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**IMPACT OF SHENG DIALECT ON THE ENGLISH AND SWAHILI
TEACHING IN KENYA; A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**



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**IMPACT OF SHENG DIALECT ON THE ENGLISH AND SWAHILI TEACHING IN
KENYA; A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Abstract

Purpose: Sheng is a blend of two words derived from Kiswahili and English. It is a code created by young people as a badge of identity, also designed to exclude adults. Sheng morphosyntactic structures can highly affect the student's competence in Kiswahili and English, which is an examinable subject by the Kenya National Examination Council. The purpose of the study therefore, is to evaluate the impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya.

Methodology: The paper used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes and to extract knowledge gaps.

Conclusion: Sheng code interferes with standard Kiswahili and English and hence it has negative effects on teaching of formal education. The study identified that learners have continued to make grammatically Sheng-related errors that hinder their proficiency in English and Swahili. The study found out that, inadequate exposure to Standard English and Swahili and the linguistic backgrounds of the learners make them to evolve communication strategies in which Sheng-formation processes play a major role.

Recommendations: The study recommends educators to discourage the learners from participating in the discourse that is likely to influence their language competence. School administrators can come up with school-based language policies where certain days of the week are dedicated to communicating in Kiswahili and the students made to conform to it.

Keywords: *sheng dialect, English and Swahili teaching*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Kiswahili is learnt and taught as a second language (L2) in the multilingual and multiethnic setting of Kenya where indigenous languages show great linguistic diversity (Whiteley 1974). Kiswahili is compulsory at the primary and secondary school levels. It is examined at the end of the four-year secondary school course and is a key determinant in the course placement in the higher institutions of learning. Its teaching is based on a prescriptive syllabus.

English language on the other hand acts as a means of teaching from primary school level to the university in Kenya. It is also the language of teaching from primary school level to the university in Kenya. It is also the language of examinations, the official language, the regional language of communication in East Africa, and international language.

Mbaabu and Nzuga (2003) state that the term Sheng is a blend of two words derived from Kiswahili and English. Kiswahili contributes 'sh' while English contributes 'eng' to form the term Sheng. Kaviti (2013) concurs with Mbaabu by saying that Sheng is a blended form derived from the compounds 'Swahili and English. Three suggestions have been advanced to explain the origin of Sheng.

One claim suggests that Sheng emerged from a complex multilingual and multicultural situation coupled with housing problems that were prevalent in Nairobi's middle-class estates in the early 1970s. Mbaabu (2003) supports this idea by arguing that Sheng was started by the urban youth as a secret code to communicate among themselves. Inadequate housing among the urban dwellers curtailed their freedom and personal privacy. This compelled the youth to take advantage of the multilingual situation to secretly pass messages amongst themselves while keeping the adults in the dark. Arguing from this perspective, Sheng is a code created by young people as a badge of identity, also designed to exclude adults. It is used as a shibboleth to distinguish those who belong to the group and those who do not. Its growth is attributed to the need by young people for an alternative lingua franca.

The second postulation was put forward by Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997). They claim that Sheng originated from the deviant behavior of the youth living in the near-slum estates of Nairobi's Eastland's areas. Since the wider community did not approve of their behavior, they devised a code of communication that was understandable only by its members, known as wakora in Kiswahili. This group conducted its illegal business under the immunity provided by Sheng's incomprehensibility among the other members of society. The third suggestion was advanced by Brian Tetley (1984). He postulates that Sheng is an amalgamation of various Kenyan languages, brought about by a communication need by the ethnically heterogeneous urban youth. Kenya has roughly forty-two languages that are extensively used in various socio-cultural settings. This claim tends to classify Sheng under pidgin, an idea that has been disputed by several researchers.

Sheng has not attained the full status of a language due to the following deficiencies. It has no recognized dictionary or group of dictionaries, which embody standardized spelling. This is a resultant feature of its amorphous linguistic structure; it has no recognized record of grammatical forms and rules which guides its usage and it has no standard system of pronunciation.

During the colonial era, African languages were placed second to English in the order of importance. Africans were taught a minimal grammar to serve the interests of the colonial administration. These included rendering manual, clerical, religious or technical services. Moreover, the administration went ahead to propose an educational system in which the language of instruction was vernacular. English was deemed too complex and sophisticated for Africans (Chimerah 1998) Africans reacted sharply to the enactment of vernacular schools and other restrictions. They, therefore, created the "independent schools," where the medium of instruction was to be English. To them, the move by the colonial administration to use only vernacular in African schools was to maintain the local people in relative ignorance for better subservience to the British. The language conflict was born.

Shortly after Kenya joined the ranks of free nations, English was adopted as the Official Language and Kiswahili the lingua franca. Eleven years later, in 1974, Kiswahili became the national language. This meant that the language of instruction in all institutions of learning was to be

English. However, in lower primary classes teaching could be done in Kiswahili in urban centers, or in indigenous languages in the rural settings.

Sheng morphosyntactic structures can highly affect the student's competence in Kiswahili and English, which is an examinable subject by the Kenya National Examination Council. Most people in Kenya are on the opinion that Sheng code interferes with standard Kiswahili and English and hence it has negative effects on teaching of formal education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, linguists and stake holders in the education sector have expressed concern over the falling standards of English and Kiswahili performance in the national examination. While the use of Sheng as a communication code was initially confined to the urban environment, its use has spread to the rural areas due to increased social mobility and interaction. There are two varieties of urban youth codes, Sheng and Engsh. While Sheng bases its structure on grammatical structure on Kiswahili, Engsh matrix language is English. Sheng is however, more widespread while Engsh is confined to the affluent areas of Nairobi. This widespread use of Sheng has raised significant linguistic and pedagogical questions associated with the attainment of English and Kiswahili proficiency. Most of the linguistic difficulties of learners have been investigated, but the area of the influence of Sheng on Standard Kiswahili and English remains unexplored. It is for this reason that the study sought to investigate the influence of Sheng dialect on English and Swahili teaching in Kenya.

Despite the efforts made to ensure the attainment of curriculum goals, pre-research observation has revealed that learners have continued to make grammatically Sheng-related errors that hinder their proficiency. The findings were corroborated by reports from the Kenya Examinations Council and print media. The occurrence of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching of learners and its obvious effect in the attainment of Kiswahili and English proficiency remains understudied in the existing literature. This study investigated the impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is believed that the end results of this research will contribute greatly to the developers of curriculum in development and advancement of English and Swahili for example helping them to identify the impact of sheng dialect on teaching of the subjects and performance of learners and the strategies of dealing with the spread of sheng dialect among learners. The results also will form the literature to be viewed by other future researchers, academicians and scholars who doing the research work in the same field thus benefiting them because they can use it and it will guide them to identify gaps.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature on Interlanguage and Error Analysis Theory

This study was guided by Interlanguage theory as proposed by Selinker (1972). The five successive steps of error analysis were used in the analysis. The term interlanguage was elaborated by Selinker (1972) as the separate linguistic system, which is hypothesize-able from the observed output (target like and non-target like) of learners' attempted production of the target language. According to Selinker (1975), the learners' language need not correspond with the target language since its evolution manifests characteristic differences. He observed that this learner language is a dynamic variable and is constantly changing.

Nemser (1971) and Dickerson (1975) studied the dynamic and variable characteristics of learner language and concluded that the observed continuity in change results to a series of interlocking systems. Elsewhere, Corder (1981) introduced the notion of developmental continuum while Bickerton (1975) and de-Camp (1971) have used the term 'linguistic continua' to refer to interlanguage as dynamic and variable. They suggest that the learner language should be viewed as being ordered, hierarchical and systematic

In this study, the use of Sheng related structures appears to be consistent with stipulations made by Corder P. and Selinker L. that focus on the active psycholinguistic processes of interlanguage. Dulay et al., (1972) elaborate these processes as the subconscious process, which learners use to organize the language input according to the rules in order to construct, understand and generate sentences. This is what Dulay et al., (1972) summarizes as the creative construction hypothesis and it was relevant in guiding the investigation in this study. English and Swahili learners creatively construct meaningful Sheng related structures in which they communicate while generating new sentences. It was the objective of this study to identify the impacts of the Sheng dialect in the learning of English and Swahili.

By making use of insights and principles explicitly stated in the interlanguage theory, this study was able to provide principled explanations into the active Sheng formation process, which in turn guided approaches that can be applied in the teaching of English and Swahili. The five successive steps of error analysis, namely, identification, description, explanation, evaluation and correction were used in analyzing the data. This study employed the Error Analysis approach as espoused by Corder (1971).

2.2 Literature on Sheng

Miguda-Attyang, J. (2003), investigates the attitude of Sheng as an emerging language among the people of Nairobi. The study reveals that the attitude towards Sheng is largely negative. Sheng speakers are thought of as incompetent in both Kiswahili and English. Another very important observation that Miguda makes is that Kiswahili has a very important role as a national language and the lingua franca for the Kenyan population. Its role in unifying the forty-two stable codes, Webb & Kembo-Sure (1992) in Kenya cannot be underscored. It is with the same concern that she mentions that Kiswahili is taught as a subject and pupils must pass in it at both primary and secondary school national examinations. The researcher's view calls for a practical step in the education sector. One such step is an in-depth examination of the effect of Sheng on Standard Kiswahili; and mother tongue interference. It is on the basis of this study that recommendations will be made on how to improve on the teaching and learning process. The point of divergence is

that Miguda-Attyang's study is in the field of sociolinguistics whereas this study is in the field of applied linguistics.

The phonological and morphological studies that have been carried out concur that though Sheng borrows heavily from Kiswahili and sparingly from other local and foreign languages, it is modified to fit into Sheng morphosyntactic structure. The studies, according to Ogechi (2002), do not explicitly show how Sheng structure conforms to or differs from Kiswahili type concord. He identifies other languages that fall in the same league with Sheng referring to them as urban youth languages. These are Iscamto and Tsotsitaal in South Africa, Indoubil in Ivory Coast, Pidgin English in Nigeria, Luyaaye in Uganda, Kiswakinge in Tanzania, Lingala ya Bayankee in Congo and Camfranglas in Cameroon, among others. He claims that some of these languages are used for wider communication besides their sociological function. Their fluidity, however, remains a big challenge even to researchers. Sheng is an unstable code just like the above-mentioned codes. The idea of publishing in Sheng faces a lot of challenges since the rise of new lexemes will render the previous publications redundant. Nevertheless, there are few publications that mainly targets the youth. A case in point is the Kwani publications. It starts in urban areas before spreading to rural areas. By the time it gets to the rural areas, further distortions and modifications will have been made. It is this view and the information on the historical development of Sheng that guided the researcher on the sample choice.

2.3 Sheng Dialect on English and Swahili teaching

According to Selinker (1972), some rules, items and subsystems arise from identifiable items in training procedures. Teachers and particularly the young teachers can inadvertently impart defective rules or deviant constructions in their learners. If a learner is taking part in formal instruction, some errors result from misunderstanding caused by faulty teaching or poor gradation of teaching items. As an example of this, Jack Richards (1974) suggests that many teachers or materials place special emphasis on the present continuous form in English. Their purpose is to counteract the fact that if a learner possesses no equivalent of form in their mother tongue, they may be inclined to use it less frequently than they should. This extra emphasis may have the undesired effect of making the learner overuse the continuous form, at the expense of the simple

present. With regard to Sheng and Kiswahili, to reach a conclusion of this nature requires a very different data elicitation technique. It also calls for a lengthier period and an in-depth study of the learner's sociological environments

2.4 Empirical review

Kangai, (2019) conducted a research study that sought to establish the reasons behind poor performance in integrated English curriculum at KCSE level in public secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya. The study was informed by Chomsky's Input Theory. The research design for the study was descriptive and the target population was the public secondary schools within Laikipia County, Kenya. Specifically, the research targeted all the principals, teachers, and students in the schools who totaled to 5,161 respondents. Purposive sampling was utilized to sample principals and teachers, while simple random sampling was utilized to sample the students giving a total sample of 298 respondents. Questionnaires and Interview schedules were used as research instruments. The study established that availability of teaching and learning resources, teachers training and teacher-student relationship positively influenced the teaching and learning of the IEC and students' academic performance. The study also established that the school management had a significant moderating role between effective teaching and learning of the IEC and the students' academic performance at KCSE level. The study concluded that timely and adequate allocation of teaching and learning resources enhances students' performance as it is the case to teacher student relationship and teachers training. The study recommended that the government through the relevant stakeholders should ensure adequate resource allocation, proper time for teachers training and encourage student-teacher relationship to enhance performance in the IEC.

Afandi, (2018) carried out a study to examine the teaching strategies used in teaching oral skills in English language and their effects on pupil's performance among lower primary school pupils. The study used descriptive research design. The study employed stratified simple random sampling technique in selecting the sample size for the schools, classes and teachers of English giving final sample sizes of 10 schools, 100 teachers and 10 classes. Questionnaire, interview schedules, observation schedules were used to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative data

were collected and analyzed by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), content analysis respectively. The study established that textbooks and newspaper/magazine cuttings were used as the preferred teaching and learning material in teaching oral skills in English. It was further established that most schools lacked a variety of other learning materials and resources to enable them effectively teach oral skills. The study established that there was a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and the teaching of oral skills in English. Among the challenges facing the teaching of oral skills in English, the study revealed that the teaching and learning of oral skills in English was greatly hampered by mother tongue influence, lack of constant practice in the use of oral skills and inadequate textbooks of oral skills in English. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teachers should design more interactive oral strategies such as role play, reciting of poems and instructional activities that allow students to participate in the learning process. Moreover, teachers of English should try and advance their teaching skills through attending more professional trainings and that they should adopt a learner centered method of teaching to allow for active participation of students in order to encourage them to communicate effectively and intelligibly.

Kariuki, (2016) conducted an investigation into the adoption and use of sheng for advertising and public awareness among profit and nonprofit organizations in Nairobi, Kenya. The study identifies and analyzes the meanings of Sheng lexical items and phrases used in advertisements in Nairobi Central Business District and then discusses the linguistic strategies found in the advertisements. The researcher further discusses the communicative impact of selected Sheng adverts. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study targeted the marketing or advertising officers of selected businesses and the consumers who buy and use products advertised in Sheng. Data for this research was collected through structured interviews, questionnaires, observation notes and content analysis of advertisement materials such as brochures and billboards. It was then analyzed, and summarized using qualitative methods. The analyzed data is described in a narrative. The research findings reveal that: different linguistic strategies are used in the advertisements, Sheng adverts carry multiple meanings, and the adverts have both a direct and an indirect purpose. The direct purpose is easily recognizable and emphasizes the benefits of the advertised brand while the indirect has a hidden meaning that is not easily recognizable. This hidden message includes

information on the costs and other liabilities to the consumer of the advertised brand and how the advertiser stands to benefit from selling the brand.

2.5 Research Gaps

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the issue discussed. For instance, Kariuki (2016) conducted an investigation into the adoption and use of sheng for advertising and public awareness among profit and nonprofit organizations in Nairobi, Kenya. The study targeted the marketing or advertising officers of selected businesses and the consumers who buy and use products advertised in Sheng. Data for this research was collected through structured interviews, questionnaires, observation notes and content analysis of advertisement materials such as brochures and billboards. It was then analyzed, and summarized using qualitative methods. The analyzed data is described in a narrative. The research findings reveal that: different linguistic strategies are used in the advertisements, Sheng adverts carry multiple meanings, and the adverts have both a direct and an indirect purpose. However, our study focused on impact of sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya.

Secondly, a methodological gap can be identified from the research, for example, Afandi, (2018) carried out a study to examine the teaching strategies used in teaching oral skills in English language and their effects on pupil's performance among lower primary school pupils. The study used descriptive research design. The study employed stratified simple random sampling technique in selecting the sample size for the schools, classes and teachers of English giving final sample sizes of 10 schools, 100 teachers and 10 classes. Questionnaire, interview schedules, observation schedules were used to collect data. The study established that there was a significant relationship between teachers' qualification and the teaching of oral skills in English. Among the challenges facing the teaching of oral skills in English, the study revealed that the teaching and learning of oral skills in English was greatly hampered by mother tongue influence, lack of constant practice in the use of oral skills and inadequate textbooks of oral skills in English. On the other hand, our study employed desk study review methodology.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya. Three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on the articles that related to the impact of Sheng dialect on the English and Swahili teaching in Kenya which was split into top key words. After an in- depth search into the top key words (sheng dialect, English and Swahili teaching), the researcher arrived at 3 articles that were suitable for analysis.

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4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Sheng morphosyntactic structures can highly affect the student's competence in Kiswahili and English, which is an examinable subject by the Kenya National Examination Council. Most people in Kenya are on the opinion that Sheng code interferes with standard Kiswahili and English and hence it has negative effects on teaching of formal education. The study identified that learners have continued to make grammatically Sheng- related errors that hinder their proficiency in English and Swahili. The study found out that, inadequate exposure to Standard English and

Swahili and the linguistic backgrounds of the learners make them to evolve communication strategies in which Sheng- formation processes play a major role.

4.2 Recommendations

The study recommends educators to discourage the learners from participating in the discourse that is likely to influence their language competence. School administrators can come up with school-based language policies where certain days of the week are dedicated to communicating in Kiswahili and the students made to conform to it. The Ministry of Education should encourage the culture of drama and speech competition in Standard English and Swahili in order to give the students opportunities for language practice and generally all stakeholders in the education sector should assist in ensuring that its usage is as stipulated in the syllabus. The knowledge of language form and structure, and the oral communication ability should be encouraged.

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