

African Languages in Business Communication in Eldoret Town: A Case of Languages Determined to Live

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Abstract

This study aims at unraveling roles played by Kenyan languages in business communication in Kenya's town of Eldoret despite the fact that the languages face discrimination by existing language policy. It also sets out to investigate factors that affect language choice between business interlocutors in the town. Kenya has two official languages, English and Kiswahili, which are the only languages of wider communication. The language policy only defines the role of the two languages in communication and education. This means that the remaining languages which are not languages of wider communication do not have clearly defined roles by the existing language policies. This paper sets out to investigate any roles played by these languages in the urban environment of Eldoret town in Kenya. Ten businesses were purposefully sampled within the central business district of Eldoret town. Conversations between traders and their customers recorded and analyzed. The results indicated that many languages that had no roles as languages of wider communication played an essential role in business communication.

Keywords: Communication, business, language and development

Introduction

This study aims at unraveling roles played by African languages in business communication in Eldoret town in Kenya despite their discrimination by existing language policies. It also sets out to investigate factors that affect language choice between business interlocutors in the town. Eldoret town is in the Rift Valley region of Kenya, in the middle of the Kalenjin community which speaks Kalenjin dialects. The town can be referred to as a multilingual town due to the many communities which inhabit the town (Toboso 2014.)

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The town has many communities which speak many different languages. These communities include Kikuyu, Abaluyia, Luo, Maasai and Kalenjin (Toboso 2014). Other communities include Somali, Meru, Samburu, Kamba, Turkana, Indians and Kisii. Members of these communities live in the town and its environs for various economic reasons. Businesses in the town are owned by people from different communities who speak different mother-tongues. Due to this, languages of wider communication which are English and Kiswahili are expected to become the medium of communication in cross-ethnic business communication. It is due to this reason that this study set out to investigate if there are any significant roles played by languages that are not used for wider communication in this urban situation, and factors that influence choice of languages by business interlocutors.

Not many investigations have been carried out about the role and relevance of Kenyan languages in urban settings in the quickly globalizing world. Not much information is available about factors that affect choice of language in urban settings; information that could play a key role in language maintenance and language policy in this highly multilingual setting. Many African countries like Kenya do not have comprehensive language policies that take care of their multilingual situations, therefore leaving affected languages to fight for space in the linguistic landscape and define their own roles. Kenya has more than 42 languages whose roles in the society are not well defined. Due to this reason, some of the African languages in Kenya like Suba and Elmolo are under threat of extinction.

Many writers have discussed the role of language in business communication and development (see Selmer 2000, Domke-Damonte 2001, Feely and Herzing 2002, CILT 2005, Jaster 2008, Mirjalisa 2009, Toboso 2014.) Many of these discussions have centered on language and language barriers in Europe, U.S.A and Asian countries. Some studies have comprehensively discussed linguistic challenges in healthcare in U.S.A (see Woloshin 1995, Perkins 1999, Bowen 2001 and Lee 2003.) Not many studies have been done about roles of languages and linguistic challenges in African countries like Kenya which are highly multilingual. Many of the available discussions have looked at the role of language in development in general and do not address the role of particular African languages (see Mazui and Mazui 1995, Luoch and Ogutu 2002, Koul 2006, Bamgbose 2007, 2011, Wolff 2006, Chumbow 2009.) Other studies have looked at language policy in Education in Kenya (see Kembo-Sure and Ogechi 2006 and Kembo-Sure 2009.)

It is an established fact that economic, social and political development of a society depends on effective communication. Establishment of a successful business depends on effective linguistic strategies aimed at realizing efficient communication between the services and commodity providers and customers. In a multilingual society like Kenya, it is difficult for a person who cannot communicate in the languages of wider communication to establish a business in an urban area or urban suburbs, or provide services to urban dwellers due to the fact that urban dwellers in Kenya come from diverse ethnic backgrounds with diverse mother tongues. Successful business ventures rely on successful communication. That is the reason Selmer (2000) and Toboso (2014) argue that the success of any business investment depends on successful communication, which depends on availability of a common medium of communication between traders and their customers. They opine that the absence of such medium can cause barriers in communication which can have a negative impact on business. Toboso (2014) discusses linguistic barriers in Eldoret town in Kenya and argues that there are various language barriers in the town which have a negative impact on business. Domke-Damonte (2001) while contributing to this discourse posits that the greatest challenge facing businesses in an environment where traders and customers speak different languages is language barrier. The exchange of commodities and services which is the essence of trade depends on availability of a language that can be used by all participants (Mijaliza 2009).

With a total of over 40 languages (See Webb and Kembo-Sure 2000) spoken by 40 million people, Kenyan has a high linguistic diversity. This means that issues of trade can be complicated in areas where different ethnic communities live and interact through trade. Low English proficiency levels complicate issues of inter-ethnic communication in Kenya. This means that Kenyans with low English proficiency levels and little understanding of Kiswahili, the national language are likely to face linguistic barriers in their effort to interact in business. This is the reason Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000) propose a policy that will ensure the involvement of all African languages in the effort to attain development in Africa. In their opinion, lack of involvement of all African languages in development can have a negative effect on the speakers of these languages about important national issues. Trade is an issue of national importance considering the fact that it has a direct bearing on national development.

There are many other scholars who have expressed their views about the role of language in development. Feely and Herzing (2002) argue that research has shown that British companies dealing in international business considered linguistic barriers as the greatest threat to their engagement in international business. This testifies to the fact that in business, issues of language can not be overlooked. Bamgbose (2007) has also contributed to this discourse. He argues that the business, banking and mining sectors in Africa are dominated by the use of foreign languages a fact that discriminates against millions of Africans who can not speak these languages. This further distances them from issues of economic development. Jaster (2008), while contributing to this issue argues that many multinational companies have incurred losses due to linguistic challenges. He posits that it is now widely agreed that apart from English, other world languages need to be empowered and used in international communication. From the foregoing, it is evident that language is an important factor in the success of any business. There are many other scholars who have contributed to this topic (See Alexander 2007, Brock-Utne 2009, Chumbow 2009, Harries 2007, 2010). These writers agree that issues of language are key to development.

This research was governed by the Communication Accommodation theory. This theory was developed Giles and associates in (1973). It was later elaborated by various writers such as Taylor & Bourhis (1973), Street and Giles (1982), Giles et al (1987) and Street (1991). It focuses on the circumstances that dictate people's change of speech characteristics and languages so as make them similar to that of interlocutors. Essentially, it explains similarities and differences in linguistic characteristics between conversants, including pauses, length of sentences and choice of similar dialects and languages (Giles et al. 1987, Street & Giles 1982.)

Methodology

This research was carried out in ten businesses in Eldoret town. The businesses were purposefully sampled so as to help us realize our objectives. The businesses under this study were three pharmacies, three agrovets, two traditional medicine street businesses, one fish business and one grocery. We sampled businesses owned by speakers of different Kenyan languages. The businesses were distributed as follows: 2 Kalenjin speakers, 2 Oluluyia speakers, 2 Kikuyu speakers, 2 Maasai speakers and 2 Dholuo speakers. The three agrovets belonged to a Kalenjin, a Luyia and a Kikuyu. The pharmacies were divided in a similar way. Both traditional medicine businesses belonged to Maasai speakers. The fish and grocery businesses belonged to Dholuo speakers.

Methods used in data collection were recording of conversations, interviews and participant observation. The traders and their sellers helped us to collect data after teaching them how to safely handle and record conversations by using the digital recorder. We also interviewed all business owners and sellers in all businesses except three that did not have sellers. We recorded 333 conversations which we analyzed with the help of sellers who helped us record the conversations and nine friends, specialists in linguistics, who were speakers of various Kenyan languages. We used the sellers because some of the conversations were in languages which we could not understand.

Results and Discussion

The essence of any business is to exchange goods and services. This exchange which takes place between traders and their customers requires successful communication. This is the reason Mirjalisa (2009) argues that the exchange of goods and services between traders and their customers can only be made successful through a common medium of communication. It emerged through this study that language is a key factor in business development, and that both, languages of wider communication and those of narrow communication play important roles in business communication in Eldoret town, despite the fact that this is an urban environment where the two lingua-franca (English and Kiswahili) were expected to play main roles in communication. The fact that these languages play an important role in business communication, despite the fact that they are not languages of wider communication means that the languages have defined roles for themselves in their effort to survive.

This investigation realized that language and communication partnership is a key element in business success and growth. This means that customers and traders require a common medium of communication for successful business endeavour. This common medium may be through one or various languages that work in collaboration to aid business growth. In the absence of such a language, business communication is likely to encounter linguistic challenges that can affect the growth of business. This is the reason Toboso (2014) encountered linguistic barriers in business communications in Eldoret town in 6.3% of communications. The absence of such linguistic environment may also be expensive to businesses as they may be forced to come up with linguistic strategies to counter the barriers.

Such strategies may include employment of multilingual speakers, use of interpreters and learning of customer's languages and accents. However, in multilingual situations, multilingualism itself can be part of the solution as strategies such as code switching and borrowing of words which are multilingual based strategies may be employed effectively through what can be referred to as language collaboration. However, the result of this study indicates that all communication witnessed through observation and recording required language. This means that 100% of business relied on language-communication partnership for success.

This study noted the use of 10 languages in the businesses studied. These languages include Kiswahili, English, Kalanjin dialects, Oluluyia dialects, Maasai, Dholuo, Somali, kikuyu, Gujarati and Sheng. This result shows that businesses under study did not rely on the official languages only. In Kenya, the official languages are English and Kiswahili. It was noted that although the two official languages were widely used in business conversations, the non official languages also played a fundamental role in successful business conversation. In the following section, we look at the languages used and their roles in business communication.

Kenya's Local Languages in Business Communication

There are 42 languages in Kenya, according to Kembo –sure (2000). This study realized that African languages in Kenya played a key role in business communication in Eldoret town. This is because 96.4% (N = 321) of conversations were either in local Kenyan languages or had local language vocabulary. It is only 3.6% (N=12) of conversations that were not in local languages and had no local languages vocabulary. Bellow, we discuss the various Kenyan languages used.

Use of Kiswahili

According to Momanyi (2009) Kiswahili is an African language spoken by 80% of Kenyans. It is Kenya's national language and co-official language with English. This language is spoken in various other countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. Many South Sudanese who have lived in Kenya can also speak the language. As Noordin (2001) argues, this language plays a fundamental role as the lingua-franca of the East African region. This means that it is a language of wider communication.

Our study indicates that Kiswahili was the most widely used languages in business conversations. According to this study, 81.9% (N=273) of conversations were carried out in Kiswahili or had Kiswahili vocabulary. This language was used in monolingual, code mixing and code switching patterns. The text bellow gives evidence about the use of Kiswahili.

- (1) **Customer:** Una dawa ya macho? (*Do you have eye ointment?*)
Customer: Nasikia uchungu sana. (*They are very painful.*)
Trader: Chukua Probeta, ni mia. (*Take Probeta, it costs one hundred shillings.*)
Customer: Ni mzuri kwa macho? (*Is it effective?*)
Trader: Hii ni mzuri sana. (*Very effective.*)
Customer: Si unifanyie sabini? (*Make it eighty shillings.*)
Trader: Hiyo ndiyo bei Mamy. (*That is the only price my mother.*)

This study noted that Kiswahili played a major role in enhancing business communication in various ways. First, it played a major role in enhancing cordial relations between traders and their customers, a fact that plays a key role in bringing about future contacts between traders and their customers that are fundamental in successful business. Second, the language played a key role in sharing of information between traders and customers especially in pharmacies and agrovets. For example, it played a major role in helping the traders to share information with customers about good and effective medicine.

In this example, the customer required Kiswahili language to make an enquiry from the trader about the effectiveness of the medicine proposed by the trader. The trader convinces the customer through Kiswahili language that the medicine is effective. Kiswahili language also played an important role in helping the interlocutors to carry out price negotiation. It also was key in helping traders such as pharmacists to give instructions to customers about the use of medicine, chemicals and other commodities acquired in their shops. This language was used in all the ten targeted businesses. The prevalent use of this language was due to the fact that Kiswahili is a language of wider communication and as Myers-Scotton (1993) argues, when language users realize that there is a language which can serve communication needs of users of various mother tongues, these people are likely to learn that language.

Use of Kalenjin Dialects

Kalenjin is a language spoken by the Kalenjin community which lives in the rift valley region of Kenya. Kipkorir (1985) notes that the language has eight dialects. Eldoret town is geographically situated in the middle of this community. Use of Kalenjin dialects in this urban environment testifies to the fact that languages that are not used for wider communication in Kenya still play a fundamental role in business communication. Our study shows that 19.5% (N=65) of conversations in the sampled businesses were carried out in these dialects or had temporary borrowed vocabulary from these languages. The conversations were carried out in various patterns such as monolingual (4.8%, N=16), bilingual (11.1%, N=37) and trilingual patterns (3.6%, N=12).

The agrovets under this study had the largest number of conversations carried out by use of these dialects. The reason is that many Kalenjins are farmers who frequently visit agrovets for farm equipments, chemicals, seeds, fertilizers and other requirements. It is important to note that the use of Kalenjin dialects was not limited to businesses owned by Kalenjin speakers. We also encountered use of the language in businesses owned by Kikuyu, Oluluyia, Maasai and Dholuo speakers. This means that its use was not only influenced by its mother-tongue speakers. The wide use of Kalenjin dialects may have been influenced by lack of fluency in English and Kiswahili, languages of wider communication, which forced customers to use their mother tongues which they speak fluently and confidently. It may also have resulted from the need to stay within an in-group during business transactions. The proximity of Eldoret town to the Kalenjin community may have also contributed to the wide use of the languages. Look at this example:

(4) Customer: Kale ii amache kerichot ab kineet ab tetaa. Yo kikeei chogo komagu korotik. (*I want medicine for the treatment of mastitis. The cow bleeds upon milking.*)

Trader: Kerichot noto kegure Multijeet. (*Its medicine is called Multijeet.*)

Customer: Ialdae nee? (*What is the price?*)

Trader: Siling' sitini. (*Sixty shillings.*)

The example above shows that this language, as is the case with other African languages, has the ability to enhance business communication. The problems of vocabulary led to borrowing of words by some customers from Kalenjin dialects, which were used in Kiswahili conversations as is the case in the following text.

(5) Customer: Iko *ng'endek*, mbegu? (*Do you have beans seeds?*)

Trader: Gani? (*Which type?*)

Customer: Ya kienyeji, *ng'endek*. (*The local type called ng'endek.*)

Trader: Ng'e..! Hiyo hakuna. (*Nge..! I don't have that one.*)

In this example, the customer borrowed the word, *ng'endek* (beans seeds) from his Nandi dialect of Kalenjin language which he used in a Kiswahili conversation. Word borrowing was a strategy widely used to counter language barriers in the businesses. However, in some cases, such borrowing caused breakdown in communication especially in cases where the traders could not understand the borrowed words. In this case, use of multilinguals and sellers from various communities was employed as another strategy to counter this new linguistic challenge. The wide use of Kalenjin dialects (19.5% of conversations, N=65) in this urban context, despite the fact that the language is not defined as a language of wider communication in Kenya shows that local Kenyan languages are determined to maintain their existence despite many challenges arising from urbanization, globalization, economic changes and language policy which are major causes of language shift.

Use of Oluluyia Dialects

The Oluluyia language is spoken by Abaluyia community of western Kenya. This is a neighbouring community to the Kalenjin, although it does not have direct contact with Eldoret town geographically. Oluluyia has more than seventeen dialects. This language is mainly used by members of Abaluyia community and is therefore not a language of wider communication. The use of these dialects in communication in Eldoret town indicates the significance of this language to its speakers in this urban environment, and the determination of the language to fight for space in the urban linguistic landscape and communication environment. Eldoret town has many Oluluyia speakers who have influenced the use of this language in the town.

According to this study, 4.5% (N = 15) of conversations were in Oluluyia dialects or had Oluluyia vocabulary. This means that 4.5% of the conversations relied on this language for successful communication. This also means that the absence of this language may have led to communication barriers involving customers who preferred the use of these dialects or their vocabulary. The patterns used were also varied.

They included bilingual and trilingual code switching patterns and word borrowing. This type of language collaboration is expected in areas with high linguistic diversity as is the case in Eldoret town. Look at his example:

(6) Customer: Mbekho Liquid Paraffin. (*Give me Liquid Paraffin.*)

Customer: Tsichupa tsiyera ebiminywi *one hundred*. Umbekho nende *Growers Finishers* likunia elala. *Give me enough for one hundred chicks. I also need one sack of Growers Finishers.*)

Although the use of Oluluyia language was confined to businesses owned by Oluluyia mother tongue speakers, the language's vocabulary was not confined to these businesses. By this, we mean that Oluluyia vocabulary was borrowed and used in Kiswahili conversations in businesses owned by non Oluluyia speakers. Look at this example:

(7) Customer: Nimeona hapa mashini ya kusiaga chakula ya ng'ombe. (*I have seen a machine for crushing animal feeds.*)

Trader: Iko. Tunauza *fourty thousand*. (*It is available at fourty thousand shillings.*)

Customer: Inaweza kusiaga *msogori*? (*Can it crush maize cobs?*)

Trader: Eee. (*Yes.*)

In this example, the customer borrowed Oluluyia vocabulary, *msogori* (maize cobs) which he used in a Kiswahili conversation as a way of enhancing communication. It is evident in this example that the trader understood the meaning of the word despite the fact that he was not an Oluluyia mother tongue speaker. The customer asks the trader, a Nandi mother tongue speaker, if the machine could grind maize cobs. The trader answers, "Eee (*Yes.*)" This means that he understood the question. The fact that non-Oluluyia speaking traders understood Oluluyia vocabulary used in Kiswahili means that they had encountered the use of the vocabularies before, a fact that made them to learn their meaning as a strategy to eliminate language barriers.

Use of Kikuyu Language

Kikuyu language is spoken by members of Kikuyu community which inhabits central parts of Kenya and some parts of the rift valley. This is therefore not a language of wider communication.

Eldoret town has a large population of this community. It emerged through this study that Kikuyu language also played a key role in enhancing business communication between traders and their customers in Eldoret town. According to this study, 4.8% (N=16) of conversations involved this language. This means that successful communication of 4.8% of the conversations was due to this language. Many of the businesses which had Kikuyu use were owned by Kikuyu mother-tongue speakers. This means that many of the customers knew the mother tongues spoken by the owners of the businesses they visited. Look at the following example. The business owner is owned by a Kikuyu mother-tongue speaker:

(9) Customer: Nĩatĩa? (*How are you?*)

Trader: Nĩ kwega. (*Fine.*)

Customer: Ndĩ na mwana mũrwaru, akorora mũno na akahingara maniũru ũtukũ akaremwo na kũhuhia wega. (*My sick child coughs and experiences breathing problems at night*

Trader: Ni ekwenda kũrorwo. Ahota gũkworwo na *allergy* kana hama mũgũrũre Cetrizine na Clavoxil umũne no niakwenda kuonwo nĩ ndagitarĩ. (*He needs to be observed. It could be an allergic or fever. Take Cetrizine and Clavoxil but he needs to visit a doctor.*)

In this text, there is testimony that African languages play a fundamental role in the success of business communication. It is evident in this text that the Kikuyu language played several roles. First, it successfully played the role of fostering cordial relations evident through greetings. These greetings are important for sustaining business relations. Secondly, it successfully helped the customer to describe symptoms of the child's ailment apart from successfully helping the trader to suggest medicine to the customer. In some cases, Kikuyu language was used in businesses owned by non Kikuyu mother-tongue speakers. In these cases, Kikuyu vocabulary was borrowed and used within Kiswahili conversations. Look at this example:

(13)Customer: Kama *njau* inahara dawa gani? (*What medicine is good for a calf with diarrhoea?*)

Trader: Umri gani hiyo *njau*? (*How old is the calf?*)

Customer: Ilizaliwa tarehe moja mwezi wa kumi. (*It was born on first of October.*)

In this text, the word, *njau*, which is Kikuyu word for calf has been used in a Kiswahili conversation on borrowed basis.

The fact that the word was found in several conversations means that the borrowing was permanent and that many traders and their customers were aware about the fact that the word could be used in Kiswahili conversations without causing linguistic barriers. In this case, use of kikuyu vocabulary was a way of eliminating linguistic barriers through language collaboration. This example also shows that traders and their customers understood the meaning of the word despite the fact that some were non-Kikuyu speakers. The reason is that the vocabulary had been used for a long time by traders and their customers who had similar linguistic challenges.

Use of Dholuo Language

Dholuo is a Kenyan language spoken by members of Luo community which inhabits the region around Lake Victoria. It is therefore not a language of wider communication. This study noted that 3% (N=11) of conversations were in Dholuo. The use of Dholuo was confined to the fish businesses which were mainly owned by Dholuo speakers. We never encountered the use of this language in another business. However, the use of this language in the fish business demonstrates the importance of the language in enhancing business communication in Eldoret town. It shows that the success of many fish businesses relies on Dholuo. The use of Dholuo in the fish business was influenced by the fact that the business was owned by a Dholuo mother-tongue speaker. It was also influenced by the fact that many customers who visited this business were aware about the mother-tongue spoken by the business owner. Look at this text:

Customer: Jaduong', rech mar mia ang'wen. (*My father, prepare for me fish worth four hundred shillings.*)

Customer: Los motuo to ilos nengo. Nyoro nyaiwang'a. (*Today, prepare for me a dry one. However, reduce that price, yesterday you sold to me expensively.*)

Trader: Kel mia gi piero ang'wen. (*Give me one hundred and forty shillings.*)

Customer: Timna mia gi piero adek. (*Sell to me at one hundred and thirty shillings.*)

Trader: A biro wang'. Mia gi piero ang'wen ye nengo maber. (*I will make a loss. One hundred and forty shillings is good price.*)

This text exemplifies the role of this language in price negotiation. In small scale businesses, price negotiation is a normal practice. This price negotiation relies on languages used in business communication. In this case, the language used is Dholuo, which is a language of narrow communication.

Use of Maasai Language

Maasai language is mainly spoken by members of Maasai community which inhabits parts of the rift valley region of Kenya. Some members of this community live in Eldoret town and participate in various businesses including herbal medicine. Use of Maasai language was confined to the traditional medicine businesses which were majorly owned by Maasai mother-tongue speakers. This study encountered a few cases of the use of this language (0.9%, N = 3). The conversations we encountered which used this language took the code switching pattern. Despite the few cases where the language was used (N= 3), the language played a great role in enhancing communication between the interlocutors in herbal medicine business. Look at this example:

(14) Customer: Kaata enkarai naimu oloodo nkumeshi najo shomo sipitali pooki, na tala olchani alau taa pi. (*My child is nose bleeding I have tried treatment with no success.*)

Trader: Kaisho ele shani oji keji tabas, na kishore oshi oltung'ani oidikidik elukunya.

Pee lo aisaidia osarge oiposha te lukunya pe itasheiye. Iyalo eleshani na isugaa asubuhi na jioni. Iyolo eleshani emiri mia nane. (*I will give you this medicine known as Tabas.*

It treats head ache and nose bleeding You will sniff it in the morning and evening. The price is eight hundred shillings.)

In this text, the role of Maasai language in business communication is evident. The customer used the language to describe the child's ailment, thus helping the trader to suggest remedy.

Use of Somali Language

Somali language is spoken by members of Somali community who inhabit northern parts of Kenya. Use of Somali language was confined to the grocery which received many Somali mother tongue speakers.

It was used in 1.5% (N=5) of conversations, which were in code switching pattern between Somali and Kiswahili languages. Therefore, the success of 1.5% of business conversations depended on this language. The use of this language was confined to vegetable and fruit businesses owned by Dholuo speakers.

This business received many Somali and Indian customers due to the goods sold by the traders. Many customers who visited this business had problems communicating in English and Kiswahili, which are languages of wider communication. This made Gujarati and Somali languages to be main languages of communication in the business. This also forced business owners and their sellers who were non-Somali and non-Gujarati speakers to learn the two languages as a strategy to communicate with their customers. See below. The conversation is between a Somali customer and a Luo trader:

17) Trader: Wariah *kachar*. (*Wariah we have cucumber.*)

Trader: Ndimu hakuna. Mos? (*No lemon. What about bananas?*)

Customer: Pea mos. Maembe ngapi? (*Give me bananas. What is the price of mangoes?*)

Trader: Mia. Leta *eighty*. (*One hundred shillings. Give me eighty.*)

In this example, the trader was aware of the linguistic challenge facing the customer. This made him to borrow Somali vocabulary as he spoke to the Somali customer. Look at the use of the Somali borrowed words (*kachar* and *mos*).

Use of Sheng

Sheng is a new language mostly spoken by urban youth although it is quickly spreading to rural areas (Bosire 2006, 2009). The language is not listed among Kenya's languages, meaning that it has not been officially accepted as a language. In this study, it emerged that this language plays an important role as a language of business communication. It emerged that in the businesses under study, some customers preferred the use of Sheng to enhance their communication with traders. Look at this conversation which involved a Kalenjii trader and a customer:

(19) Customer: Maze kamtoi kangu kamechomeka kiasi. (*My child has sustained burns.*)

Customer: Kali-dip mkono kwa hot water. (*He dipped the hand in hot water.*)

Trader: Huyo, itabidi a observe-iwe. (*It is advisable for him to see a doctor.*)

Customer: Si mngeniwahi tu dawa? Maze story za hosi saa hii nimesota kiasi. (*I beg that you give me medicine instead. I have no money for hospital bill.*)

In this conversation, the customer chose to converse with the trader in Sheng because he was aware about the role of the language in the success of communication between him and the trader. Indeed, the language enhanced communication between them. The customer used the language to present his problem about the child's burns. The trader and the customer used the language to reach an agreement about possible remedy to the problem facing the customer's child.

Use of Gujarati

Gujarati is a language mainly spoken in India. However, there is a large population of Indians in Kenya who speak this language. Many of them are Kenyan citizens, a fact that makes Gujarati one of Kenya's languages of foreign origin. Despite the fact Gujarati is a language spoken in India, it was widely used in the fruit and vegetable business owned by a Dholuo mother tongue speaker. We noted that many of the customers who visited this business were Indians who lacked fluency in Kiswahili and English. Due to this, the customers used Gujarati or its vocabulary in their business conversations. Look at this conversation between a Luo Trader and an Indian customer:

(23) Customer: Papai lai au. (*Bring me a pawpaw.*)

Trader: Soo shilling. (*One hundred shillings.*)

Customer: (*Presses the pawpaw*) Nathi saru. Kakri lai au. (*Your pawpaw is not good. Give me cucumber.*)

Trader: Pachas. (*Fifty shillings.*)

Customer: Pana pachas, atana maneno. Kera gap? (*It can not be fifty shillings stop that joke. What is the price of bananas?*)

Trader: Soo shilling. Paise lai au. (*It is one hundred shillings. Give me the money.*) In this text, it is evident that despite the fact that the trader in this text was a Dholuo speaker, he understood and spoke Gujarati. This was due to the fact that many customers who visited this business were Indians who could not speak Kiswahili. This forced the traders to learn Gujarati, the language which was fluently spoken by these customers as a strategy of eliminating linguistic barriers.

Factors that Influenced the Choice of Language

It emerged during this research, that in many cases, it was the customers' chosen language that dominated business conversations. By this, we mean that the traders waited for the customers to choose a preferred language of use through greetings and enquiries before they joined in the conversations. The reason is that many traders tended to have specific linguistic strategies which were well planned to help in eliminating possible language barriers in the businesses. Eldoret is a town with a high linguistic diversity, a fact that was well known to the traders; and a fact that was a source of many linguistic barriers that affected business communication within the town (Toboso 2014.) Due to this challenge, as a strategy, the traders waited for the customers to choose a preferred language of communication before they joined in the conversation. There are a number of factors that influenced the type of language used by interlocutors.

Age of Speakers

The age factor greatly affected language choice by traders and their customers. There was a difference in the choice of language between the youth, middle aged and the older customers. The youth tended to use Kiswahili and Sheng or code switching between the two languages. The middle aged customers favoured the use of Kiswahili, English and code switching between Kiswahili and English. This was especially evident in pharmacies and agrovets. We also noted some use of mother tongues by this group, especially in agrovets. Use of Sheng by this group was very limited. The reason may be that many people in this age bracket disapprove the use of Sheng which is considered as slang for ill mannered youth in urban areas. The older generation favoured the use of mother tongues and Kiswahili. This may be due to the fact that more middle aged customers were more educated and therefore more proficient in English than the older customers, especially farmers. The youth favoured the use of Sheng, Kiswahili and code switching between the two languages. It is possible that the speakers in this age bracket favoured this language as a way of staying within their in-group, which identifies with the use of Sheng. The age of speakers, however, did not influence the choice of language in the grocery and traditional medicine businesses. In the grocery, customers of all ages favoured the use of Gujarati, and code switching between Kiswahili and Gujarati.

The Type of Business

There was a difference in the way language was used by traders and customers in different businesses. In the grocery, customers preferred the use of Gujarati, Kiswahili and code switching between Kiswahili and Gujarati. This may have resulted from the fact that many customers who visited this business were Indians. We also noted lack of fluency in Kiswahili and English among Indian customers. This explains why many of the customers used Gujarati and code switching between Gujarati and Kiswahili. There were however some cases where customers used English in this business. These customers were mainly Europeans, Chinese, Nigerians and Sudanese. In this business, we also encountered the use of the Somali language by customers of Somali origin.

The two traditional medicine businesses were dominated by the use of Kiswahili and a few cases of the Maasai language use. The reason that influenced the use of Kiswahili as the main language in these businesses is the fact that the businesses were owned by Maasai people who dressed in their traditional dresses therefore making it easy for customers to identify them. Many customers also believe that the traders are not fluent speakers of English and Kiswahili. The Maasai language was not used in any other business apart from the traditional medicine businesses. The fish business witnessed the use of Dholuo, which was not used in any other business. The reason is that the business was owned by a Luo and many customers may have been aware about this fact.

There was also the use of Kiswahili in this business due to the status of Kiswahili as a national language. Many customers in the pharmacies and agrovets used the Kalenjin languages, Kiswahili and English. In these businesses, Kiswahili and Kalenjin languages or code switching between the languages were preferred. The reason that explains this may be the proximity of Eldoret town to Kalenjin speakers. Due to this fact, many of the customers especially in the agrovets were Kalenjin farmers who preferred using their mother tongues in which they were fluent.

Traders Mother Tongues

We noted during this research that many customers were aware about the languages spoken by their preferred traders as their mother tongues.

Many customers, therefore, visited businesses whose owners spoke their mother-tongues. This was a strategy aimed at avoiding linguistic barriers that may have arisen from the inability of some customers to communicate in Kiswahili and English. For example, the pharmacy and Agrovets businesses owned by Oluluyia speakers received customers who chose the Oluluyia dialects as their preferred languages of use. In this case, speakers used Oluluyia dialects or code switching between these dialects and Kiswahili. Similarly, the pharmacy and Agrovets owned by Kikuyu mother-tongue speakers also received customers who used Kikuyu language as their preferred languages of conversation.

The Origin of Customers

All European customers who visited the businesses under study used English. Similarly, Indians who visited the fruit and vegetable business preferred the use of Gujarati or code switching between this language and Kiswahili. The prevalent use of Gujarati was due to the fact that many of the Indian customers who visited these businesses lacked fluency in Kiswahili and English, a fact that influenced their choice of Gujarati which they spoke fluently. Gujarati is a language widely spoken in India. We also noted that customers from outside Kenya, for example Nigerians, used English in their conversations. The reason for their use of English was lack of linguistic skills to speak Kiswahili and other African languages spoken in Kenya.

Location of Eldoret Town

The proximity of Eldoret town to Kalenjin speakers influenced the choice of language in the targeted businesses. Generally, Kalenjin dialects were most preferred after Kiswahili and English. The reason was the location of Eldoret town which is surrounded by Kalenjin speakers. For this reason the targeted businesses received many Kalenjin customers who used their mother tongues in conversations. The use of these dialects was noted in all the six pharmacies and agrovets. Its use was also noted in the two traditional medicine businesses. This means that these dialects were used even in businesses which were owned by Kikuyu, Oluluyia and Maasai speakers.

Language Status

The fact that English and Kiswahili are official languages in Kenya, and therefore, languages of wider communication influenced the prevalent use of these languages in the businesses under study.

Kiswahili was noted as the most preferred language with 81.9% (N=273) of conversations being carried out in this language or having a Kiswahili borrowed vocabulary. English on the other hand was used in 49.8% of conversations, in various patterns including monolingual and code switching modes.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the role played by Kenyan languages in business communication in the multi-ethnic town of Eldoret in Kenya. It emerged during this research that many languages are used in business communication in Eldoret town. It emerged that it is not only the two official languages, English and Kiswahili, that are used in business communication in Eldoret town. Other languages that are not official are also used in business communication. These languages include Oluluyia, Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Maasai, Dholuo, Somali, Gujarati and Sheng.

It also emerged that the use of these languages is not limited to particular businesses. This is evidence that these languages play a key role in the success of business communication. The use of Kenyan languages which are not languages of wider communication in business communication in Eldoret urban environment is an indication that these languages have a great role to play in the economic lives of residents of Eldoret town. With many businesses owned by people from many different communities with different mother-tongues, languages of wider communication are expected to become the main languages of communication.

However, it emerged through this research that languages which are not used for wider communication play significant roles in business communication. This means that these languages are still valued by their speakers despite the fact that their roles have not been defined by language policy. For this reason, it is important to recognize the various languages and the significant roles they play. This can be done through language policy so as to empower them and enable them to maintain their roles in the economic development of their users. The fact that many businesses depend on the languages for business communication means that the success of the business actually depends on the languages used by the traders. For this reason, the languages should be empowered so as to give them roles officially, a fact that will help maintain them and help them play more significant roles in cultural and economic development.

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