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## THE GROWTH OF SHENG AND ITS EFFECT ON MEDIA STRATEGIES FOR TARGETING THE YOUTH MARKET

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of the paper was to review the growth of sheng language and its effect on media strategies of market targeting in Kenya.

**Methodology:** The paper looks at how sheng is being used by corporate companies to air their advertisements hence change of strategy in order to fit in the youth market. The paper attempted to look how politicians use sheng to reach the public youths during campaigns. The paper also looks at how the sheng can influence the public either positively or negatively by the way they convey the messages or issues especially the messages uttered by the politicians. The paper identified documentary evidence in the form of already completed studies that focused on the growth of sheng language and its effect on media strategies of market targeting in Kenya.

**Results:** The findings indicate that sheng has greatly spread in the urban centers in the country like a bush fire and therefore the company's need to change their marketing strategies especially if the products they make are used by the youths. Findings also indicate that slang in developed economies is mostly used by peers or people of the same age group because it's stylish and secretive.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Due to its widespread use, 'Sheng' has been in the centre of discourse among scholars and researchers in Kenya. The code has also caught the attention of the print and electronic media especially in advertisements, official health warnings on HIV/AIDS, and other commercials. It is also gaining prominence in music and popular youth culture where popular musicians like GidiGidiMajiMaji and those who specialize in hip hop music like Kalamashaka, Nameless, Mr. Nice and Darling P. often blend the various ethnic languages, Kiswahili and English words in their compositions. The paper recommends that further studies should be done to evaluate if growth of sheng language and its effect on media strategies of market targeting in Kenya has helped in achieving positive results as targeted by different organizations. For example, it may be important to evaluate the effects of using sheng in Safaricom advertisements before the adverts and after the adverts were aired. The case study also recommends that further studies be carried out to determine whether use of sheng has brought unity among the youths and if this language can be useful in fostering national cohesion.

**Keywords:** *sheng language, media strategies, growth, market targeting*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Sheng ((S)wahili and (Eng)lish) is a Swahili-based slang language spoken by predominantly the Kenyan urban youth. Sheng sources words from various languages in Kenya and evolves rapidly. It is said to be the 'unifying language of the '43th tribe' (the Kenyan youth) and to transcend ethnicity.

Kiswahili language was standardized in the third decade of the 20th century (1930) so as to have a common way of expression in all the East African countries for purposes of cultural, educational and socio-political developments. The standard form is the one that is used in schools, administration, parliamentary systems and general communication. It is therefore the one that is used to produce text books and other teaching materials in schools, and it is this standardized form that the student is expected to learn in order to communicate with the general public.

However, in the recent past Kiswahili, including English, have been hit by a wave of 'Sheng' speakers who are mostly pre-adolescents and young adults. The youths developed a secret code which they wanted to identify themselves with, and a variety of the subculture. So the term 'Sheng' was originally coined as a result of an emerging mixture of Swahili and English words. But as time went by, the code no longer was situated in these two languages. It is now a blend of these languages and other ethnic Kenyan languages.

Different theories have been advanced by researchers as to the exact origin of the code (Ogechi 2005; Githiora 2002; Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997; Spyropoulos 1987). However, they all agree at one point that the code started in the less affluent and slum areas of eastlands of Nairobi. Spyropoulos, for example, indicates that the code must have been invented soon after national independence in 1963 but I cannot agree with this argument because of the nature and character of the code. This is because it cannot be equated with the 1960s inhabitants of Nairobi who were speaking broken Kiswahili for purposes of communicating. The present 'Sheng' speakers are youths who can speak Kiswahili competently but who choose to defy the norm and inventing their own code for group identity. Let us not forget that the 8-4-4 system of education I mentioned earlier made Kiswahili a mandatory subject to be taught in schools. The school graduates of this system are the ones who are engrossed in 'Sheng' so much so that it is part of their life. It should also be realized that restricted codes like 'Sheng' are commonly identified with a closed in-group. This is because once one is able to speak it fluently; one achieves prestige among members of one's group. This also disempowers the outsider and makes the group assert their identity.

'Sheng' is based primarily on Kiswahili structure. It uses Kiswahili grammar with lexicon drawn from Kiswahili, English and the various ethnic languages mostly spoken in big towns. Initially, this mixed code was unstable, random and fluid, but it gradually developed more systematic patterns of usage at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. For example, the word 'father' started as 'fadhee', later it changed to 'buda' or 'budaa' and now it is 'mbuyu'. According to Githiora (2002), the word 'buda' has its origin in Gujarati and Hindi which means an old man. But in the new coinage 'mbuyu' there seems to be no explanation as to its origin. The code dominates the discourse of primary and secondary school children



outside their formal classroom setting, and is widely spoken also by street hawkers, street children, public service vehicle drivers and conductors and small scale business communities in market places.

During the middle Ages, certain writers such as Chaucer, William Caxton, and William of Malmesbury represented the regional differences in pronunciations and dialects. The different dialects and the different pronunciations represented the first meaning for the term —slang.¶

However, our present-day meaning for slang did not begin forming until the 16th or 17th century. The English Criminal Cant developed in the 16th century. The English Criminal Cant was a new kind of speech used by criminals and cheats, meaning it developed mostly in saloons and gambling houses. The English Criminal Cant was at first believed to be foreign, meaning scholars thought that it had either originated in Romania or had a relationship to French. The English Criminal Cant was slow developing. In fact, out of the four million people who spoke English, only about ten thousand spoke the English Criminal Cant. By the end of the 16th century this new style of speaking was considered to be a language —without reason or order¶ (Thorne 23). During the 18th century schoolmasters taught pupils to believe that the English Criminal Cant (which by this time had developed into slang) was not the correct usage of English and slang was considered to be taboo.

However, slang was beginning to be presented in popular plays. The first appearance of the slang was in a play by Richard Brome's and later appeared in poems and songs by Copland. By the 1700's the cultural differences in America had begun to influence the English-speaking population, and slang began to expand.

Almost all of the slang words during this time were anatomical and well known all through Britain and in America due to the British colonists. Furthermore, certain events happened in the 18th century that helped the development of slang such as, Westward expansion, the Civil War, and the abolitionist movement. By this time scholars such as Walt Whitman, W. D. Whitney, and Brander Matthews all considered slang to be anything that sounded new, and that was not in the —glossaries of British dialects¶ (Thorne 26). Walt Whitman considers slang to be the life of the language. Whitman wrote —that slang was a wholesome.....of common humanity to escape the form bald literalism, and express itself illimitably¶ (Thorne 26).

This was a turning point for slang it was starting to escape the harsh criticism of being associated with criminals or foreigners. It was not until the early 1920's that slang had gained the interest of popular writers. It was during the post-World War I era that society gained new attitudes about slang. There was now a demand for entertainment, mass media, and slangy fiction. Today modern American slang has been shaped and reshaped by the different cultures and the emergence of technology, which has left our society with varieties of slang from extremes like Street/Drug Slang to African-American Slang. British slang, contrary to popular opinion, is not a lower-class trait. It stems from Shakespeare to Chaucer and encompasses nearly every generation of human speech. From Cockney rhyming slang to short-lived colloquialisms, England contains a mixture of euphemisms that often leave Americans scratching their heads.

With cultural globalization comes cultural change. In the Amazon rainforest, it is possible to hear a canoe approach with someone playing Madonna. Hip hop has become a global

phenomenon. Many people decry what they see as the emergence of a new global culture: shallow, celebrity-focused and American dominated. Part of this critique focuses on the danger not only to local cultures, but also to languages, thousands of which are endangered globally. The Enduring Voices project of National Geographic is currently seeking to record some of these tongues before they disappear forever, not only to document them for history, but also to facilitate efforts to revitalize them. Thinking about indigenous language based on field work in Oaxaca around HIV/AIDS. How do you do HIV prevention work in a region that may have more than 16 different indigenous languages, each of which has many different dialects? Zapotec itself has more than twenty dialects, each of which has its own name, such as Lhej, Xan, Xhon and Xidza. The diversity of these languages is amazing. Mazotec is a tonal language, which has a whistled form, so that people can communicate across the valleys through whistles. But while we focus on language loss, and indigenous languages, it is interesting to also remember that new languages are also being born.

Of course, new languages have always emerged through history. In Canada during the fur trade a new ethnic group emerged, the Métis, who were the children of French fathers and indigenous mothers. Over two centuries, this people created a new language, Michif, this is a mix of French and Cree. Often when languages mix they are simplified, to become a pidgin. This did not happen with Michif, which tended to adopt the most complex aspects of both its parent tongues. It was always a minority tongue in Canada. In Brazil, on the other hand, a new language emerged called the lingua geral (General or Common Language) or Nheengatu. Because the Portuguese needed a language with which to speak to diverse linguistic groups, this language spread. Indeed, it became so common that it increasingly replaced Portuguese, until a frightened Crown banned it in the 1700s. It still survives in the Amazon, and is not dying out, although it no longer is widespread. The Portuguese Crown did not want to see a new Brazilian identity emerge. It knew what it was doing when it banned this language.

Sheng is a hybrid linguistic code (Bosire 2005, Samper 2002) spoken in Nairobi and other urban areas of Kenya, which presumably derives its name from the phrase —Swahili English Slang (Mazrui 1995, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003). Its dominance in the urban areas puts it at par with similar codes such as Camfranglais in Cameroon (Kouega 2003, 2004), Town Bemba in Zambia (Spitulnik 1999), Urban Wolof (Ngom 2004), the new language in Malawi (Moto 2001) and Tsotsitaal or Flaaitaal (Makhundu 1995) in South Africa among others. It has been observed in Githiora (2002) and Bosire (2005) that it exhibits varying features of pidgins, Creoles, argots, and jargons but it does not fit into any one of these categories. Although its vocabulary is drawn from various Kenyan languages such as Dholuo, Gikuyu, Luhya, Kamba2 etc (Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, and Githinji 2006), it embodies Swahili morphosyntax (Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003) which prompts Githiora (ibid) to call it an urban dialect of Kenyan Swahili. It is unanimous that English and Swahili are the most prominent lexical donors in Sheng e.g. Kiama (1990) and Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) among others. Although its emergence is usually traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s e.g., Spyropoulos (1987), Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) Moga and Fee (1993), work by Mazrui (1995) citing Karanja (1993) suggests that it may have existed from as early as the 1930s.

Sheng comes to add to this repertoire of Swahili social variants. Like other mixed codes or peer languages, Sheng appears to be used by its speakers chiefly as a marker of identity and

solidarity. There are not many other ways of explaining the fact that certain sectors of the society do not make use of the widely understood form of an existing common language, that is, (Standard) Swahili. Restricted codes are commonly identified with a closed in-group because its mastery confers prestige to the insider and, at the same time, disempower outsiders. Such codes are known to have emerged from language contact situations similar to that of Nairobi. In fact most major urban centres of Africa are likely to have produced a mixed code identified with a certain sub-group of the larger society, such as Sheng. Town Bemba is one such example. It emerged from a multilingual context, code-mixes in ways Sheng does and is spoken between peers in the urban areas, copper belt and mining areas of Zambia (Spitulnik 1998). It is based on a major existing language and is used as a lingua franca, and its chief characteristic is code mixing while retaining the structure of its substrate, Bemba. Another example may be Camfranglais, a mixed code spoken by Cameroonian youths and used 'to assert identity and maintain secrecy', as reported by Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997). It relies on heavy mixing of French, English and Cameroonian languages. Yet another example is Fanagalo, a mixed language that arose from the context of South African mines, industrial sites and farms where it was established as a lingua franca between speakers of various languages found in South Africa. Its syntax is based on Zulu, Xhosa and related languages with adaptations of modern terms from English, Dutch and Afrikaans. It evolved from contact between European settlers and African people especially in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and later also in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and even Malawi (Cole 1964).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The purpose of the paper was to review the growth of sheng language and its effect on media strategies of market targeting in Kenya.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Literature Review**

Richard Ruiz (1984) suggests that there are three possible perspectives on language: language as problem, language as resource, and language as right. Language as a problem is a perspective that sees threats in use of a non-dominant language. In the U.S. school system, the historical attitude has been that any use of a language other than English causes difficulties for schools, individuals, and ultimately society. Students who come to school with fluent oral use of a language other than English are typically not supported in using and maintaining this language; the ultimate school goal is for learners to be strong users of English only. From a national security perspective, this becomes a strategic dilemma. It is easier to develop strong working fluency in a second language like Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, and Arabic as young adults if there has been early exposure to the language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) promotes the perspective of language as a right in that individuals have the right to use their mother tongue in public settings, to go to court in such a language, and to name their children with traditional names from their home language, no matter what country they are living in. This perspective contrasts directly with a bumper sticker found on a vehicle in the Pacific Northwest in the fall of 2010: "No hablemos Espanola. This is the United States." In both the United States and

Canada, there are records of native/aboriginal children in boarding schools being punished for using their language even on the playground.

In France, certain first names have been prohibited, and the same is true in Iran, where post revolution names deemed too "royal" or too Western were forbidden.

Language as a resource is the most positive perspective. Ruiz suggests that if we see use of an additional language besides English as a resource, this resource can be supported and ultimately used to the benefit of all. To return to the Quechua example, if use of Quechua in Peru is seen as a resource rather than simply a national language in name only, government funding can be invested through the college level in maintaining teachers, developing materials, and creating media programming to reach more individuals.

Public documents from the European Union (<http://www.europa.edu>) and from the Council of Europe (<http://www.coe.int>) indicate the time and effort government officials have invested in protecting the languages of the EU, given that some languages possess more linguistic capital than others. Preservation of linguistic human rights is paramount in the planning conducted by the EU.

Some scholars argue that one can lose one's mother tongue but still be actively connected to the cultural community of that language. Jerzy Smolicz (1979) contrasts Greek immigrants to Australia with Dutch immigrants to Australia. The Greek immigrants maintain their "Greekness" while actively promoting maintenance of the Greek language—not unlike the parents in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, who insist their American-born children attend Greek school on a weekly basis. The Dutch immigrants maintain their "Dutchness" even though they do not insist their children learn their parents' home language. On the other hand, Thomas Paikeday (1985) looks at how multilingual children in places like India and Africa may lose their mother tongues if their elementary schooling is in a regional language that is different from their home languages. In addition, their regional language may be replaced by a language like English or French in secondary school and at a university.

The Kurds are one of only two indigenous groups recognized by the UN that do not have a nation-state (Palestinians are the other). Scattered among Russia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, the Kurds have three different alphabets, even though language is a unifier among all Kurds. In Iran, Iraq, and Syria, the alphabet is the Arabic alphabet, written from right to left. In Russia the alphabet is Cyrillic, and in Turkey the alphabet is the Roman alphabet—both of which are written from left to right. If the Kurdish language as a marker of Kurdish identity vanishes, it will become even more difficult to maintain an ethnic profile, particularly since the Kurds do not have a homeland.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Use of sheng in marketing in Kenya**

Another public domain where language is critical is the media. Prior to 1992 the media was largely controlled by the government. Following the liberalization of the press after the 1992 multiparty elections, the country now has a vibrant and a diverse mass media sector in the region. As an information disseminating tool, the media has great influence on its citizens. The government controls the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) which recognizes Kiswahili

and English as the official languages of operation. KBC has three major levels of news broadcasting (television and radio). The National Service broadcasts from Nairobi and its programs are strictly in Kiswahili, the national language. The General Service also broadcasts from Nairobi and its programs are all in English. The national television ran also by KBC broadcasts in English and Kiswahili, but with the majority of the programs in English. The government has also established regional radio stations which are ran in at least 17 major regional languages on a four-hour basis per day. The programs in these regional stations are organized as follows: Central Station broadcasts in Kikuyu, Kikamba, Kimaasai, Kimeru and Kiambu. The Eastern Station broadcasts in Somali, Boran, Rendile, Burji and Turkana. The Western Station broadcasts in Dholuo, Kisii, Kalenjin, Kuria, Teso and Luhya (Kiarie, 2004).

After the advent of multiparty in 1992, airwaves were liberalized, a development that has seen a proliferation of different forms of mass media including print and FM radio programming in local languages throughout the day. Some of these FM stations include Mirembe FM in Luhya, Musyi FM in Kamba, Ramogi FM in Dholuo, and Kameme FM in

Kikuyu. Besides these ethnic language stations, there are also stations that broadcast in Kiswahili and in both English and Kiswahili with announcers who are hired not because they are trained in journalism, but rather due to their popularity among the general public. In urban areas, such personalities often use Sheng in their talk shows.

Private FM stations in ethnic languages that continue to emerge, for the first time, seem to offer local languages a public that had never been envisaged by ordinary Kenyans. The Kenyan government does not support local languages as avenues of disseminating public information for fear of promoting ethnic division.

As one can observe, the impetus to have local languages in the public media comes from private enterprises, a move that has sometimes received criticism from the government as a site for hate speech. It is therefore fair to conclude that while the private media liberally allow the use of indigenous languages and Sheng in their programming, language policies in the media run by the government such as the KBC are largely aimed at promoting English and Kiswahili.

Although English is given preferential treatment and reinforced in these public domains, it remains very difficult to ascertain the percentage of the people who speak it effectively in Kenya. Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) point out that English is yet to develop a large number of native speakers in Kenya.

Sheng has now transcended socioeconomic class boundaries and is used by many youths irrespective of social class or gender. It is now gradually spreading to some rural areas by way of radio and young people who travel between urban and rural areas. This variety has also attracted the attention of business people and politicians who use it to promote their products and policies to young people. The spread and appreciation of Sheng has also been made possible due to avenues that are usually appealing to the youths and the public in general. For example, young people especially in Kenya and to some extent in Tanzania and Uganda, have adopted hip hop music that is usually sung in Sheng or Swahinglish as this hybrid form is referred to in Tanzania (Higgins 2007). During recent national elections in Kenya, politicians have been capitalizing on hip hop music to show that they are trendy and that they identify with the youths.



Such instances usually affect people's attitudes towards Sheng even though it is not a legitimate code in formal institutions.

In summary, Sheng is pervasive among Kenyan youths and they have adopted it as an identity marker. It is a variety that unifies them, creating in-group solidarity against outsiders. Rural youths also attempt to align with their urban counterparts because they view their way of speaking to be trendy. Although these rural youths can hardly speak like their urban counterparts due to their lack of knowledge of English and exposure to a variety of mass media, their temporal identification with them is something that most rural youths would like to project in non-threatening situations. The code has also caught the attention of the print and electronic media especially in advertisements, official health warnings on HIV/AIDS, and other commercials.

### **2.2.2 Official Sheng station- Ghetto Radio**

In February 2008 the Ghetto Radio Foundation set up a radio operation in Nairobi, Kenya. The station transmits on 89.5FM to the wider area of Nairobi and has become one of the country's most popular youth stations.

Ghetto Radio primary target was Nairobi's Eastlands, an area known for its ghetto and slum neighborhoods. Prior to Ghetto Radio's establishment, the area had been ignored by commercial media. Eastlands' inhabitants, who make up 60% of the capital's population, now have a major outlet through Ghetto Radio.

Ghetto Radio is a community station, realized on a commercial revenue basis; the business operations are sustained entirely by advertising. As the major stakeholders [government and commercial industry] have begun to realize that media operations in marginalized urban areas can be beneficial in all sorts of ways, they have started to support Ghetto Radio and invest in it from a commercial perspective.

The station runs on an urban music format, copyright of the Ghetto Radio Foundation, and available for franchising to other media operations across Africa. Criteria for expansion into new markets are:

- i. Urban area
- ii. There is an urge for attention on marginalized areas and audiences iii.  
There are commercial opportunities for such a radio format
- iv. The infrastructure for the lease of a license and frequency in such areas exists v.  
Potential pool of talented staff

Ghetto Radio's format has been recognized as unique: focusing on marginalized urban areas, using a mix of street language, local culture and urban music, and a street-level journalistic approach. Ghetto Radio is managed and staffed by a young crew from ghetto areas, all of who understand the codes and responsibilities of a street-credible and reliable operation. Ghetto Radio benefits greatly from the use of social media. The interaction with its audience via mobile messages and Facebook updates links private opinion to social issues.

Ghetto Radio is also involved in a number of social events during the year, an expression of its desire to truly contribute to the community via media and social activities. The government has

started to support the radio station as they collaborated with other groups such as NACADA to pass messages about drug abuse and how to stop the vice.

Their programs start as early as 5am with the inspirational music to start the day, from 6am to 10am is brekko which airs current affairs and music with a humorous twist, niajeniaje program is aired between 11am and 2pm and discusses issues concerning lifestyle and relationships and later the famous show from 3pm to 7pm by Captain Mbuci and Bonoko in their program air goteana ( a direct flight to Jamaica with dancehall and reggae music), kumbatoto (love songs), nyonyachupachupichupi, and kungutamiwa where they play conscious reggae. At night time they air the Chart show / Women's report / Cool R&B. Hence we see that Ghetto radio incorporates all people and air their programs targeting different age groups at different time of the day.

### **2.2.3 Sheng in Banking Adverts**

Commercial advertisers have also recently turned to Sheng to market their products. The banking industry in Kenya has undergone a major transformation due to amongst other actors, changing patterns of customer behavior, government regulation, technological innovations, service quality movements, and pressures to improve productivity, relaxation of previous professional association restrictions on marketing, internationalization and globalization.

This has caused a lot of dynamism in the banking sector spiraling unprecedented competition. To survive and thrive, these banks have been forced to differentiate themselves mainly through customer-focused initiatives. This has led to a renewed focus on the development of relevant marketing strategies as a response to the evolving challenges. These strategies consist of the business approaches and initiatives specific banks are undertaking to attract customers and fulfill their expectations; to withstand competitive pressures and to strengthen their market positions.

With the rapid changes being experienced in this sector, the traditional marketing mix of the 4 Ps has been criticized for being too myopic and disparaged for being too product focused and overly inward-looking in the current market situation. Commercial banks face many challenges in today's dynamic marketplace.

In a global economy that has become increasingly competitive, there is need for efficient development of products that can quickly satisfy a more demanding customer base and build long term customer trust.

It must optimize both internal and external innovation, while seeking operational excellence at all levels. Meeting these challenges requires new business and marketing strategies that boost revenues, improve operational efficiency, cut costs, and enhance the overall management of business. Today, banks are looking beyond traditional practices to new tactics and tools that analysts and thought leaders have identified as the best for the industry.

To achieve this, an increasing number of banks have adopted separate strategies to service their customers with the current trend to shift from a product-based focus to a more customer oriented focus of providing packages of financial services tailored to their needs.

There are numerous strategies that banks are using to gain a competitive edge in the market place. These include: Understanding Customer Expectations; Market Segmentation; Service

Positioning; Relationship Marketing; Setting and Measuring Service Standards; Human Resource Strategy; and Communication Strategies.

New trends in marketing banking services have since emerged, including personalized banking, which have created a niche in the selling of services. Creating a niche in business is the key to creating a brand name that resonates with the business vision and mission. Banks in Kenya have their own niche markets: KCB, for example is perceived as a national bank that presents an ace in the deck of bank cards. Equity is largely perceived as local bank with local interest at heart, I&M and CFC Stanbic, are perceived as leaning towards the elite of the society kind of bank, while NIC is seen as warming up to upwardly mobile professionals.

It is through the target markets that marketing services are honed to give banks clients who bring in money and borrow money with satisfaction. NIC was, for example, key originator in personalized banking, with the bank offering a cup of coffee or cappuccino and telephone calls at their expense. Equity Bank, from the word go, has it market cut out going for the large untapped market of the common mwananchi, opening bank accounts with no money and deductions made once the money started streaming in.

KCB and Barclays recruited sales teams that aggressively targeted the working population of Kenya with promotions using sheng language. With such promotions, tag lines such as —Mkopowa Salol (Loan against a salary or pay slip at Barclays) and —Bankikana KCB (Bank with KCB) taking the advertising mantra to another level. The front and promotional marketing activities did not leave the professional women behind as evidenced by the Diva Account at the Standard Chartered Bank, targeting the modern working woman, between 2545, with related goodies decked on board.

In a PR campaign for the Cooperative Bank of Kenya, advertising firm Ayton, Young and Rubbican used Sheng phrases to advertise the opening of a new branch of the bank in Githurai: Tumerudi Githu Mara Ya Twice (We Are Back in Githurai for the Second Time) went the ad. While Barclays Bank, in spite of its English heritage, has MkopoWa Salo.

#### **2.2.4 Sheng in Politics**

In 2002, Kenya had a momentous General Election that ended KANU's 40-year rule since independence in 1963. During the election campaign the NARC party employed the Sheng word *unbwogable* to very good effect. Similarly, the Head of State used the term even in his official speeches. Also in his limited Sheng repertoire, the President would end his official speech by urging Kenyans to go home and *kuji-enjoy*. The use of Sheng by the politicians was a ruse to win votes from the youth. By speaking one or two Sheng words the politicians seemed to be saying *hey young guys! We are pulling together!*

In the General Election in 2002, politicians were very keen to use Sheng to woo votes from the youth. However, the huge billboards only displayed messages in Kiswahili and English, an indication that the main protagonists did not belong in the youth culture. Nevertheless, Sheng remains a powerful weapon for creating the illusion of solidarity with the youth. The politicians are using sheng to launch their parties as mostly they are targeting the youths A presidential hopeful (Raphael Tuju) launched the Party of Action (POA) which he would use to vie for the top seat in the forthcoming general elections. At the launch at KICC, Tuju pledged that his party

which has a youth centered political agenda was determined to adopt best practices from around the world and ensure that skills' training for the youth was government financed. —We want to take action not just the same old same stories,|| Tuju said. POA symbol is a cellphone which Tuju said showed the party embraced modern technology and industry. —We welcome every Kenyan to this party where active participation of the youth is guaranteed,|| he said.

### **2.2.5 Sheng in telecommunication**

The entrepreneurial class in Kenya has now woken up to the economic advantages that Sheng presents as the language of the youth. With more than 60% of Kenyans being young persons, the advertising industry has turned to Sheng to lure the youth.

In particular, the two competing mobile phone service providers, Celtel19 and Safaricom, have continually used Sheng in their advertisements. Some soap manufacturers also use *lifebuoy kadonye* to market their products. For example we find that safaricom used sheng to advertise okoa jahazi, and launced sale of air time for small currency such as bambambao, and also Bamba 50 and the Ponyoka Na Pick-up ad.

The G-Pange campaign, a social responsibility ad, is an example of how Sheng can be used for a positive end.

### **3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The rise, development and present status of Sheng is a reflection of a larger social process and internal social relations, such as class division, age and gender within a highly multilingual context. It was pointed out by Spyropoulos (1987) that 'the emergence of Sheng may also have to do with the lack of clarity in Kenya's language policy' by providing speakers with a code that makes good use of all the major languages spoken in the city. I think that Sheng's most important function is to empower a certain group of speakers by providing a 'closed' ingroup means of communication. In this way it also acts as a means of establishing group identity, expressing solidarity and creating prestige among insiders. Sheng's widespread use and its acceptance among Nairobians are on the rise first and simply because of the great numbers of its speakers - the young and underprivileged residents of Nairobi. Out of its own dynamism, it has permeated all levels of society and gained much media and scholarly attention such as letters to editors, newspaper columns, advertisements, official health warnings on AIDS, and so on. Sheng is moving out of the estates because of a growing perception of 'coolness' especially among young males, i.e. a covert prestige that is associated with toughness, masculinity and local solidarity. This is taking place in part because of Sheng's increasing use in mainstream media, but more significantly because of music and popular youth culture. 'Rapping' and singing in Sheng is currently enjoying great success among the youth across all socio-economic classes of Nairobi.<sup>8</sup> For example, some upper class adolescents we interviewed claimed to speak the code without actually being able to do so. In fact, an analysis of my interviews with them revealed that they speak 'slang'<sup>9</sup> the version of Nairobi English spoken by the upper classes, not Sheng as we have described it. Such attitudes are produced by the effect of those qualities of covert prestige and 'street smartness' embodied by Sheng and transmitted through popular music.



Sheng's prestige remains covert because it is the non-standard language of an otherwise unprestigious section of society. This would explain the gender differences noted among respondents. Amongst young adults, women, especially female university students, reported less use of Sheng than their male counterparts. Most of them claimed to be speakers of 'slang' rather than 'Sheng', despite, for example, their family residence and background being in predominantly Sheng-speaking areas of the city. Similar conservative linguistic behaviour of women is documented (e.g. Labov 1972; Milroy 1980) in urban communities of the USA and the UK respectively. The linguistic conservatism is often manifested by females' lesser use of local, non-prestigious forms, reflecting their status consciousness. Young adult females in Nairobi are therefore more aware of the (negative) social significance of using Sheng. In the future, Sheng is likely to increase in use and in the number of speakers, as more young Nairobians identify with its dynamic and innovative culture. The conditions for its existence are likely to continue to prevail, such as the socio-linguistic distance between classes and generations. Sheng will probably continue to be the favoured code of the urban masses that do not fit in to the world of Standard Swahili - being ethnically non-coastals, and having low levels of formal education. Sheng could eventually establish itself firmly as an urban dialect of Swahili with certain implications for language in Kenya: to what extent for example, would it influence Standard (Kenyan) Swahili in future? Or will Sheng crystallize as an agegraded phenomenon?

The case recommends that more studies be done to evaluate if growth of sheng language and its effect on media strategies of market targeting in Kenya and whether it has helped in achieving positive results as targeted by different organizations. For example, it may be important to evaluate the effects of using sheng in Safaricom advertisements before the adverts and after the adverts were aired. The case study also recommends that further studies be carried out to determine whether use of sheng has brought unity among the youths and if this language can be standardize and be taught in schools to foster national cohesion.

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