The Expanding Domains of Sheng: The Use of a Sheng-based Slang in Kenyan Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Sheng, an urban youth spoken language in Kenya, has continually expanded its domains of usage. It is now used in political discussions, advertising, creative and performing arts, mass communication, broadcasting, and other forms of communication. Using data collected from secondary schools' students in three counties in Kenya, this article argues that high school students are using Sheng-based slang, an indication of the Sheng expansion. It is argued that high school students use this Sheng-based slang to talk about matters pertaining to schools. Word lists questionnaires containing words pertaining to school matters were translated by purposively selected male and female students from five schools in three counties in Kenya. The analysis shows that the high school slang exhibits word formation features associated with Sheng, such as lexical and morpho-phonological manipulations known in Sheng such as truncations, semantic extensions, hypocorisms, coinages, and others.

Keywords: Sheng, Slang, High School Students, Lexical Manipulation, Hypocorism

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that there is a slang variety used by Kenyan high school students when talking about school-related issues such as things or objects found in school, exams, personnel, events, and issues pertaining to school. The paper demonstrates that the slang used by the students exhibits associable morphological and morpho-phonological operations pertinent to Sheng, an urban youth language spoken in Kenya.

Describing the use of language by the youth, Eckert (1997:52) says that the youths are "movers and shakers … prime source of information about language change and the function of language in social practices". In response to their increased social engagement, a later study, there is an "explosion of linguistic activity in secondary school (Eckert (2000:14)." The world over, high schools provide space and opportunities for the adolescent youth to develop their linguistic creativity. For instance, in the United States, public high schools offer students space and context to construct identities which is also about linguistics innovation (Eckert 1998).

In the Kenyan context, Mutiga (2013: 3) notes that " the influence [of Sheng] is now felt across Kenya's social strata, influencing the way other languages are acquired, learnt and used, even within the educational system such as schools and colleges". As a fact, "Sheng can be argued to have reached a point where neither educationists nor language policy makers and researchers have the capacity to control it (Kioko 2015:125)". With such a backdrop, high school students in Kenya, particularly those in urban schools, are bound to have a high use of Sheng in the daily interactions in and out of the school context. This article advances the claim that such students use a Sheng-based repertoire in their daily interactions in school to talk about the 'ecosystem of school issues'.

Is Sheng a Pidgin, Creole, Dialect Slang, Sociolect?

The question of what Sheng is has been around for some time. The interrogation is whether Sheng is a pidgin, slang, dialect, or an emerging creole, see Osinde (1986); Githiora (2002); Bosire (2006) and others. Osinde (1986:7) says "Sheng is a pidgin at least in form, if not in its genesis". Mazrui 1995) describes Sheng as Kiswahili-English code-switching and a Kiswahili slang. Githiora (2002, 2018) believes that Sheng is a slang and a Kiswahili vernacular, respectively; and Ferrari (2014) also calls it a vernacular language. Abdulazziz & Osinde (1997) commented that Sheng (and Engsh) is slowly developing a community of young speakers for whom the languages are gradually becoming primary (p.46)". The nature of Sheng is captured by King'ei (1987:22) cited in Mazrui (1995). He writes:

A close analysis of Sheng, … shows that it does not wholly fall into any of the language varieties, jargon, slang, code, creole and pidgin It incorporates qualities of each of these varieties or social styles of language' . One can probably say that the slang factor in Sheng operates not only at the lexical level, but also at the syntactic level". That is probably why the phrases, with internal Swahili-English code-switching, that violate the Swahili word order constitute a relatively fixed, and numerically small set (King'ei 1987:22 cited in Mazrui (1995:171)).

Mazrui (1995) faults King'ei for not definitively saying where Sheng lies, despite discussing the above terms. Allan & Burridge (2006: 68) contend that the line that separates jargon and slang is disputable, because definitions of slang sometimes overlap with that of a jargon.

Samper (2002:122) disagrees that Sheng is a slang arguing that the slang category is unsuitable because it applies to individual words forming an utterance, and not a whole utterance. Mazrui (1995) contends that the slang factor in Sheng transcends the lexical level into the syntax level. Similarly, Rudd (2017:281) states that "Sheng is more than just vocabulary and has elements of language that are more systematic and deeper than slang". Agreeably, it is possible to delineate individual words use in Sheng. The present concern in this paper is with the vocabulary that is Sheng based, not on constructions beyond words.

Definitions of what counts as a slang are varied and often controversial. For instance, a slang is an "age-specific variation within a language" (Coulmas 2005:52). Bailey (1995) suggests that a more universal definition of a slang should consider it a usage variety or register intentioned by its users. The definition of a slang must consider users (, i.e., who uses it?) and the intention of use (i.e., why?) (Bembe & Beukes 2007:464).

This article is interested in the 'individual Sheng words' that are used by high school students to talk about the school ecosystem. As such, the words used are intentioned and context-suited, such words have all the hallmarks of informality, and differ from the standard Kiswahili or English codes. That given, the 'slang' label is applicable, and the paper posits that there is a Sheng based slang in Kenyan secondary schools. The notion of Sheng as the 'jargon of the underworld' (Mazrui 1995) may in fact refer to the students' use of the slang in school, considering that Sheng is prohibited in schools; thus students used it clandestinely; sometimes oblivious of the fact that some of the words they use are not standard English or Kiswahili. Incidentally, some teachers use some of these words, albeit unconsciously. An example is the word 'openers', a word coined to refer to the exams done immediately after opening school.

The Role of Sheng in the Kenyan Multilingual Context

The development of Sheng was aided by the multilingual situation in the underprivileged neighbourhood in the Eastlands part of Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. These areas were mainly inhabited by different ethnic groups with the Gĩkũyũ, Luo, Akamba and the Luhya forming the highest populations. Their contribution to Sheng is evident in the lexicon whose origin is in these indigenous languages, besides Kiswahili, which is the lexifying languages, owing to its lingua franca status among the residents. Most research has shown that Gĩkũyũ and Luo words are the majority in Sheng although a lexicostatistics study would give more reliable facts.

The youth use Sheng for group identity (Ogechi 2005), and group solidarity, and to linguistically distance themselves from 'outsiders' e.g. parents, and teachers, or others who do not 'belong with them'. Sheng has a negative perception in Kenyan schools. It is blamed as the cause of poor performance in English and Kiswahili examinations (Momanyi 2009).

Although Sheng started out as a code for the underprivileged and later a code for criminals and as a youth language (Mazrui 1995; Osinde 1986), it has expanded its domains of usage and users as well as shedding its negative perception. In any case, Sheng is no longer a language for underprivileged truant youth, it has

expanded its spheres of usage (Iribemwangi 2020); and neither has Sheng remained an urban youth language. Kioko (2015) demonstrates that there are rural and urban Sheng varieties as well as what he calls 'ethnic registers'. In fact, Ogechi (2002) collected Sheng data from both urban and rural informants for his study. The spatial spread of Sheng and its increased domains of usage adds to its specialised usage as a specialised slang.

The uses of youth languages in Africa have considerably expanded (Kießling & Mous 2004). Sheng has experienced and continues to experience an expanded range of usage in the Kenyan landscape (Githiora 2016). McLaughlin (2009:9) contends that Sheng is not just a youth language; it has become an "urban language of wider communication" used by both the young and old. Furthermore, Hoogervorst & Mous (2022) asserts that Sheng has expanded its usage domains; and it is on the way to becoming a full-fledged language. In point of fact, until recently it was unimaginable to write an academic paper's abstract in Sheng, but Barasa (2010) and Githiora (2016) wrote the abstracts of their papers in Sheng.

Currently, Sheng is used in specialised fields or discourses, for example, in tourism, there is the Coasti slang , a Coastal slang that borrows from Sheng Swahili, German , Italian , French ,etc., and used in tourist centres at the coast by beach boys and other traders (Nassenstein 2016); in advertising (Kariuki et al 2015; Mutonya 2008); in social media (Kanana & Kebeya 2018); in verbal humour (Kihara & Schroeder 2012; Kihara 2013; Githinji 2006); performing arts (drama and music) (Iraki 2004; Ogechi 2008; Ferrari 2014); in the print and broadcasting media (Mous & Barasa 2021). Ghetto Radio, a Nairobi-based radio station, brands itself as the 'official Sheng radio station'. The radio station airs programmes and even news bulletins in Sheng. Sheng has also featured in local television programmes for example, *Maria, Machachari* both aired by Citizen TV, *Auntie Boss* aired by NTV, and *The Real Househelps of Kawangware*, *Junior,* all aired by KTN. These examples point to the expanding domains of Sheng usage. [1]

This article describes various vocabulary used by high school students in their daily interaction in school. Such words are phonologically and morphologically manipulated for communication. The creative and conscious lexical manipulation to coin words is a feature of African youth languages (Kießling & Mous 2004), and Sheng is one of them. I follow Kießling & Mous' (2004) analysis of words in youth languages. Bosire (2009) also used the analysis on select Sheng words. Such an analysis will uncover the morphological, morpho-phonological and semantic manipulations of words from Swahili, English, indigenous languages and Sheng as used in the high school students' slang.

Methodology

This study adapts a qualitative phenomenological approach in its description. Creswell & Poth (2018:159) say that "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon". The phenomenon under study is the school-based slang in some selected high schools in Kenya.

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[1] There is a popular Sheng prayer that uses Sheng that is originally from *Maria*, a television series aired by *Citizen TV*, and one that mobile phone users can subscribe as a *Skiza* tune (a tune heard whenever a subscriber receives a call.

The phenomenology research method is applicable in educational settings to find out "the essence of a certain phenomenon from the perspective of the one who has experienced it". As such, "phenomenological research studies lived experiences to gain deeper insights into how people understand those experiences" (Bonyadi 2023: 11-12).

According to Lester (1999). "Pure phenomenological as concerned with description rather than explanation and it had no hypotheses or preconceptions. However, he notes that "more recent humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias and emphasise the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, as well as making the researcher visible in the 'frame' of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (e.g. see Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993)" (p.1). This paper adapts the latter claim. It has a preconceived idea that high school students do have a peculiar slang that they use in school; and it is this slang that the paper aims to describe and explain

The data was collected from three purposively and conveniently sampled counties in Kenya: Nairobi City, Nyeri and Murang'a. From each county, five boarding extra-county schools were purposively selected; three boys' schools and two girls' schools. The data was collected during the teaching practicum assessment in which I was involved in, hence the choice of convenient sampling. The choice of the extra-county boarding schools follows from the fact that they admit students from all over the country, but the majority of the students will come from the local county. Thus, they offer an opportunity for national representativeness.

Form each school, ten form three students were randomly selected to participate in the study (*n*=150). Form threes were selected because they are the classes because they are experienced enough in the schools, Secondly, the form fours were preparing for their final high school exams at the time of data collection, and ethically, it would have been unfair to interfere with their studies as they prepared for the national exam. The respondents filled a questionnaire with the vocabulary related to school issues and activities. Questionnaires are ideal to elicit lexical items from specific semantic areas including questions on language use (Androutsopoulos 2005). The selected students were informed of the intention to collect data and the purpose of the data, and voluntarily accepted to participate. Each student received a questionnaire with a list of words pertaining to school context and were asked to write the Sheng word(s) they use in school for each of the vocabulary listed. The students were also asked to add any relevant word they thought should have been included. From the questionnaire, the entries were compared, and the most occurring words were picked for analysis. The questionnaire was supplemented by group discussion interviews on the words collected.

For the words that appeared more than four times; they were also considered, but those that appeared once were ignored. The data was codified into (school) subjects, school events (for example, sports, school outings, and other activities, scholastic items, and titles of personnel in a school set up (for instance, offices and officers in a school set-up) among others. The data presented illustrates aspects of lexical manipulation i.e. phonological, morphological and semantic manipulations of lexemes. The collected words are analysed to show their resemblance to morphological characteristics of Sheng.

Lexical Manipulation of Sheng Words

According to Kotsinas (1997), adolescents have four types of linguistic innovations: new phonological variants, slang, grammaticalization processes, and emergence of new language varieties in contexts of language contact. The slang under study shows similar innovations.

Lexical manipulation of Sheng words may be structural or semantic. Thus, it might involve the manipulation of a word's structure –which might involve coming up with a new word, or an extension or change of its meaning. Such manipulation is a hallmark feature of Sheng morphology (Bosire 2009:79). According to Kießling & Mous (2004:318), youth languages use several linguistic strategies to innovate new words such as borrowing, (from other languages and dialects), loan translations, morphological manipulations (e.g. use of dummy affixes and incorporating borrowed affixes), phonological manipulations (e.g. truncation, dummy affixation and metathesis) semantic manipulations (e.g. semantic extensions, hyperbole, dysphemisms, and others.). Bosire (2009) tried out some of these strategies in general Sheng words, and I extend the same strategies to the lexicon used in schools' context.

The lexical manipulations are discussed under two sub-headings (1) Morpho-phonological manipulations subsuming morphological manipulations such as clipping, prefixation and suffixation e.g. semantically empty suffixes, and phonological manipulations involving metathesis, truncations, etc., and (2) semantic manipulations such as semantic extensions, hyperbole, and others.

Morpho-Phonological Manipulations

Most youth languages in Africa have morphological manipulations characterised by the extension of some morphological features of one language to lexemes of another language (Kießling & Mous 2004).Such transferred features include prefixes or suffixes. It happens that affixation is the most common feature of morphological manipulations. This kind of manipulation may involve dummy affixes on both ends of a word. In most cases both prefixation and suffixation co-occur.

Table 1: Lexeme Prefixation and Suffixation

Sheng Lexeme	Sheng Meaning	Source
Ku-pae	'To pass an examination'	English
Ku-dunda /Ku-chwada	To fail an examination'	Kiswahili Probably Dholuo
Ma-stud-o	Students	English
Ma- kaandi	Form four students/final year students	English
Ku-chop	To study/read	Probably English
Ku-home	To go home from school	English

In table 1 the Kiswahili infinitive *ku-* is prefixed to the slang words. It attaches to verbs *-pae,* from English verb 'pass', *-dunda* from Kiswahili 'hit the ground'. In Kenyan Swahili *dunda* means failure in an exam e.g. *a-me-dunda mtihani* 'he has failed the exam'. The verb *ku-pae* has an additional suffix *–e*, which is semantically empty, and whose origin is unclear. The root of verb *chwada* in *Ku-chwada* 'to fail an exam' is most probably borrowed from Dholuo meaning 'to hit',

Ma-*studo* /**ma**-*shtudo* and **ma**-*kaandi* have the common plural Bantu noun class marker prefix *ma-*. The roots *studo* and *kandi* are from English words 'student(s)' and 'candidates, respectively. In Sheng, the

words' last syllables are clipped, and a dummy suffix –*o* added to '*studo*'. In *ma-kaandi*, there is vowel lengthening that is not in the original English word.

Both *ku-chop* and *ku-home* have infinitive prefix *ku-*. The word 'chop' is from English *chop* 'cut to pieces', but whose meaning is narrowed in the slang to mean 'to study'. From this very word, comes a noun *choopi* 'a studious student', which has an agentive Bantu suffix –*i* for a suffix. In that case the meaning of the verb 'chop' is extended to mean a studious student. *Ku-home* (and also *homing*) derive from English noun 'home' from which a verb meaning 'to go home/going home' is derived. The kind of morphological and phonological manipulations above indicate borrowing of morphological features of Bantu languages, as well as semantic extensions and narrowing of the derived words.

Most of the words in table 2 are English. Recall that English is the medium of instruction and the language often used in school and to talk about school matters. The last syllables of the English-based words are clipped, and dummy suffixes (-*o*,-*a*,-*u*,-*i*,-*ɔ*) added. These dummy affixes bear no semantic function or content. They are inserted for phonotactic reasons especially to maintain the phonological patterns of Kiswahili, on which Sheng is based. Bosire (2009) suggests that suffix –*o* comes from Dholuo, although no evidence is provided. Thus, it remains speculative without tangible evidence for the claim.

Table 2: Suffixation of lexemes

Sheng Lexeme	Sheng Meaning	Source
Mao	Mathematics	English
Inga	English	"
Seki	(School) Secretary	English
Prifo	Prefect	"
Kapu	(School) Captain	"
Depa	Deputy Principal	"
Pano	Punishment	"
Praimo	Primary School	"
Seko [Sɛkɔ]	Secondary School	"
Campo	University	"
Di-Manga	D-Grade	"
Daaro	Classroom	Kiswahili

To users of Sheng in schools-and also in Kenyan English-, the word 'campus' refers to a 'university' not a 'campus', which is a case of semantic extension. The word *di-manga* has a prefix *di-* which means grade D, while suffix -*manga* means 'eat' in Sheng. When put together it means that when one has a grade D in an exam, 'they have earned /won it'. To win, e.g. in a lottery or a bet, the word *kula* 'eat', in colloquial Kiswahili, means 'to win'. Thus, *dimanga* may well mean that one has 'won ('eaten') a D for themselves',of

course sarcastically[2]. The word *darasa* 'classroom' is borrowed from Kiswahili. Its final syllable is clipped, and replaced with suffix *–o*.

Table 3: Clipping of Syllables in Lexemes

Sheng Lexeme	Sheng Meaning	Source
Calk	Calculator	English
Uni	University	"
Sus [Sus]	Suspension (From School)	"
Raima	Primary School	"
Geo	Geography	"
Toile	Toilet	"
Poke [Pɔ:Kɛ]	Pocket Money	"
Mida [Mi;Da]	Mid-Term	"

Both ends of the word 'primary' - 'p-' and '-ry'- are clipped, and a dummy suffix-*a* added resulting to *raima*. The use of the adjective 'primary' (without school) to refer to elementary school is a feature of Kenyan English (Buregeya 2019). The word 'practicals' is shortened to 'pracs' meaning the medial syllable is clipped but the plural marker is maintained.

Another notable feature of Sheng- evident in the school slang under study- is the pervasive use of clipping resulting in hypocorisms. Technically, hypocorisms refer to the reduction of a word to a single syllable and then *–y* or *–ie* suffixes are added (Yule 2020: 62). Indeed the school slang under study has words such *deskie* 'desk-mate' , *roomie* 'room-mate , *funkie* 'function' , *chopie* 'a bright student' ,*midie* (*mida*) 'mid-term break, *watchie* 'watchman', and others.

Table 4: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
K [kɛi]	KCSE (final high school exam)
CR	Christian Religious Education
BS	Business Studies

High school students use abbreviations for specific lexemes. Such words do not qualify to be acronyms because they are not pronounced as a word. Examples include the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) that is simply abbreviated as 'K' [kɛi]. Subjects such as Business Studies is just 'BS' (although some call it *Bizna,* the Sheng word for 'business'), Christian religious education is just 'CR'. There are phrases such as *kupigwa X* meaning to be expelled from school; the 'X' is from 'expulsion'. There is also the phrase: *kwenda for G* 'to be expelled from school' or sent away from school for good.

Another common word formation process in Sheng is coinage. High school students also coin words within the school context, and sometimes it is difficult to tell the exact sources of some of those words. For example, the words *mode* and *odijo* mean 'teacher', but it is difficult is to tell their origin. For *odijo*, we

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[2] Notable about morphology in Sheng is that for some words, the addition of suffixes and phonological manipulations may be derivational as was explained for the adjective 'best' which becomes a noun, when /s/ becomes /ʃ/ and a suffix –e attached to the word *beshte* /beʃte/ meaning 'friend'.

speculate that is a product of a morpho-phonotactic manipulation of the word 'teacher', just the same way students use the words *tichoo* or *tichee* meaning 'teacher'. Words such as *teka* 'textbook' and *teo* 'test' use the first syllables in 'textbook' and 'test' respectively. Words such as *chopa*/*chopi* 'a studious or bright student' are also difficult to make out. Recall the concomitant verb *kuchop* 'to read', although the English word 'chop' does not mean 'to read'. One is left to speculate that high school students rely on the literal meaning of the verb *chop* 'to cut into small pieces' to derive the word *chopa* /*chopi* by way of analogy to reading to refer to one who reads and synthesizes bits of information easily.

Table 5: Coinage of Words

Sheng Lexeme	Sheng Meaning	Source
Mode	Teacher	Unknown
Odijo	Teacher	English
Teka	Textbook	"
Teo	Test	"
Grabo	Snacks (Illegally) Taken to Boarding Schools	Unknown
Chopa/Chopi	A Bright /Studious Student	English

Lexico-Semantic Manipulations

Semantic manipulations take the forms of semantic extensions, hyperbole, dysphemisms, etc. Semantic extension involves extending the meaning of one lexeme to cover another semantic domain.

Table 6: Semantic Extensions of Sheng Lexemes

Sheng Word	Sheng Meaning	Source
Chuo	School	Kiswahili
Ku-Mada Chuo	Complete School	English And Kiswahili
Campo	University	English
Karao	Prefect	Unknown
Kopa	"	English
Openers	Exams Done When Schools Opening	"
Fanki	School Outing	"
Deka	Bunk Bed	"

The semantic manipulations in table 6 include hyperbole e.g. *ku-mada chuo* 'complete school' [literally 'to murder school']. On the one hand, the word 'campus' as used in Standard English attains a new meaning in the high school students' slang, where it refers to university; not just a university campus. On the other, the Kiswahili word *chuo* means a higher institution of learning, e.g., a college or university, but students use it to generally refer to learning institutions including high schools. These are two clear cases of broadened or extended meaning of borrowed words.

The high school slang has also extended the use of the word *karao*. It means a police officer in general Sheng, but in school it is used to refer to school prefects. Students use the name in analogy to the duties of police officers. In school, prefects perform duties such as ensuring school regulations are adhered to and

maintaining general discipline and order among students. These and other duties are similar to those performed by police officers in maintaining law and order in our society. Related to *karao* is the word *kopa* from the English slang 'cop', informal meaning for police officers. Like *karao,* it is also about the similarity between the duties carried out by police officers (cops) and prefects, including being brutal to those found in the wrong. The word 'openers' refers to the examinations or tests that are written when students open school. Interestingly, teachers are also said to use it in the same sense, although it must have originated from students.

Other than semantic extensions (e.g. broadening), high school students also use semantic narrowing. For example, the word *fanki* [fʌnki:] is clipped from the word 'function'. While in Standard English the word 'function' includes a ceremonious gathering of a kind, in the students' slang, it is morphologically reduced to *fankie* meaning 'a school outing', including sports, competitions, excursion, field trips, and other out-of-school activities. Another semantically narrowed lexeme is 'homing' which for those in boarding schools means 'going home from school'. They use it to refer to their going home from school for mid-term (*midie*/ *mida* in Sheng), holiday breaks or when sent away home from school.

Dormitories in Kenyan boarding schools are furnished with bunkbeds, beds with a lower and an upper bunker, similar to double decker buses. In Kenyan English, *double decker* refers to bunk beds (Buregeya 2019). High school students in boarding schools call their beds *deka* [dɛka], which is a shortened and extended meaning from the usual usage.

Students have also borrowed lexemes to refer to subjects. For example, the collected lexemes referring to Mathematics are *ithabu* [iθaβu], *githabu* [ɣeθaβu] and *mao*. The first two words have origins in the Gĩkũyũ word *ithabu*, 'sum' and the plural from *mathabu* [maθaβu] 'sums'. The borrowing extends beyond the word, to include the pejorative augmentative prefix *ge-*, which a clear case of what Kießling & Mous (2004:320) calls "morphemic hybridization". The borrowed augmentative morpheme captures the dislike students have for Mathematics. Therefore, the prefix is not semantically empty like the dummy suffixes discussed earlier, or the one found in *Mao,* the shortened form of the word 'Mathematics'.

The vocabulary pertaining to school issues discussed this far is evidence of an extant slang used by students in schools. The slang exhibits lexical and semantic manipulations reminiscent of the productive mechanisms associated with youth languages. This particular one is used for exclusive and specialised purposes in school set-ups. The structural and semantic malleability of Sheng words allows linguistics innovation by the high school students who use the slang. The linguistic innovation witnessed among the students is a reflection of their wish to be different, and to use their own linguistic creations and innovations that give them an identity and solidarity.

Conclusion

This paper set out to show that there is a type of a Sheng-based slang used by school-going youths in their day to day communication in school contexts. The described lexemes show that the slang has the hallmarks of word formations in Sheng such as borrowing from Kiswahili and other local Kenyan languages. In addition, Sheng employs morpho-phonological manipulation of word forms, semantic manipulation and semantics of words to meet their communicative needs. Other than exhibiting the Sheng-like morphological

features, the school slang borrows a lot from English. This is not surprising considering that English is the dominant language in school contexts. As the examples show, students prefer shortened (clipped) words to full words. Thus, clipping is the most common form of morphological truncation leading to many hypocorisms. The slang user also use word-initial or word final affixation to create new words. They also coin words although the words coined still have some relational similarity with the source words, although there are full coinages. Students also use abbreviations for subjects. The students also use single letters e.g. 'K' to refer to the final high school examination (KCSE) and *kupigwa* 'X' refers to expulsion from school. The students also employ semantic manipulation strategies such as hyperbole, as well contextualising words used in ordinary Sheng to fit the school context. An example is *karao*, which in ordinary Sheng means police officer(s), but one that means school prefects in a school context.

Undoubtedly, Sheng has expanded its domain usage. It is now used in advertising, politics, health communication, entertainment, broadcasting, religious activities, and as this paper shows, students have developed their own slang to talk about their issues in schools. Although demonised, allegedly because of its negative impact on the performance of Kiswahili and English examinations, and its association with the criminal underworld, the impact and prevalence of Sheng cannot be ignored. It has now shed its former association with criminals since it is used across different social classes. It is now in advertisements and public communication initiatives and activities. Sheng now affords the youth an identity and group solidarity beyond social classes and ethnic groups. Thus, other than Sheng providing a national linguistic identity, it also neutralises ethnicity.

Githinji (2013) suggested that Sheng should be included in teacher training processes considering that instruction becomes easier when learners are taught in their vernacular. This is yet to happen, and I doubt if it will happen anytime soon. However, there are teachers who code mix in class including using Sheng when teaching in class, consciously or unconsciously. In this era of competence-based teaching and learning, where performing arts are valued, the innovations of Sheng should be harnessed and not demonised. Finally, it should be understood that linguistic rights are rights like any other, and Sheng speakers, including students, have these rights, and their rights need to be safeguarded and positively exploited for the greater good of Sheng users.

Disclosure Statement

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