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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Linguistic disenfranchisement, minority resistance and language revitalisation: The contributions of ethnolinguistic online communities in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Zimbabwe is a multicultural nation with multiple ethnolinguistic groups. Since 1980, when the country attained its independence from colonial rule, the government has struggled to fit all linguistic and cultural representations in the public domain. This resulted in disenfranchisement and disillusionment of linguistic minorities. However, the subject of ethnicity is sensitive and is to some extent associated with undertones of regionalism and division. Against this background, the disenfranchised linguistic minorities have taken advantage of the liberative potential of social media and are regrouping in the virtual space; in the process forming vibrant ethnolinguistic online communities. This study critically analyses the motivations and purpose of ethnolinguistic online communities on Facebook. This is a netnographic study of 10 purposively selected Facebook groups of linguistic minorities in Zimbabwe. The study is grounded in the concepts such as hegemony, hidden transcripts and alternative media. The findings of the study show that ethnolinguistic online communities provide the disenfranchised linguistic minorities

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This article consolidates their research interest and engagements in indigenous language print, broadcast and digital media.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Politics of language and belonging are contentious issues in post-independence Zimbabwe. The country is characterised by a complex language ecology which comprises multiple ethnolinguistic identities. Discounting English, language use in the public domain exhibits Shona and Ndebele hegemony. Consequently, the marginalised linguistic minorities are disenfranchised. However, debates or studies on ethnicity are often perceived as retrogressive to national integration. Therefore, this study is a contribution to the meagre scholarship on the resistance of linguistic minorities to domination in the context of digital and social media. The study analyses ethnolinguistic online communities on Facebook which consists of geographically dispersed but linguistically and culturally bound members. These online communities function as subaltern counter-publics that contain rejoinders and subversions to the dominant linguistic and cultural representations in the public domain.