

## Vannie Kaap memes: an interview with Samantha Roman

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**Vannie Kaap** memes are super popular on social media.

Cliffordene Norton interviews Samantha Roman about her thesis, entitled: *What Kaaps brings to the table: A sociolinguistic analysis of the intersection between language, food and identity in Vannie Kaap memes.*

Read more about Kaaps in the following *LitNet Akademies* articles:

- **“Moetie rai gammattaal gebrykie”**: Die gebruik en waarde van ’n Tienerkaaps in gedrukte advertensies (Elvis Saal and Joline Blignaut, 2011)
- **Die verrekening van taalvariasie in die prosawerk van Elias P Nel** (Frank Hendricks, 2017)
- **’n Verkenning van taalvariasie in die Afrikaanse poniekoerante *Son en Sondag*** (Elvis Saal, 2017)
- **“Ons skryf soos ons praat”**: Informalisering van geskrewe Afrikaans onder Afrikaanse tieners (Elvis Saal and Donovan Lawrence, 2019)

## What inspired your thesis topic?

With my growing up and living in Bonteheuwel, on the Cape Flats, it never dawned on me what a significant social role food plays in the coloured community.

This all changed when I moved away from the Cape Flats to the northern suburbs of Cape Town. Here, there is no “open door policy” of going to the neighbours to borrow an onion, some sugar or a cup of rice; Muslim neighbours do not come around during the Fast or after Eid to bring homemade *barakat* (blessings), and that one aunty who is known for her koesister on a Sunday after church does not exist in this area.

Here, it is “each to his/her own”. Despite this difference in the two communities and the changes that have occurred over the years, the beloved traditional foods remain unchanged and continue to appear on tables, while recipes are still passed down from generation to generation.

Even though personal histories in the coloured community differ, in my opinion, what ties them together and grounds them are the foods – and the rituals that are linked to the serving thereof – they have in common.

Having the opportunity to travel, I always find that the best way to immerse myself fully in local culinary traditions is by trying the respective foods. Yet, this also serves as a culinary reminder that I am far away from home. I have a great interest in trying these new foods, but, at the same time, there is a longing for something more familiar. I find myself reminiscing about my cultural dishes – the smell, the taste and the image thereof.

After following the *Vannie Kaap* Facebook page, I’ve also noticed the positive response to the memes, especially those related to food. I was once again reminded of how food is an important marker of one’s cultural identity. Together with my passion for language, it was this that sparked my interest in learning how individuals construct their identity through food and talk about food.

## Why does your research focus specifically on the intersection of food, language and identity?

Food is important in every culture, but this couldn’t be truer for the Kaaps community. Whether you’re rich or poor, the celebration of events such as birthdays, weddings, funerals, baptisms or confirmations, whether big or small, is characterised by having food in abundance. Eating and talking are one of the traits we all have in common.

It provides an important link to our heritage. Culturally speaking, food is very important, as it can provide important connections to our families or nations.

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Not only is there a scarcity of studies that view food and language equally; studies that focus on food talk that is used with non-standard varieties of language are even rarer. An additional motivation for this study is that it provides an opportunity not only to record, but also to gain insight into, how Kaaps is used when talking about food.

Due to the stigmatised background of Kaaps, I believe and hope that a present-day study that focuses on food, language and identity will contribute to heightening the status of Kaaps further and broadening its scope.

**Vannie Kaap** is an **online business** (online store and with a store in Canal Walk). It sells various products (such as T-shirts, coffee mugs, notebooks and hoodies), based on their memes. In Christo van der Rheede's 2012 paper, ***Kaaps in fokus-referaat: Ekonomiese bemagtiging deur Kaaps***, he examines economic empowerment through Kaaps. What do you think is the potential for economic empowerment through Kaaps?

I think there is great potential for economic empowerment through Kaaps. This is evident when we look at artists such as YoungstaCPT, a hip hop artist who uses Kaaps in his rap songs, whose following has grown to over 150 000 over the past few years.

There is also an increase in social influencers that use Kaaps: Kaaps cookbooks, Kaaps shows, Kaaps theatre productions, stand-up comedy, and the list goes on. Also, the promotion of Kaaps not only empowers its speakers, but also instills a sense of positive self-image in them, which leads to other indirect forms of economic empowerment.

For example, it advocates curly hair and encourages its speakers to embrace their natural hair. This is even depicted in the *Vannie Kaap* memes that state that "kroes is the new styl". This form of activism challenges previous ideologies, which believed that failing the pencil test during the apartheid era meant that you belonged to an inferior social class.



Currently, this contradicts the trend we see today, as there is even an increase in the commodification of natural hair products, with a whole aisle (such as in Clicks or Dis-Chem) dedicated to products that promote natural hair.

**What is the contribution of Kaaps to the South African heritage?**

Since Kaaps is unique to Cape Town, it contributes to the richness of Cape Town. It also adds to its intangible heritage, with its array of cultural dishes, music, street art and dance.

**Standard Afrikaans is often dismissed as the language of the oppressor, and Afrikaaps is considered a variant of Afrikaans. What is your opinion on the future of Afrikaaps?**

Kaaps has always been perceived as a marginalised variety of Afrikaans. I think that derogatory labelling of Kaaps as *plat taal* and/or *kombuistaal* and standard Afrikaans as *suiwer* (“pure”) is one of the factors that has led to Kaaps speakers being viewed as half-skilled, shufflingly submissive, and incapable of fully understanding or appreciating the complexities of this variety. People feel ashamed of speaking Kaaps to someone who addresses them in standard Afrikaans.

Therefore, the increase in the promotion of Kaaps on platforms such as the *Vannie Kaap* Facebook page; artists such as Brasse Vannie Kaap, Jack Parow, Emo Adams and YoungstaCPT; theatre productions, namely *Joe Barber*; musicals like *Ghoema* and *District Six*; and the comedy shows of Marc Lottering, have all acted as a catalyst in heightening the status of Kaaps, slowly changing this narrative.

There has also been an increase in Kaaps used in schools as a form of social activism, such as with the *Heal the Hood* project, which utilises breakdancing and hip hop as tools to encourage youth to break away from the gang culture.

Kaaps has also become more visible in universities, particularly Stellenbosch University, as Kaaps phrases appear on benches.

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I think that these forms of language activism have become a powerful form of social mobility. More people are starting to identify with and embrace the language.

This shows that Afrikaans is by no means just a language which oppresses or is oppressed (as common discourses around the language seem to suggest), but, in the form of Kaaps, it is also a language in which people laugh, have fun with language, reconstruct new identities for themselves, and perform activist roles to resist ideologies of shame.

***Vannie Kaap’s* Facebook responded positively to your thesis. How did the academy receive your research?**

My research findings were quite interesting and different to what I initially thought I would find. This shows that there is still much to discover about Kaaps in present times. The department reacted well to my thesis, and was pleased that I could contribute to the field and broaden the scope on Kaaps.



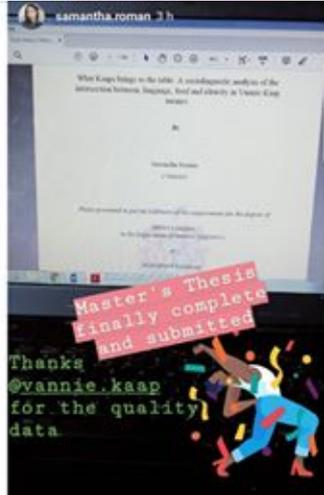
**Vannie Kaap**

about 10 months ago

Congrats to these two for completing and submitting their master's and honours thesis.

Samantha of Stellenbosch University: "What Kaaps brings to the table: A sociolinguistic analysis of the intersection between language, food and identity in Vannie Kaap memes."

Alexandro of Free State University: "The emancipation of the Coloured: The reshaping of the Coloured identity through memes."... [See more](#)



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### Is there more research to do on Afrikaaps? Would you like to take your research further?

I am considering completing a PhD. I think a study of a much broader scope would reveal a lot more about Kaaps. I would also like to focus on linguistic landscapes where Kaaps cuisine is sold, such as Aneesa's, The Golden Dish, Miriam's Kitchen, etc.

This could elicit more underlying themes, and gain a broader knowledge of Kaaps and how it is used to talk about and identify with food.

Kaaps has a rich history, and there is still so much to uncover. Therefore, for prospective studies, I think that conducting research in virtually any aspect of Kaaps – whether it is on the use of Kaaps in music or theatre production as a means of social activism, the way in which Kaaps is used as a tool to challenge political issues, or the use of Kaaps in schools and universities and so forth – would contribute greatly to the field.

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Also read

## Kaaps in fokus-referaat: Ekonomiese bemagtiging deur Kaaps

"Die ontginning van Kaaps se ekonomiese potensiaal is nie 'n hersenskim nie."



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## Kaaps en (her)standaardisering



"In die ontstaansgeskiedenis van Standaardafrikaans is 'oorleg met alle gebruikers' kennelik 'n leemte wat 'n hoë prioriteit moet wees by die hantering van taalnormering vorentoe."



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## "Jol", "antie", "pelle": omgangstaal in poniekoerante



"Kodevermenging in poniekoerante dien nie net as 'n aanduider van die veranderinge in die sosiopolitieke dinamika van die Afrikaanse spraakgemeenskap nie, maar het ook die potensiaal om onder lede van die spraakgemeenskap 'n bewustheid van hierdie veranderinge te skep."



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## LitNet Akademies-resensie-essay: *Kaaps in fokus*



"*Kaaps in fokus* gaan ten slotte oor mense, want '[d]ie soppangheid van Kaaps is in die laaste instansie nie net 'n linguistiese kwessie nie, maar wesenlik een van die waardigheid van alle sprekers van Afrikaans' (Willemse, 81). En dit is juis

hierdie kenmerk van *Kaaps in fokus* wat dit so 'n tydige en relevante publikasie maak."



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