.; Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, n.d.), research shows that English is becoming the predominant language in many social spheres (De Klerk 2000; Kamwangamalu 2003; Prinsloo 2007; Postma and Postma 2011; Álvarez-Mosquera 2015). This prevalent position of the English language is detrimental to the other official languages, including Afrikaans.² Therefore, it is important to underline some of the major factors that contribute to the current situation, with a focus on those that specifically affect the Afrikaans language.

In general terms, the new multilingual language policy seems to reinforce the role of English as a lingua franca within the country at the expense of other languages. English came to dominate in parliament, higher education, local government, and institutions such as the police, defense force, and the courts (Mesthrie 2006: 153). For example, despite being the native language of only 9.6% of the population in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2012), in total, 95% of speeches in the Parliament are in English (Kamwangamalu 2003: 232), and according to the Pan South African Language Board (PanSalb), 80% of tuition at

² It is important to note that there are currently more coloured than white speakers of Afrikaans in South Africa. Roughly 75.8% of coloured South Africans (3.4 million people) speak Afrikaans versus 60.8% of white South Africans (2.7 million) (Statistics South Africa 2012b).

schools and universities is also conducted in this language. Its higher status is supported by the fact that English has become the language for business and information on a global scale (Cornelissen and Horstmeier 2002: 74; Casale and Posel 2011). Its economic value is relevant at a national level as well. Casale and Posel (2011) demonstrated the strong correlation between English proficiency and higher earnings in South Africa.³ Greenfield (2010) also found that students display a sense of national pride in their use of English, believing that English stands “as a marker of equal opportunity and the advancement of a country” (2010: 525).

Additionally, the unfavourable situation for the remaining official languages is also due to the legacy of apartheid-based Bantu education. As I previously mentioned, the Bantu Education Act prompted English to be the language of the liberation. Consequently, any attempt to promote other official indigenous languages in education raised much suspicion, and was seen as “a painful reminder of apartheid education, whose key goal was to deny the black child access to English” (Kamwangamalu 2003: 230). Moreover, any attempt to promote other official languages would also raise suspicion among historically rivalling black ethnic groups in South Africa, notably the Xhosa, Zulu, and Sotho ethnicities. Clearly, this situation also strengthens the general perception of indigenous languages as entities of lower status. In the case of Afrikaans, although educational programs and schools with Afrikaans as the language of instruction have continued after apartheid, subjects in this language and Afrikaans courses have been progressively losing students (Prinsloo 2007: 35; Thutloa and Huddlestone, 2011: 58, 62; Bornman et al. 2014: 176–178). Recent successful media-propelled campaigns such as #AfrikaansMustFall in 2015 and 2016 have also contributed to the removal of Afrikaans as a language of instruction across different South African universities. More importantly, Afrikaans has lost its status as a language of power, and it is also generally negatively perceived at a social level (Beukes 2009: 54; Greenfield 2010: 525).⁴ In addition to its

³ This also implies the displacement of Afrikaans as the former institutional (and powerful) language in South Africa. For further information regarding South Africa’s language policy since 1994, please see Webb (2002).

⁴ Although the historical construction of race is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to point out that McCormick (2002), whose research focused on Cape Town’s District Six – a largely coloured residential area declared a whites-only zone in 1966, pointed out that only Standard Afrikaans carries these negative connotations. In her research, coloured speakers disassociate themselves from (Standard) Afrikaans by using their vernacular variety (known as Kaapse Afrikaans or Cape Afrikaans) with a number of distinctive phonological, lexical, and syntactic features, as well as a great degree of code-switching between English and Afrikaans, or by even using other local varieties of these languages. In our methodological approach, no references or features of Kaapse Afrikaans were used.

association with the past and the effects of the Bantu Education legacy, this language group also experienced a loss of speakers during what was called the *White Flight*. The *South African Institute of Race Relations* estimates that 800,000 or more whites (out of the 4 million plus who were there when apartheid formally ended the year before) have emigrated since 1995 (White flight from South Africa: Between staying and going 2008). While some expected that apartheid would end in a bloodbath, many also left for socio-economic reasons, as well as out of a fear of crime. Others sought better education for their children outside the national borders. This institute also affirms that although emigration by white South Africans is likely continuing nowadays, it is hardly possible to provide an exact number of those who have left the country.

The theoretical and historical background in the foregoing paragraphs gives us a glimpse of the potential relevance of language in the identity formation process and in the perception of the individual in the South African context. Moreover, with regard to the white Afrikaans group in particular, the complexity of South Africa's sociolinguistic dynamics due to its recent history of apartheid and post-apartheid is another determining factor that cannot be ignored when analysing the group's status quo. Therefore, it is our purpose to determine what it currently means to be a white Afrikaans speaker in South Africa for the youth of this country and whether the present situation represents a liminal identity of the members of this language group.

2 Identity construction and *liminality*

Research on identity construction has been very prolific in recent decades. Its relevance to understanding human behaviour has attracted experts from different fields who have contributed to expanding the number of factors that may play a role in the process of self-identity and social identity construction. In this respect, social anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists, among others, have helped to demonstrate that identity is fluid in nature. Linguists as well have contributed to this identity construction owing to the highly informative nature of language and its potential impact on the social categorization process. It is perhaps worth underlining the idea of speaker agency, that is, the conscious and strategic use of language with important identity implications especially at an intergroup level (Alim 2006: 16; Coupland 2007: 77; Álvarez-Mosquera 2012: 143). However, as Cutler (2010: 248) points out, the effects of speaker agency on the social categorization process are "always somewhat constrained by the sociocultural field". In other words, speakers' possible lack

of experience and exposure to relevant contextual, social, and cultural elements associated with the intended linguistic uses might hinder their chances of social (re)categorization.

The idea of fluid identities goes hand in hand with the Social Identity Theory which establishes that, in an interpersonal–intergroup continuum, individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness, that is, to strive for a positive self-concept (Tajfel 1969: 95; Tajfel and Turner 1979: 41; Hogg 2000: 230; Hewstone et al. 2002: 580). This underlines the idea that identities are not static. According to Social Identity Theory and other recent studies, “self-enhancement is best achieved by the adoption of strategies that achieve or maintain a sense of in-group superiority relative to an out-group” (Hornsey and Hogg 2002: 203; see also Hogg and Kipling 2000: 87). This process of seeking positive identity might lead individuals to initiate a process of recategorization into other groups if they perceive their current identity to be harmful (Pettigrew 1998: 80; Dovidio et al. 2001: 170–171; Hewstone et al. 2002: 589), though recategorization may have a social cost (Marques and Paez 1994: 63).

It is within this identity framework that the concept of liminality becomes relevant. Originally imported from the field of anthropology, “liminality” was used to describe the transition phase between two periods in the rite of passage of children and youth (Van Gennep 1960; Henning and Dampier 2012). While applying this concept to society at large, authors such as Beech (2011: 285) have extended and developed the notion of liminality into the domain of identity construction, allowing them to explore this *state of in-between-ness and ambiguity* where people seek, for example, to change their current self to an aspirational identity or to dis-identify from a work-imposed identity (see also Tempest and Starkey 2004; Mälksoo 2012). More specifically, some of their work has focused on the on-going struggles that surround the creation of a sense of self and on providing temporary answers to central identity questions, while helping individuals to distance themselves from unwanted traits of the social group they belong to (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003: 1164, 1184).⁵ Another central feature of this state of liminality is the fact that creativity is central to the individual in initiating an identity transition since, in that state, he/she has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state (Mälksoo 2012: 481).

⁵ The idea of distancing ourselves from other members of our own social group(s) is not new in social psychology as, for example, the notion of optimal distinctiveness already implies: “optimal distinctiveness is achieved through identification with categories at that level of inclusiveness where the degrees of activation of the need for differentiation and of the need for assimilation are exactly equal” (Brewer 1991: 478).

3 Young white Afrikaans speakers: A case of liminality?

It is hypothesized that individuals belonging to the ethno-linguistic group of young white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa could represent a case of liminal identity. To begin with, they might find themselves with two socially undesirable characteristics in the South African context. As mentioned in the introductory section (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.2), being white and speaking Afrikaans were two of the features of the social group that ruled South Africa during the apartheid, and therefore, represent two possibly negative traits in New South Africa. In order for this social reality to be prevalent among the young members of this group, it should be accompanied by an incipient need to distance themselves from an imposed identity and stepping into an uncertain stage of in-between-ness. However, it is important to note that, despite the connection to the young white Afrikaans speakers' (possibly negative) recent past, there are other social matters that might mitigate this negativity. First, white South Africans have tended to retain a higher social status after the end of the apartheid,⁶ a social position that implies overall desirable features. Second, South African youngsters, the age group under investigation in this study, were either too young to remember the apartheid era or were born after the fall of the apartheid regime. Finally, social contact, especially in urban areas, might have had a positive effect on the conceptualization of the white Afrikaans speaker, as it diminishes overall prejudice levels under certain conditions, as Intergroup Contact Theory has established (Allport 1954; see also Du Toit and Quayle 2011: 549; Gibson and Claassen 2010: 271).

Therefore, in general terms, this study tackles what it means for South African youth to be a member of the white Afrikaans speaking group. More specifically, bearing in mind that language plays an important role in identity construction and identity perception and that changing one's ethnicity is practically impossible, my aim is to examine if speaking Afrikaans determines young white Afrikaans speakers' identity at a social level. If it does, this study also aims to demonstrate whether the historical load attached to their language variety (Standard Afrikaans) is pushing this group into liminal practices. Using data from two different studies (Section 4), it will try to establish whether white Afrikaans speakers could be regarded as liminal, that is, as being in a state of in-

⁶ Often, the unbalanced wealth distribution, as a legacy of the apartheid, is regarded as one of the main threats to successful democratization and stabilization of a country where 80% are black South Africans (Gibson 2006: 106).

between-ness and ambiguity (Van Genneep 1960; Beech 2011: 287; Mälksoo 2012: 481), as they would be trying to reconstruct their identity in such a way that their new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community and far from the stereotypical one rooted in the past.

4 Methodological approach and data

This section will describe the methodology and data employed to determine whether young white Afrikaans speakers represent a case of liminal identity. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 present two stages of a single project on social categorization and language choices with a clear focus on the role of ethnicity. Relevant linguistic implications have also been detected and explained here. Section 4.3 discusses an experiment on the effect of language and social distance on the process of categorization, placing language at the core of intergroup perception. The use of diverse data sources is central to confirming the liminal state of this ethno-linguistic group as well as being an effective way to gain greater objectivity.

4.1 Social perception survey

4.1.1 Qualitative approach

An essential first step in accomplishing the research objectives of this study is to confirm the potential negative social perception of the white group among South African youth. To achieve this, a rather simple questionnaire was used on social perception and the attribution of features to a list of social groups. In order to avoid politically correct answers, we framed our study as an international survey, and participants were told that the survey was meant to assess how individuals of multi-ethnic countries saw members of different groups which were part of their society. After emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers and that their honesty was highly valuable, participants were requested to provide up to five features or characteristics they would ascribe to individuals belonging to a series of groups. The list provided included irrelevant social groups for the study such as the category *soccer player* or *priest*, but also highly relevant ones such as *South African*, *White South African*,⁷ *Black South African*, and *Coloured South African*. This specific design allowed participants from all the

7 It is important to note that no language was mentioned at this point.

main ethnic groups to assess their own ethnic group (in-group) and the other groups (out-group) in the same task and in a non-threatening way. Short post-interviews either elicited more in-depth opinions or clarified some of the answers provided. In analysing the data, the WordList function of *WordSmithTools* (WST) was employed; this tool organizes all the features (words) listed by the participants in alphabetical order and/or in order of decreasing frequency. The WST outputs from the different (ethnic) groups, then, allowed a comparative analysis of these features/perceptions. The eclectic methodological approach used in this study is relevant because the research is data-driven, instead of hypothesis-driven. That is, the hypotheses, theories, and category labels emerge from the analysis rather than being imposed on the data. The design, data collection, and analysis took place between 2012 and 2014.

4.1.2 Participants

For the purpose of this study, we targeted young South Africans (18–25) from the three larger ethnic groups in the country (Whites, Blacks, and Coloureds).⁸ All participants were based in the cities of Pretoria or Cape Town. We were particularly interested in learning from young individuals who spent a lot of time in contexts where they were exposed to the other ethnic groups and could (potentially) interact freely. Most of our participants were approached on different university campuses⁹ (UNISA, University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town, and University of the Western Cape) or nearby areas where university students spent their spare time. We collected answers from 100 participants with the following ethnic distribution: 33 whites, 33 blacks, 32 coloureds, and 2 Indians. Questionnaires were administrated individually in public settings or common areas by a non-South African foreign-accented researcher from a similar age group (late twenties). Participants were not allowed to interact during the survey.

8 Limitations: In this initial stage, we used age, ethnicity, and exposure to other ethnic groups as our research parameters; gender (64% females and 36% male) and social class were not considered. Although these two parameters might have an impact on the data obtained, my focus was not on the relationship between the individuals' social background and the descriptors used, but on identifying general patterns of in-group and out-group perception. Finally, Indian South Africans were excluded in this version of the study in order to simplify the survey. A future study will include this group.

9 Although we did not keep track of the institution they were attending, 55 of our participants were based in Pretoria and 45 in the city of Cape Town.

4.1.3 Results

The results were highly informative, allowing the in-group and out-group perceptions to be studied both qualitatively (see Tables 1 and 2) and quantitatively (see Tables 3–5). To begin with, Table 1 presents the overall results: it lists, in terms of decreasing frequency, the characteristics/labels ascribed by all participants to members belonging to the three ethnic groups included in this study.

Table 1: Global results (frequency).

Most frequently used labels among ethnic groups	
1. Racist (78)	11. Rich (22)
2. Loud (61)	12. Apartheid (22)
3. Friendly (50)	13. Funny (22)
4. Hardworking (39)	14. Afrikaans (20)
5. Violent (36)	15. Cultural (20)
6. Ignorant (31)	16. Gang (19)
7. Diverse (28)	17. Corrupt (19)
8. Poor (24)	18. Rude (19)
9. Good (23)	19. Black (18)
10. Drink (22)	20. Class (17)

Our data reflect an overall antagonism, *racist*¹⁰ being the label used most frequently (78 instances) by all participants.¹¹ It is worth noting that the top six labels are mostly negative (*racist*, *loud*, *violent*, *poor*, and *ignorant*), and a similar, negative tendency is observed in the rest of the list (e.g. *apartheid*, *corrupt*, *rude*, etc.). From a linguistic point of view, it may be relevant to note that the only language that appears in this list is *Afrikaans* (20 tokens). The frequency of this term is similar to another salient label in South Africa's recent past: *apartheid* (22 tokens). Interestingly, although the survey did not make mention of any particular group of speakers, sporadic positive references to white English speakers were found and clear negative attitudes towards white Afrikaans speakers were also detected.¹² This observation is in line with the socio-historical framework provided in the introduction.

¹⁰ *Racist* is the most repeated term in the overall black and coloured corpora and the second most repeated term in the white corpus.

¹¹ Variants of a particular word are all seen as tokens of the same *lemma*.

¹² Instances of the terms *English* and *Afrikaans* were retrieved by making use of the *WordSmith Tools* Concord Tool, which finds all the occurrences of a search word in a designated corpus together with a span of co-text to the left and right (co-text). Only black participants made a

Table 2 then presents the features ascribed to *White South Africans* by all participants from the three ethnic groups.

Table 2: Features ascribed by all participants to *White South Africans*, by ethnic group.

White participants	Black participants	Coloured participants
1. Friendly (6)	1. Racist (14)	1. Racist (15)
2. Class (5)	2. Afrikaners (3)	2. Wealthy (5)
3. Racist (5)	3. Rich (3)	3. Better/superior (4)
4. Drinkers (4)	4. Privileged (3)	4. South Africa (4)
5. Hardworking (4)	5. South Africa (2)	5. Apartheid (3)
6. Afraid (3)	6. Afrikaans (2)	6. Dirty (3)
7. Aggressive (3)	7. Arrogant (2)	7. Friendly (3)
8. Struggling (3)	8. Awesome (2)	8. Themselves (3)
9. Well off (3)	9. Cape (2)	9. Upper (3)
10. Afrikaner (2)	10. Fake (2)	10. Beer (2)
11. Apartheid (2)	11. Superiority (2)	11. Rude (2)
12. Boer (2)	12. Past (2)	12. Judgmental (2)

There are several patterns that draw our attention. Overall, each group employs negative labels (e.g., *racist*), positive labels (e.g., *friendly*), and neutral labels (e.g., *South Africa*). There are striking singularities within the characteristics ascribed by each group, when compared with the other two. First, although the term *racist* appears in the white group (5 tokens) in defining *White South Africans*, it is by far the most frequently used term by the black group (14 tokens) and by the coloured group (15 tokens). These high frequencies of the label *racist* in the non-white groups establish an important gap with the rest of the characteristics attributed to white South Africans since almost half of the non-white participants ascribed this feature. Second, it is important to note that the negative labels used by non-white participants (e.g., *racist*, *arrogant*, *fake*, *superiority*,¹³ *dirty*, *rude*, etc.) as well as the references to the

distinction between the two groups of white speakers as illustrated in the following examples: “English: compassionate, reasonable, non-racist” versus “Afrikaans people: hold senior positions; Afrikaner-racist.”

13 Besides using *superiority* as a label, the coloured group also used sentences to describe this feature: “think they are superior”, “superior complex”, or “see themselves better than others”.

past (*Afrikaner*,¹⁴ *apartheid*, *past*, etc.) outweigh the positive traits. In this sense, a comparison with the labels used by the white participants becomes highly relevant when approached from a socio-cognitive and/or an anthropological perspective. More specifically, the auto-references in the white group to personal qualities such as *friendly* or *hardworking* appear to be in contrast with terms such as *arrogant*, *themselves*,¹⁵ *fake*, or *rude* in the other two groups. These opposing views, aside from being consistent with the Social Identity Theory principles (Tajfel 1969; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Hogg 2000; Hewstone et al. 2002; see Section 2), are also in line with Adams et al.'s (2012: 377) study, which confirms that white cultures in South Africa are more individualistic, while black cultures tend to be collectivist. Therefore, behavioural patterns considered by members of a culturally individualistic group as *hardworking* or *friendly* might be misinterpreted by members of collectivist groups as being examples of *fakeness*, *rudeness*, or *arrogance* (Adams et al. 2012: 385–386). Nevertheless, finding evidence for this diverging perception is beyond the scope of this article, and we acknowledge that other contextual factors should also be considered. For instance, if we take into account that the unemployment rate among white South Africans is constantly under 10% (the lowest among South Africa's ethnic groups, see Statistics South Africa 2014), it might be easy to establish a correlation between the labels *hardworking* (by white participants), *privileged* (by black participants), and *upper*¹⁶ class (by coloured participants).

Although the sense of community and the community practices might differ among the three groups, by no means are we asserting that these differences would necessarily be misinterpreted. However, the prevalence of characteristics associated with pre-democratic South Africa has led us to consider another important factor that might be contributing to the misunderstanding of out-group behaviours, that is, the effect of *social distance*. In

14 The use of terms such as *Afrikaner* and *Boer* is controversial nowadays due to their social implications and association with the past. However, I used *WordSmith Tools* (Concord function) and post-interviews to clarify their intended meaning, and they were widely understood by our participants to be negative terms. For example, *WordSmith Tools* showed how some black participants clearly underlined the negative connotations of the terms: *Afrikaner-racist*; *racist* (*Afrikaners*). Similar associations were found among white participants (e.g., *Afrikaner*: *Afrikaner Resistance Movement*).

15 *Themselves* is used with negative connotations to define white South Africans: “see themselves better than others”, “lying to themselves (still racist)”, “always want to prove themselves worthy”.

16 *Upper* is used to describe white South Africans with only two expressions: *upper class* (twice) and *have the upper hand*.

South Africa, the different ethnic groups share the same (public) spaces to a certain extent, but significant inter-group interactions are generally limited (Tredoux et al. 2005; Finchilescu et al. 2007; Erasmus 2010). If we take into account that, according to the Social Identity Theory, individuals tend to regard their own culture as being better than other cultures so as to keep a positive identity (see Section 2), the lack of significant interaction between individuals who belong to different cultures might lead to increasing levels of social distance,¹⁷ which eventually triggers higher levels of intergroup hostility, extreme categorical perception, and increasing social anxiety (Oaten et al. 2008; Sacco et al. 2011; Schaafsma and Williams 2012). In this regard, our data show that white participants provided a wider variety of labels of medium frequency, while the other two groups typically used a single, highly frequent feature (*racist*), making this effect of social distance more evident in the black group corpus. From a socio-cognitive perspective, the lack of nuance in the perception of the category *White South African* reinforced by a permanent lack of social contact seems to lead out-group members to rely on stereotypical features commonly associated with the past, as the terms related to that period demonstrate (e.g., *apartheid*, *past*, *Afrikaner*, etc.). Therefore, it is quite likely that the separate dynamics of the white and non-white groups are not only mutually misunderstood but that they may actually contribute to polarising intergroup categorization. In that case, it is quite likely that, from a linguistic point of view, *Afrikaans* (20 tokens overall, see Table 1) acts as another feature that helps in-group and out-group members to reinforce their own categorization processes.

To complete the qualitative analysis of the data provided in Table 2, I would like to focus on the words *afraid* and *struggling*, and, to a lesser extent, *Afrikaner*, *apartheid*, and *Boer* in the white participants' corpus. First of all, the negative features *afraid*, *struggling*, and *Boer* differ from any other term used by the coloured and black groups. However, the actual relevance of the selection of these terms by young white participants to define members of their own ethnic group will be shown in the next section, where we will analyse these data from a quantitative point of view.

¹⁷ Other indicators of social distance provided by participants in this social perception survey are: *different*, *dissimilar*, *misjudged*, *unfamiliar*, *untrustworthy*, *neglected*, *unsupported*, *misled*, *divided*, *intolerant*, *unforgiving*, *misjudged*, etc. The likely existence of this social gap might be contributing to the negative perception of members of the other groups. In the case of white South Africans, young out-group members establish a strong connection with the past and this ethnic group, showing a preponderance of pre-democracy stereotypes (e.g., supremacist, segregation, apartheid, etc.).

4.1.4 Quantitative approach

In order to strengthen the analysis of the results obtained in this survey, I classified all the answers into clearly positive labels (e.g., *helping*), clearly negative labels (e.g., *untrustworthy*), and clearly neutral labels (e.g., *Cape Town*).¹⁸ So as to safeguard the objectivity of this study, I then had at least two non-participating members of each ethnic group review the lists of labels with a view to verifying or modifying my classification. Additionally, I eliminated any subjective terms from the analysis due to the inability to determine a participant's real intention and the fact that this could negatively affect the study's reliability.¹⁹

Quantifying the participants' answers provided relevant results that advanced the analysis of the situation of the white ethnic group in the South African context. In line with Social Identity Theory, which argues that in-group members tend to regard their own group as better than the out-groups, different tendencies would be expected to be found in the way participants of the white and non-white groups (in-group vs out-group) ascribed characteristics to the white South African group. Chi-square tests were performed in order to compare differences among the groups.²⁰

Table 3: White participants' vs. black participants' opinion on *white South African*.

Participants	Positive opinion	Negative opinion	Total
Black	11	19	30
White	12	14	26
TOTAL	23	33	56

Pearson's p-value = 0.47

¹⁸ *Cape Town* was considered to be “neutral” when ascribed as a feature of the “Coloured South African” group by two non-participant coloured individuals who reviewed the lists of features for this ethnic group as well as post-survey interviews with coloured participants.

¹⁹ The list of subjective terms, that is, terms that could be interpreted differently (positive or negative) depending on the intention of the speaker, was significantly reduced because of the post-interviews with our participants and consultation with non-participating members of each ethnic group.

²⁰ Due to the nature of the data, we used a chi-square test, a non-parametric statistical test that compares research data with the expected results from a hypothesis. In other words, we aimed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies among the different combinations of ethnic categories ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Coloured participants' vs. white participants' opinion on *white South African*.

Participants	Positive opinion	Negative opinion	Total
Coloured	7	20	27
White	12	14	26
TOTAL	19	34	36

Pearson's p-value = 0.12

Table 5: Coloured participants' vs black participants' opinion on white South African.

Participants	Positive opinion	Negative opinion	Total
Coloured	7	20	27
Black	11	19	30
TOTAL	18	39	57

Pearson's p-value = 0.38

When using this non-parametric test to determine whether there was a significant difference in terms of positive and negative perception among the three groups, remarkably, the way the white group members perceive themselves did not differ significantly from the two other groups (see Tables 3 and 4), contradicting the theoretical bases of the Social Identity Theory. In other words, while in-group members should theoretically keep a positive image of themselves, this did not happen in the white group since their members perceive their own group mostly negatively. The explanation for this outcome is directly connected to the frequency of negative terms such as *afraid*, *struggling*, and the other terms that attached this group to its past. That is to say, according to our results, many white young South Africans perceive themselves as struggling in the country and, despite having been raised or even born after the apartheid, its effects linger on and come at a social cost even for the younger generations.²¹ This negative evaluation by white young South Africans of their own group, both qualitatively and quantitatively, sets the ground for liminality practices in a possible attempt to distance themselves from unwanted traits of the social group they belong to (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003: 1164, 1184). In any case, these

²¹ 57.6% of the white participants had Afrikaans as their L1. In some of the post-interviews, English-speaking participants complained about being perceived as *Afrikaners* by non-white individuals.

results cannot be substantiated without further study, therefore the next subsection seeks to corroborate if we are dealing here with a case of liminal identity.

4.2 Focus groups: Testimonies

The results obtained in the previous section illustrate an overall antagonism among the three groups, where the white group is perceived very negatively by the coloured and black groups, and, more relevantly, is defined by its own members to be *struggling* in the South African context. In order to verify the validity of our data and our interpretation, a qualitative method, namely focus group interviews, was employed (see Litosseliti 2003). More specifically, two focus group sessions with white Afrikaans speakers (2012–2013) were carried out.²² Although these focus group sessions were part of a larger project on language preferences and education in the context of South Africa (reported on in Bornman et al. 2014), they included a section on language and identity at the beginning of each session, the results of this initial section illustrate the social situation of this ethno-linguistic group.

4.2.1 Participants

UNISA research team members (University of South Africa) recruited participants using different distribution lists associated with the Department of Communication Science and the institution itself.²³ Despite being the largest university on the African continent, UNISA is a dedicated open distance education institution. Therefore, it was difficult to recruit respondents at all stages. The Afrikaans-speaking students were all graduate students in their second and third years of study. The groups were relatively small – three and two respondents, respectively. However, the aim of this qualitative study was not to generalize the findings to all students or to the entire young population, but rather to obtain detailed descriptions and insights into the participants' opinions and attitudes (Neuman 2006). Therefore, by encouraging respondents to speak about their feelings and opinions intentionally, they would be more likely to confront

²² Two focus group sessions were conducted during July 2012 – one with white Afrikaans-speaking students and one with black South African students. To enhance the reliability of our findings and explore the research questions further, two other focus group interviews with the same ethnic groups were conducted during February 2013. Only the testimonies of those participants who were Afrikaans speakers under 30 years old were taken into account for this study.

²³ UNISA administrators and teachers/professors can make use of various student lists (with names, email addresses, and telephone numbers) to reach them for different purposes.

these hidden feelings and perhaps unearth ideas that diverge from the standard topics (see Adams et al. 2012: 381). The type of data we obtained consisted of audio-recordings, transcription of the focus group sessions, and video-recordings in case participants' body language happened to be relevant.

Focus group sessions took place in a private meeting room within the Department of Communication Science (UNISA). The group discussions were conducted in English, but respondents were informed that they could speak their native language if they felt that they could express themselves better in that way. A member of the research team, or one of the respondents, offered translations in such cases. A researcher who belonged to the same language and ethnic group that was being recorded at every session led the focus groups, in this case, a white Afrikaans speaker. Finally, the analysis of the data was performed by all members involved in this project, namely a white Afrikaans speaking researcher, a black Xhosa-speaking South African researcher, and myself.

4.2.2 Results

The testimonies gathered in the focus groups represented an alternative way of gaining a more detailed description of the difficult situation of white young Afrikaans speakers. That is, their ongoing struggles to create a sense of self and provide temporary answers to central identity questions (e.g., the use of their own language) became more apparent in their testimonies, while the emergence of liminal practices to distance themselves from unwanted characteristics associated with their group were also corroborated (see also Section 5). To start with the analysis of these important identity issues, testimonies showed how, in South Africa, the lack of contact between the black and white groups, together with the legacy of pre-democracy stereotypes, has a tremendous impact on the use of Afrikaans as a language, as we can see in examples (1) and (2) by white Afrikaans participants:

- (1) *Afrikaans is not always seen as a great language in our country, **with the stigma of the past** that is connected with it.*
- (2) *It's no longer fashionable to be Afrikaans **so you kind of have to hide it. You have to apologize for who you are and I think that's sad and that's a very big bumper on who you can be and your potential.***

It is important to note that the identity struggle for this generation goes beyond their willingness to adapt to the New South Africa, and it represents a high social

cost for a generation that was either too young to remember anything of the apartheid times or was actually born in the democratic era, as we can see in (3).

(3) *...even though we had no physical hand in those wrongs*

Participants not only pointed out that being Afrikaans is socially regarded as negative and that, despite their youth, they seemed to be carrying out the blame for their past because of their skin colour and language group, they also indicated that they found themselves struggling to contribute to their country regardless of their studies or skills. This can be seen in example (4). The notion of being constantly pre-judged and perceived as formally advantaged causes an identity crisis (see examples (5) and (6)), which might trigger liminal strategies to shift towards a more positive identity (see also Section 5).

(4) *... they call window dressing when they have 3 black people and 1 white to just kind of make up like yeah.. ok we are considering the white person, **but we know it's not gonna happen.***

(5) *I didn't know what the struggle was about because I was 7. I just knew there was a change. So I grew up with a change, but **now I've judged because of my skin-color.** So to me that it's really unfair as a white South African today because **you are perceived as being formerly advantaged.***

(6) *Being a white female under 30... especially because I am Afrikaans, is kind a pre-judged... **kind of a lost generation.***

When considering the responses above, it should not be surprising that white South African participants in the first survey (Section 4.1) attributed the label *racist*, among other negative characteristics, to the other two ethnic groups²⁴ – although they did so in a moderate fashion. In addition to the complex social situation described in the previous examples, the testimonies of the focus group also illustrate how members already point out emerging liminal strategies as an option to reconstruct their identity in a more meaningful way. In this sense, examples (7) and (8) clearly describe a symbolic affiliation with a more global/European identity (see also Steyn 2005: 128).

²⁴ This information is not explicitly mentioned in the tables in Section 4.1, as they focus on how white Afrikaans speakers are perceived.

- (7) *Epecially with the white people there is a kind of European culture... While Afrikaner people, white people, have kind of evolved with the global culture... not that they have not evolved but you know what I am.*
- (8) *I am South African...everything about me is South African, my parents, my way of thinking, the way I speak... but I think it's more like a global or European.. it's not like African Africa*

In line with these statements, Bornman et al. (2014) underlined that white Afrikaans speakers also reported a positive attitude towards shifting to English, which can be regarded as closely associated with processes of social identification as well as the projection of a different persona (O'Driscoll 2001; Aziakpono and Bekker 2010). Among the majority of Afrikaans-speaking respondents, choices in favour of English were linked to a better professional projection and as an effective tool to relate to African language speakers (Bornman et al. 2014), which eventually represent socially desirable characteristics (see also Anthonissen 2009: 70–73; Thutloa and Huddleston 2011: 63). From a social categorization point of view, language can be used as a resource to seek for recategorization into a more desirable social category (e.g., European, cosmopolitan, etc.), and English, in this case, can be a way of shifting or redefining their group membership, far from the association with the apartheid that Afrikaans brings along.

The inter-group data from the first study seem to find additional support in the testimonies of the white Afrikaans participants in the focus groups, in that they both point to a potential case of liminal identity. However, the prevalence of qualitative data in evaluating this ethno-linguistic group needs to be complemented by empirical data, which will allow us to strengthen our conclusions on this issue of liminality. To this effect, a third set of data from a different project on the role of language and social distance in the process of social categorization in the South African context will be discussed.

4.3 Job candidate experiment: The influence of the ethnic and linguistic variables

4.3.1 Procedures

If we wish to corroborate the liminal state of young white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa, we need evidence from diverse sources of data pointing in the same direction. For that reason, a survey-based experiment was designed

examining the influence of L1 and social distance on the categorization of a potential job candidate. This experiment seeks to generate new empirical data to complement the personal opinions and reflective testimonies from the previous section.

In this experiment, participants were given a version of a CV cover letter that they had to assign scalar ratings to reflecting their overall opinion about the candidate as well as their attitude towards and social distance relative to the candidate's ethno-linguistic group. Although the job candidate's work experience, educational background, age and gender were not altered, his ethnicity was presented as white, black, or coloured (names were changed accordingly). Correspondingly, the candidate's L1 (English, Afrikaans, or Xhosa) also varied with the different versions of the cover letter. Of particular interest for this study is the white candidate, who was presented as either having English or Afrikaans as his first language; the ultimate aim here was to examine the role of social distance in the perception of white English vs. white Afrikaans speakers, as a window on the liminal state of the young Afrikaans speakers.

This newly designed experiment aimed to bridge the gap between individuals' linguistic and intergroup behaviour. Therefore, the manipulation of the candidate's L1 and ethnicity was central, as it would provide insight in how participants from different ethnic and linguistic groups would perceive the same candidate through the lens of their own characteristics. In collaboration with researchers from the University of Pretoria and the University of Western Cape, I established five indicators of social distance representing five questions in the survey:

1. How familiar would you say you are with members of this group? (How much do you know about them?)
2. How often do you do things socially with members of this group? (This includes activities such as going to movies or parties, eating together, etc.)
3. How often do you study or do other classwork with members of this group?
4. How often do you have social contact with members of this group in your/their home?
5. How many people from this group do you consider core/close friends?

Questions were answered on a scale from 1 to 10, except for the last question where a scale of 1 to 5 was thought to be more appropriate.

4.3.2 Participants

With more than 280 participants (174 Whites; L1: 146 Afrikaans, 28 English), 43 Blacks (L1: 35 isiXhosa, 4 isiZulu, 2 Sesotho, 1 Sepedi, and 1 Setswana) and 72

Coloureds; L1: 47 English, 25 Afrikaans),²⁵ this study was conducted in three South African universities (University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town, and University of the Western Cape). Once again, we were particularly interested in eliciting data from young individuals (Age: Mean (M) = 20.05; Standard Deviation (SD) = 3.87) who spend a lot of time in contexts where they are exposed to the other ethnic groups and have the opportunity to interact freely with them (e.g., during lessons, college activities, libraries, group projects, in libraries, in student residences, etc.). These surveys were administered in lecture halls at the University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town and the University of Western Cape by a non-South African foreign-accented researcher from a similar age group in early 2015. UNISA was excluded due to the fact that most of their teaching is online (open distance education).

4.3.3 Results

First, a one-way ANOVA was performed with group (black, white, and coloured) as a factor and social distance as a dependent variable. A main effect of condition was revealed for all the social distance conditions (*Familiar with members of this group* [$F(2,286) = 27.64$; $p < 0.001$]; *Do social things with members of this group* [$F(2,286) = 26.12$; $p < 0.001$]; *Study or do work with members of this group* [$F(2,286) = 9.12$; $p < 0.001$]; *Social contact at home with members of this group* [$F(2,286) = 9.12$; $p < 0.001$], and *Members of this group as core friends* [$F(2,286) = 21.31$; $p < 0.001$]). The effect remained significant when data were transformed into a four-stage scale of social distance so as to best assess this information as a unique variable.²⁶ The one-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of condition [$F(2,286) = 27.25$; $p < 0.001$]. All the pairwise comparisons were statistically significant. Therefore, we can affirm that ethnicity plays a central role in establishing degrees of social distance with the job applicant's group in this case.

In order to best capture the nature of these differences, post-hoc analyses were performed (see Table 6). For the first two conditions (social distance indicators), all three groups showed statistically significant differences. In other words, Whites affirm to be more familiar with members of other groups

²⁵ A possible confounding issue is the uneven number of participants in each ethnic group. However, the selected statistical model (ANOVA) is sensitive to this factor.

²⁶ Once it had been verified that the answers to all the questions in this section were positively correlated, I decided to use the overall results of the five questions on social distance as a unique parameter named *social distance*. To this aim, I grouped participants' overall answers into four stages of social distance: low (34–45), mid-low (22–33), mid-high (11–21), high (0–10).

Table 6: Post-hoc results for *social distance* and *ethnic groups*.

	Familiar with members of other groups	Do social things with members of other groups	Study or do work with members of other groups	Social contact at home with members of other groups	Members of other groups as core friends
White South Africans	$M = 8.75$	$M = 7.82$	$M = 7.48$	$M = 7.44$	$M = 3.62$
Coloured South Africans	$M = 7.75$	$M = 6.19$	$M = 6.17$	$M = 5.34$	$M = 2.80$
Black South Africans	$M = 6.75$	$M = 4.92$	$M = 5.70$	$M = 4.93$	$M = 2.50$

($M = 8.75$) than Coloureds ($M = 7.75$) and Blacks ($M = 6.75$). Furthermore, Whites state that they do social things more often with members of other groups ($M = 7.82$) than Coloureds ($M = 6.19$) and Blacks ($M = 4.92$). While for these two conditions the three groups present statistically significant differences, they split into two groups (white vs. coloured and black) for the three last social distance indicators. Therefore, when asked how often they study or do class work with other groups, Whites ($M = 7.48$) report significantly more often than the other two groups (Coloureds: $M = 6.17$; Blacks: $M = 5.70$). This very pattern is replicated in the other two social distance indicators: social contact at home with members of other groups (Whites: $M = 7.44$ vs Coloureds ($M = 5.34$) and Blacks ($M = 4.93$)) and how many members of other groups they have as core friends (Whites: $M = 3.62$ vs Coloureds ($M = 2.80$) and Blacks ($M = 2.50$)). These latter results give a rather precise characterization of the social cost attached to the white ethnic group, in that the other two groups studied, which represent the vast social majority, present higher social distance levels towards out-group members.

Finally, when performing a multivariate general lineal model analysis with (participant's) *ethnicity* and *language matching* (between participants' L1 and job applicants' L1) as within-subject factors,²⁷ *group* (white, black, and coloured) as between-subjects factor, and each level of the *social distance* as a dependent variable, results showed a main effect of language matching [$F(1,283) = 2.84$;

²⁷ Taking into account that the job applicant could speak English, Afrikaans, or Xhosa as his L1 (depending on the version of the survey), I investigated what the effect was if the L1 matched the participant's L1. Due to the many African languages spoken by black participants and the size of our population, we grouped all African languages into a single category for analytical purposes. However, we are aware that many of these languages are not mutually intelligible since, for instance, there is a considerable distance between Nguni and Sotho languages.

$p < 0.016$] and a main effect of group [$F(2,283) = 5.50$; $p < 0.001$]. Focusing on the effect of the language matching, there is an overall difference between the three groups when considering each of the five social distance parameters. Figure 1 shows statistically significant differences in answering *how often they study or do work with members of other groups*, illustrating the impact of language matching on social distance levels across ethnic groups. Pairwise comparison demonstrated that black participants more severely penalized the lack of matching in their L1, that is, they gave significantly lower ratings to those whose L1 was not African [$p < 0.001$].

As Figure 1 illustrates, white participants indicated that, quite often, they tend to study or work indistinctively with speakers of their own or of a different language²⁸ (No Match: $M = 7.51$; Match: $M = 7.45$), meaning that language does not affect social distance. A similar effect is found in the coloured group, that is, language matching does not significantly affect social distance, although they seem to interact less often (No Match: $M = 6.28$; Match: $M = 6.02$). The black group, however, shows a significant effect of language matching, when compared with the other two groups [$F(2,283) = 4.03$; $p < 0.05$]. Black participants

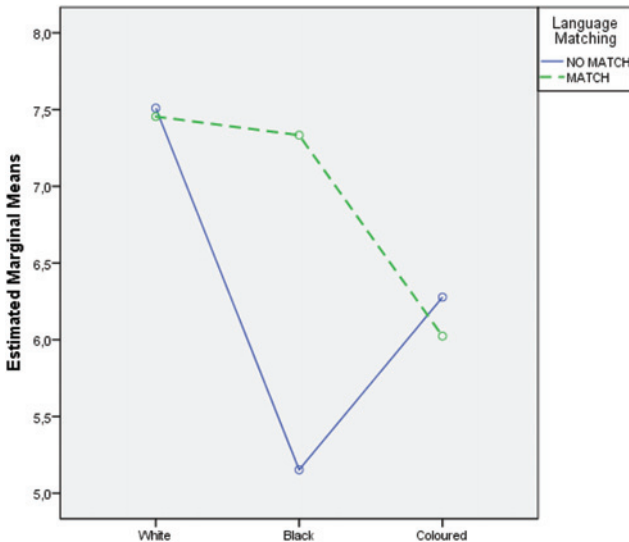


Figure 1: Language matching and social distance (Q3: *How often they study or do work with members of other groups*).

²⁸ This difference is statistically significant when compared to the other two groups, as shown by the main effect of group.

tend to interact significantly more often with speakers of African languages ($M=7.33$) than with speakers of non-African languages ($M=5.15$). In terms of liminality, these results provide additional evidence for the fact that the social dynamics in South Africa may contribute to leaving members of the white Afrikaans group in an uncertain social situation, in that they present socially undesirable characteristics, such as speaking Afrikaans. Among the youth, the largest ethnic group (blacks) will place more social distance between their group and Afrikaans speakers (despise their ethnicity), perpetuating the negative perception of this language.

5 Discussion

The aim of this paper was to determine if the case of young white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa could be considered an example of liminal identity. The combination of data from the different studies (intergroup categorization survey, focus-group interviews, and the CV experiment) illustrates this group's socially uncertain position in post-apartheid South Africa. The qualitative and quantitative results of the social categorization survey showed an overall intergroup antagonism, where the recent history takes a toll on the white (Afrikaans) group. The data obtained revealed how this group was not only negatively perceived by the other ethnic groups but also how white participants ascribed negative characteristics to themselves, such as *afraid* or *struggling*, while using other terminology associated with its past (e.g., Boer, apartheid, etc.). Testimonies from the focus groups added valuable data: they confirm the liminal situation of the participants in the white group by illustrating how the legacy of pre-democracy stereotypes had a serious impact on the use of Afrikaans as a language for a generation that was either too young to remember anything of the apartheid times or was actually born in the democratic era. Therefore, the general idea of Afrikaans being socially regarded as negative and the notion of being pre-judged because of their skin colour can be considered major reasons for young white Afrikaans speakers to implement liminal strategies in an attempt to shift to a more positive identity (Pettigrew 1998: 80; Dovidio et al. 2001: 170–171; Hewstone et al. 2002: 589).

Furthermore, the CV experiment confirmed the significant role of *social distance* in perceiving the other as a member of one of the three ethnic groups studied. More specifically, in line with the first study, all groups showed statistically significant differences in terms of their familiarity with the other groups and their level of socializing with members of these other groups. In this regard, the white group displayed significantly more

familiarity with the other groups and willingness to socialize with them, followed by coloured and then black participants. When considering social distance indicators that required or implied a higher degree of personal contact, a white versus non-white dichotomy was observed since coloured and black participants both presented higher social distance levels with the different ethnic groups. These initial data were supported by additional results from the multivariate general lineal model analysis. Results illustrated how black participants showed a greater social distance on all five social distance parameters, reaching a peak with respect to the parameter “working or studying with individuals with a non-matching language”. Taking into account that, for the purpose of this study, we considered all African languages as matching languages for the black group (none of the black participants had English or Afrikaans as their L1), this result is indicative of a social gap between this group and speakers of Afrikaans and English (either coloured or white). In contextualizing these data, one needs to be aware that the black group represents 80% of the total population of South Africa. Afrikaans speakers only represent 61% of the total white population (4.58 million; 8.9% of the total population; Statistics South Africa 2012), that is, approximately 2.7 million speakers. This may partially explain why white participants presented lower social distance levels when interacting with members of other speaking groups since they are a minority group. Additionally, we must also point out that English is the expected language for inter-ethnic communication, which may also clarify why many black participants had a higher preference for the matching language condition. Their preference for the language matching condition can also be understood if one considers the well-documented learning problems that underqualified teachers, under-resourced English-instructed schools, and insufficient exposure to English outside the classroom are causing to most black learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (Casale and Posel 2011: 452–451; Parkinson and Crouch 2011: 96). In either case, Afrikaans remains in a more socially liminal situation, which leads us to question the effectiveness of the multilingual policies in South Africa.

Of particular relevance are the incipient *liminal strategies* observed in the focus groups. Testimonies depicted emerging liminal strategies as a possibility to reconstruct the white Afrikaans identity in a more meaningful way (e.g., *global* and *European*, see examples 7 and 8). This strategy used to transform or redefine their identity as it is mediated through liminal practices has called the attention of other South African and international scholars. In seeking to limit their performance of whiteness, young Afrikaans speakers get involved in cultural practices which create a liminal space where all identities are destabilized and open for reconfiguration (Marx and Milton 2011: 724). In other words, they look for other environments where they find themselves stripped

of all previous status markers, habits, thoughts, etc., resulting in an uncertain *state of in-between-ness* that opens the door for experimentation and reflection (Van Heerden 2009: 18–19). An example of this can be seen with rap music. In this genre, white Afrikaans identity, previously considered fixed and unproblematic in line with the national discourse under apartheid, now finds itself in flux – it is being challenged, renegotiated, and possibly reconfigured, especially through the medium of the arts and cultural expression (Marx and Milton 2011: 727; Williams and Stroud 2015: 280). As Marx and Milton (2011: 739) point out, white Afrikaans speakers had to undergo a process of transformation by selecting, borrowing, and absorbing from different available cultural resources to reinterpret their old selves into the new South Africa. By doing so, (young) white Afrikaans speakers could reclaim their humanity by assisting in “a humanistic revival of our country through a readiness to participate in the process of redress and reconciliation” (Ballantine 2004: 106; see also Haupt 2012: 142–143). To explore the notion of liminality, *Zef Rap* is of particular interest: it is a new form of localized rap performance that emerged after 1994 and was pioneered by white Afrikaans hip-hopppers. *Zef* is an Afrikaans term that roughly translates into what is also referred to in South Africa as *common* (Marx and Milton 2011: 734–735; see also Haupt 2012: 115). In line with our study, the *Zef* culture is an attempt to reconfigure Afrikaans whiteness “to speak to the perceived sense of marginal and liminal experience of white Afrikaans youth in post-apartheid South Africa” (Marx and Milton 2011: 723). This idea of presenting themselves as common citizens, far from the privileged situation of the past, also has profound linguistic implications (Adhikari 2005). White South African rappers studied by Williams and Stroud (2015: 279, 288–289) were negotiating multiple representations of whiteness by appropriating linguistic features associated with *Kaapse*, a Cape Flats dialect of Afrikaans stereotypically associated with working class Coloureds. This fact highlights again the potential of language to negotiate our identity but, of course, brings legitimacy issues due to the socio-historical implications (Rampton 1995; Bucholtz 1999; Williams and Stroud 2015: 279).

In any case, participants’ testimonies and rap music illustrate that these white Afrikaans speakers are seeking to find new and innovative ways to articulate whiteness in the new space they find themselves in, proving that creativity is central for the individual to initiate a identity transition. In the words of Adam Haupt, who has been studying the rap music scene in South Africa, there is a “new-generation South Africans’ desire to reinvent what it means to be white, Afrikaans South Africans, thereby offering subjects the opportunity to distance themselves from the previous generation’s complicity in apartheid” (2006: 17–18).

6 Conclusion

The socio-historical load attached to the white Afrikaans group, together with the social dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa, have resulted in young white Afrikaans speakers finding themselves in a complex identity situation. The aim of this article was to examine whether this complex identity situation could be considered a case of liminal identity. The results of two different and independent research projects, namely, an intergroup categorization survey and focus-group interviews, as well as the CV experiment, were consistent with this hypothesis. More specifically, our data depicted a notable ongoing struggle regarding young white Afrikaans speakers' sense of self as well as evidence of attempts to distance themselves from the unwanted traits of their ethno-linguistic group. In particular, this study showed how relevant social factors such as social distance, overall social antagonism, and the legacy of pre-democracy stereotypes had a strong impact on the perception and use of Afrikaans as a language, even for the youngest generation that was not involved in the wrongdoings of the past. In addition, the existence of emerging liminal strategies used to reconfigure the identity of young white Afrikaans speakers in a more positive and meaningful way constitutes an alternative way of confirming the liminal identity of many members of this group, despite the fact that this identity transition implies a transition to an ambiguous or uncertain state (Mälksoo 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that the young Afrikaans speaking group represents a case of in-between-ness, where members of the group might seek to change their current self to an aspirational identity far from the socially imposed one, which is directly connected to the past.

Although the empirical data and testimonies support the case of liminal identity among many young Afrikaans-speaking whites, further research is needed in order to explore this on-going process, as the South African society is constantly evolving. For instance, a growing number of studies have demonstrated that Afrikaans (more specifically Kaapse Afrikaans) remains as an important identity marker within the coloured community (Dyers 2008; Thutloa and Huddleston 2011), where it is the major lingua franca. This linguistic dynamism might also contribute to narrow the “social gap” between white and coloured ethnic groups, affecting the way white young generations could perceive Afrikaans in the future. In addition, finding new contexts where members of the group of young Afrikaans-speaking whites are implementing different liminal strategies so as to reconstruct their identity will be highly valuable. Therefore, sociolinguistic as well as socio-cognitive studies stand to benefit from exploring many of the factors involved in the case study presented in this present paper.

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