

Like kids these days say

By  Charles Siboto

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Heita da! What's drugs my dealer? What's crack-a-lackin'? Umoja? Fo' shizzle my nizzle? It's all good in the hood. You'd best keep your urban dictionary close by for this one.

Language, it's something special isn't it? In his song, *Sing for the Moment*, Eminem says: "I guess words are a motherf*cker, they can be great / Or they can degrade, or even worse, they can teach hate". Words move us and have a magic about them, especially when you use them in ways that defy the rules of grammar. Language is fluid and ever-changing and there is always a tug-of-war between the powers that be in university ivory towers and everyday people who use language as a tool to communicate as to what the rules of language are.



The beauty of slang

June sees us celebrating the school pupils who lost their lives during the 16 June 1976 uprising in Soweto. Those kids stood up for the right to be educated in a language that they could understand. The great thing about this is that once you understand your own language, you find appreciation for the beauty of other languages. 40 years after those kids stood up for their right to understand what they were being taught, we live in a multilingual South Africa that has become a unique place in the world in terms of the amount of languages that are used in our interactions on a daily basis. This is most evident in the slang we use. We have 11 official languages, and many others from other regions of the world, spoken in our streets and the slang that has emerged is just typically South African and a thing of beauty.

We all have this unique flavour of speaking to which the world at large cannot compare. Think of how we confuse

foreigners when we tell them to turn left at the second robot. Where else are you in a taxi (like a proper South African taxi) and you shout “sho’t left” from the back and the driver knows what you want? Nowhere else, pappa!

#VoiceForAll

We have the kids from koKasi with their township flow whose levels of cool you cannot even hope to compete with. Libala tsotsi, just forget. The urban slang of my home, the dirty south of Jozi, with okes chasing binnets for days, my china. The language that only my goons and I use when we get together for some sips and my one friend always ends up being such a chop. I remember the days of 1337 (elite) speak when gamers thought replacing words with letters was the height of cool and n00bs would be pwnd (owned). Eish, and then Twitter came with its hashtags and no community took to it better than South Africans, especially our Minister of Sport and Recreation, Mr Fikzo Mbalula. The dude’s always #onfleek on Twitter. Even the way we discuss politics and serious matters like students protesting the increase of fees has changed since 1976. Think of movements like #feesmustfall, #zumamustfall or #blacklivesmatter. Only in Mzansi do we have hunky politician referred to as ‘The People’s Bae’. That being the EFF’s Mbuyiseni Ndlozi.

Language is fun for days, you guys. Eish, mara it can be dangerous too, if we use it to break people down instead of building them up. Racism, sexism, homophobia and all kinds of other prejudice have their own slang. That’s the stuff we don’t need. As young people, we face many obstacles, but we are ambitious, we are hungry for success and we can always push to be better. Every day we are hustling, as the motto goes. There is a magic here, you guys, even when things get hectic. Slang is a way to cross language boundaries and unite South Africans... and the youth is way ahead of the curve in this movement.

As the kids say these days, “we are just out here living our best life”.

ABOUT CHARLES SIBOTO

Charles Siboto is a delightful, youngish person. He firmly believes that kindness matters and cannot abide people who are asshats.

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