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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Rhetoric in Nouchi & French in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Tyler Center for Global Studies

FSU | DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES & LINGUISTICS
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

William Merrix[1]

Dr. Joseph Hellweg[2] & *Dr. Antje Muntendam*[1]

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[1] Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics

[2] Department of Religion

Introduction & Background

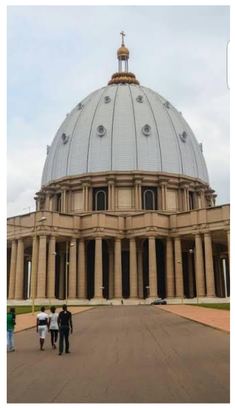
- **Background**
  - Independence in 1960
  - Ethnicity, religion, & regional affiliation shape politics
  - Intensified by the ideology of *ivoirité* (Ivorianness)
  - Instability after Félix Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993
- **Nouchi**
  - Emerging creole language
  - Developed in Abidjan in the late 1970s and 80s
  - Speakers: working-class youth
- **Research Questions**
  - Nouchi's function as a tool of political agency for marginalized Ivorian youth
  - Human rights discourse and the legacy of ivoirité
- **Theoretical Framework**
  - Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991)
- **Hypothesis**
  - Nouchi operates as a form of "political capital"

Methods

- **Fieldwork & Preparation**
  - 6.5 weeks in Abidjan, based at Félix Houphouët-Boigny University (UFHB) (Figure 1)
  - Pre-departure study of Nouchi, Jula, and French
  - On-the-ground tutoring from a Nouchi-speaking translator/research assistant. FSU IRB-approved
- **Tasks & Participants**
  - 13 semi-structured interviews with adult Nouchi speakers, current UFHB students, & former Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI) members
  - 3 focus groups (women, men, and mixed Adjamé adults) discussing language, identity, and human rights
  - Participant observation/shadowing. Expert, convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling.
- **Data Analysis**
  - Bourdieu's framework and Agar's ethnographic method
    - Political Performativity: Discourse exercises power to construct groups and enforce authority
    - Symbolic Capital and Power: Non-material resources function as forms of power
  - Performed on discourse: Stories, examples, personal histories, social/physical media and participant observation



Figure 1



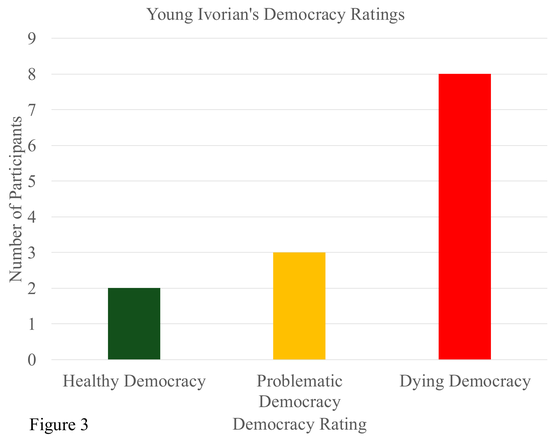


Figure 3

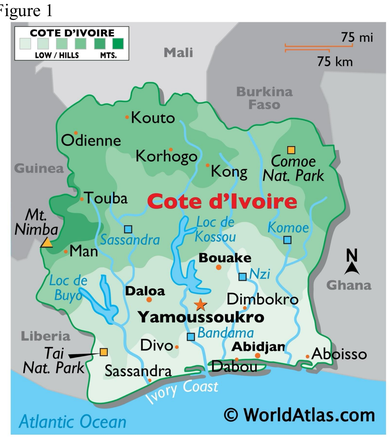


Figure 2



Figure 4



Figure 5

Results

- **Views on Democracy**
  - Respondents overwhelmingly described Ivorian democracy as "dying" or "problematic" (Figure 3)
- **Ethnic/Religious/Regional Divisions**
  - Matter for individual identity but fade when youth discuss politics as a collective
- **Nouchi political vocabulary**
  - Clusters around specific events/policies rather than abstract concepts
- **Code Switching**
  - Politicians code-switch into Nouchi to build rapport (Figures 4 & 5)
- **Free Speech**
  - Fear of surveillance shapes what people feel safe saying
  - "Personal" and "viral" speech faces the most scrutiny
- **Gender**
  - Only 4 of 34 ministerial posts held by women (17%)
  - Women report exclusion from political discourse
  - Mixed views among women on whether Nouchi's political use and the phrase *droits de l'homme* ("rights of man/human rights") is inclusive

Discussion & Conclusions

- **Nouchi as Political Capital**
  - Marginalized youth invert traditional linguistic/power hierarchies
  - Nouchi's linguistic features make it salient for its use as a reclamation of political agency
- **Politicians**
  - Using Nouchi, signaling its growing legitimacy as a register of political engagement
- **Ethnopolitics**
  - Ivoirité persists individually but is superseded by collective human-rights framing among youth
- **Contributions**
  - Shows how marginalized communities use linguistic innovation to claim political voice with broader relevance for global contexts
  - Advances past literature which debates the centrality of Ivoirité to the country's political instability
- **Future**
  - Pursuing further analysis in an Honor In the Major Thesis

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