This is Naija! Locating the new African diaspora in social media

Mirka Honkanen, Theresa Heyd, Daniel Alcón
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Germany

The sociolinguistics of CMC has increasingly become attuned to notions of place and space and their role in digital language use, in a reaction to societal and technological change. Thus sociolinguistic theory has rediscovered the notion of place through the emergence of globalized sociolinguistics and its entailments such as glocal appropriations of once regionally anchored varieties. Even more so, the study of CMC has moved away from early-day notions of communication in a purely virtual, delocalized ‘cyberspace’ through the emergence of social media and technological aspects such as mobile devices, ubiquitous computing and GPS tagging.

Within this framework, it is particularly interesting to explore how diasporic communities treat this newfound sense of place, in particular in their digital language use. This topic is explored here with regard to the New African Diaspora, a community with increasing relevance, self-awareness, and a strong presence in digital media. How do members of this new diaspora navigate notions of place and space in their CMC practices? How does Africa figure – as an imagined place, a symbolic provider of semiotic material, a real place for travel, family, friends? How does it mesh with the local anchoring to the diasporic place, e.g. the American environment? How does the Internet as a ‘third place’ fit in?

These questions are addressed here through the analysis of two Nigeria-based datasets, namely a large corpus based on the discussion forum nairaland.com, and the Nigerian diasporic community on Tumblr. These platforms embody the gradual emergence of social media, and thus provide ample evidence of an increasing semiotic multimodality in spatialized discourse, from strongly textual resources, such as narratives of belonging, to highly diverse audio/visual repertoires. The work presented here tracks, compares and analyzes these forms of representation, and thus provides new insights about place and space in the digital diaspora.

Keywords: New African Diaspora, place, Social Media.