

## **EXPANDING THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SPACE FOR THE EMERGENCE OF HYBRID MOTHER TONGUES IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF KENYA**

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This paper examines the key factors to consider when selecting the language(s) that would be most appropriate as media of instruction in schools within a multi-cultural and multilingual setting - in this case Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The emergence and growth of urban codes in African urban spaces is a socio-linguistically significant phenomenon because it represents some recognition of these urban codes and places them into a 'hybrid third space' where mixed languages and mixed identities are accommodated. Moreover, urban youth from different ethnic backgrounds can challenge the traditional linguistic and cultural identities of earlier generations that tend to categorize communities into rigid ethnic identities and cultural frameworks. The growth and spread of urban codes in urban settings even as mother tongue languages is a dynamic process that continues to grow despite deliberate efforts by educationists, language policy makers and other 'language gatekeepers' to demonize and discourage their use, supposedly because they are to blame for the poor performance of students during national examinations, particularly those that test competence and performance in English and Kiswahili - Kenya's official languages (the latter having the added accolade of being the national language). The argument in this paper is that this blanket condemnation and prohibition of urban children and youth to use familiar urban codes as their preferred forms of communication, which serves as a mother tongue for some, violates the linguistic and cultural rights of children, particularly in Nairobi.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globalization has created a sociolinguistic phenomenon that favours the expansion and acquisition of mainstream languages, which are usually in developed countries such as French, English, Spanish and lately, Chinese). This has happened at the expense of less prestigious ethnic languages used in developing countries, which are increasingly becoming endangered from a sociolinguistic perspective. There is evidence of linguistic inequality between languages used in developed and developing countries. According to the website of the movement for linguistic human rights in the World, Phillipson 2001 involves a limited a number of dominant Globalisation involves a limited number of dominating languages - English being at the centre of this globalisation process. The forces behind globalisation tend to favour the spread of English around the world. Obviously, this happens to the detriment of African mother tongues. It is often the case that educational resources are channelled to the strengthening of former colonial European languages in Africa, a place of information, discussion and action concerning linguist

human rights. In essence, this policy constitutes a recolonisation of the African mind.<sup>1</sup>

In Africa, for instance, minority ethnic languages are often overlooked in the decision-making processes of what languages to choose as the language of instruction in schools or to conduct government business. The choice will more often than not, revolve around 'mainstream' international languages. Global interaction in essence, favours the literacy, acquisition and expansion of such languages, while the less publicized and hence, less empowered languages become increasingly endangered with the ultimate threat of language death. It is unsustainable for a word to develop a sustained and democratic fashion on the basis of a borrowed or colonial language. Underdeveloped countries in Africa remain so partly because of the cultural alienation which goes hand in hand with the learning and acquisition of former colonial languages.

Users of a language communicate to reflect the social conditions and practices surrounding their environment and to vocalize their thoughts and aspirations. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate the potential of emerging urban codes used in Kenya (and in Nairobi in particular) to:

- act as channels for the transfer of cultural heritage of different ethnic groups from one generation to another;
- contribute vital information on language typology;
- conserve the socio-political and cultural history (in the absence of written records); and
- demonstrate how urban codes, (just like other recognized mother tongues) reflect the cultural attitudes and identities of their users especially during intercultural interactions.

There is a correlation between underdevelopment and the use of a foreign language as the official language of a given country. Basically, technological knowledge and skills are imparted almost exclusively in these foreign languages, while the majority of rural and urban Africans - the farmers and craftsmen perform their daily tasks in indigenous African languages such as Kikamba, Dholuo, Kalenjin, Yoruba, Hausa, Wolof, Ga, Igbo, Bambara, Kiswahili, and numerous other languages. The question this study seeks to answer is whether ordinary Africans can be assisted to improve their social, economic, and political participation via their mother tongues? Why should we insist on their learning English, Arabic, French or Portuguese first before modern technology could be introduced to them?

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[www.linguistic-rights.org](http://www.linguistic-rights.org)<sup>1</sup>

## 2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND - REVIEW OF UNITED NATIONS' INSTRUMENTS ON LINGUISTIC RIGHTS

Linguistic or language rights refer to the human and civil rights concerning individual and group collective rights to choose their preferred language(s) for communication both in private and public spaces. Linguistic rights include the right to use one's language in legal, administrative and judicial acts, language education, and the media. Linguistic rights enable a person to access to information and knowledge, particularly basic scientific and technical knowledge.

Ideally, the medium of communication should be understood and freely chosen by all those concerned. The linguistic rights relating language in education have been framed in numerous international agreements - both for minority and indigenous groups. Languages are vital communication tools and are channels for the transfer of knowledge and preservation of a community's bio-cultural heritage. Indeed, they also function as a marker of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group. Consequently, respect for the languages of those belonging to different linguistic communities is a prerequisite for peaceful cohabitation and harmonious co-existence of both minority and majority groups. Claims for language rights are often the primary rights demanded by majority groups in situations of political change and evolution. Such claims range from the official and legal status of the minority language, as well as the language of instruction in educational institutions and the media.

The *United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948)* affirms the right to education without discrimination. *Article 2* of this document establishes the basic principle against discrimination on the grounds of language. *Article 5* of the *Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960)* specifically recognizes the rights of members of national minorities to carry out their own educational activities, including the use or the teaching of their own language, provided that this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minority groups from understanding the culture and language of the community as a whole and from participating in its activities. Other UN declarations and conventions affirm the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to learn and/or have instruction in their heritage language.

UNESCO's mandate is to provide and support quality education for all and to reinforce cultural and linguistic diversity in education. In so doing, it has reinforced the use of mother tongue instruction in early childhood and primary education since 1953. This is in line with the international targets for universal education articulated in the *Education for All* goals.<sup>2</sup>The UNESCO

Constitution underscores the fundamental principle that language should not be used to discriminate in any way and that the human (and linguistic) rights and fundamental freedoms are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.

However, the reality on the ground is that monolingualism is still predominant worldwide, despite the advantages of multilingual education in the early years of schooling. Studies reveal that children who are offered opportunities to learn in mother tongues are more likely to enrol and succeed in school. In addition, it is fairly easy for their parents to communicate with their children's teachers in a familiar language, thereby giving the parents the opportunity to participate more in their children's learning and education process. Moreover, mother tongue-based education benefits disadvantaged groups such as children from rural communities who often tend to have less exposure to official languages and have been found to stay in school longer, achieve better, and repeat grades less often when they are taught in their mother tongue.

### 3. KENYA'S LANGUAGE POLICY

Over the years, Kenya has implemented numerous educational policies which have subsequently contributed to the subordinate status given to the linguistic diversity of ethnic languages. From a linguistic perspective, this had drastic implications on the acquisition, learning and use of mother-tongues. The effects of this are still being experienced today. A number of educational policies have threatened the country's linguistic diversity. In 1920, Kenya became a British colony and hence, ceased to be part of the East African Protectorate. From around 1920 to 1924, a group referred to as the "Phelps-Stokes Committee" was formed. Its primary aim was to suppress and discourage the use of all ethnic/mother tongues by Africans in Kenya. The underlying objective was to create a sense of embarrassment and shame in Kenyan children if they used their ethnic languages publicly as opposed to speaking the "colonizers' tongue", which was English. As a way of reinforcing the stigma associated with speaking native African mother tongues in public, a bizarre rule was introduced that any child heard speaking an African ethnic language would be stigmatized and humiliated before the whole school.

The "culprit" would be forced to wear a huge, placard disc around their neck engraved with derogatory phrases such as: "*I will only speak English in school*" or "*I am very stupid [because I spoke my mother tongue in school].*" This situation prevailed even after Kenya attained its independence in 1963. In some schools, even speaking the national language Kiswahili was considered offensive. Children and making them feel ashamed of using their mother tongues, and then surely, this had to be the most effective and traumatizing deterrent. The stigma bestowed on the young, impressionable

and self-conscious minds of these school-going children had lasting effects, some of which still prevail today. It deterred pupils from using their ethnic languages, even when the “forbidden languages” were the primary (and perhaps, only) languages used in the catchment area. Consequently, any pupil heard speaking or code-mixing English with an African language or speaking any other language other than English in the school setting was ridiculed, mocked and stigmatized - both by fellow pupils (who had been indoctrinated that English was a superior language) or by the teachers who after ridiculing the “disobedient” child” then would further humiliate the child by forcing them to wear the hideous collar sometimes for the whole day. The same crude punishment would be vetted out to anyone caught or heard speaking Kiswahili in school. The “guilty” child would be severely reprimanded and similarly forced to wear the revolting disc with its equally repulsive, racist and derogatory messages.

In essence, speaking any other language in school other than English was prohibited, irrespective of whether or not it appeared on the time table. The ultimate effect of this punishment implied that local languages were inferior to English - and by extension, the speakers of the languages. Hence, the closer a learners’ speech approximated English, the more intelligent they were perceived to be. This was the genesis of the negative stereotypes that even today affect literacy and the development of African languages. This type of thinking was influenced by early historians and anthropologists who initially classified African ethnic languages and cultures as “primitive” and inferior to colonial languages because they lacked written records like those found in Semitic and European texts. This previous lack of recognition of the significant role of Kenya’s ethnic languages meant that the local languages were disempowered. In the contemporary world, using ethnic languages does not avail their speakers with key access to services, programmes, knowledge and information. Furthermore, speakers of these languages often do not understand the policies, the objectives and the procedures of development and, therefore, cannot meaningfully participate in these processes such as those articulated in key government blueprints such as Vision 20130 and the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

In 1974, the first official language policy of independent Kenya’s first government was enacted. The Government of Kenya designated Kiswahili as the national language and English as the official language. However, this pronouncement did not stipulate exactly how this policy would be implemented within the education sector nor did it address the role of the other local languages used in Kenya. The Mackay Committee of 1981 developed a policy which recommended that Kiswahili be made a compulsory and examinable subject. Before this, there was no clear language planning body in Kenya to steer a head the implementation process in educational institutions. Furthermore, this enactment did not state how this policy would

be implemented in the education sector or what would be the status of the ethnic languages spoken in Kenya.

Interestingly, although Kiswahili was classified as a taught subject in the syllabus, it was allocated only three teaching slots, as compared to English and Mathematics, which each had eight slots per week on the timetable. Furthermore, this uneven allocation of time further created the impression that learning English far outweighed learning Kiswahili or any other African language. Three times as much time was spent not only teaching but also examining learners in other subjects, whereas the time allocated to learning Kiswahili was a mere 1/3 of the time allocated to English per week. Moreover, even after teaching them the subject, no importance was placed on testing their understanding of what they had learnt either through an oral or written examination. The impression created was that the exposure the learners received in Kiswahili was simply a hobby to help them pass time in school.

The high prestige accorded to English language, the dominant role it plays in the process of globalization, and the lack of political will to develop it by putting in place policies that are supportive of mother tongues, created a situation education in mother tongue became stigmatized. English was therefore accorded a higher status over all other languages including Kiswahili. If the Kenyan child's major learning problem is linguistic in nature, the focus of Kenyan policy-makers should then be logically devoted to strengthening African languages as languages of instruction, especially in basic education. The concept "education for all" becomes a completely empty concept if the linguistic environment of the basic learners is not taken into account.

According to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, both Kiswahili and English are stipulated as official languages, with Kiswahili being both an official as well as national language. Failure to make Kiswahili the official language since 1970 clearly demonstrates the lack of commitment among the elite, policymakers and educationists. Kiswahili ought to acquire the same status as English after its elevation to both a national and official language. Indeed, positive strides have been made in advancing the linguistic rights of Kiswahili under Kenya's new Constitution, which recognizes it as both a national and the country's second official language. Moreover, it is a compulsory and examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. The decisive role of linguistically favourable policies plays a huge role in the development and empowerment of a language.

According to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, it is the right of every Kenyan to access information and Government records in both English and Kiswahili. However, to date, there have been no efforts, policies or plans to include Kiswahili as a medium of instruction for other subjects except the language itself. No policies have been put in place to make Kiswahili a

medium of instruction for other subjects and yet, in the new Constitution, it is the right of every Kenyan to access information and Government records either in English or Kiswahili. It is anticipated that institutions of higher learning, the government and all institutions concerned with language policymaking will establish departments that will take up the role of translating all vital government documents into Kiswahili.

The reality on the ground is that English is still viewed as a more prestigious language - perhaps because it appeals to a wider global audience. This is rather ironical because more Kenyans (both educated and illiterate) use Kiswahili and their different ethnic languages more than they use English. According to (Mbaabu 1996), the majority of Africans who still live in rural areas constitute as many as 80 percent of the total Kenyan population, use their mother tongues in most of their day-to-day transactions as opposed to the prestigious English language. However, the choice of what language will be used as the medium of instruction and conducting government business has implications on the redistribution of power between the elites and the masses. For instance, if one particular indigenous language is selected as the medium of instruction to be spoken by the masses, it follows that its speakers must also embrace its cultural heritage. In essence, the decision to select either English or Kiswahili as official languages gives a certain amount of power to the privileged few who speak it competently as opposed to the masses who only speak and understand a smattering of it to the masses.

The development and promotion of local languages in Kenya before the enactment of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 was hampered by educational policies and acts of political interference that inhibited and frustrated efforts to make mother tongue use an important part of national development. The Constitution recognizes the rich linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in the country. Previously, English was favoured as the language of instruction in educational institutions. This situation has since been changed to adapt to the linguistic diversity of the country. The transition from English to the indigenous languages as the medium of instruction especially in the field of science and technology could perhaps contribute to breaking down the barrier that exists between the privileged English-speaking learners exposed to English right from birth and the ordinary folk whose mother tongue is not English. Moreover, this paradigm shift would give confidence to both teachers and pupils in Kenya in the sense that would have a better command of science and technology. There is little evidence that a good command of English is a prerequisite for learning science and technology and accessing knowledge via ICT. After all, the leading technological nations are Japan, China, Korea, Germany and other countries where English is not spoken as the primary language.

However, despite the promotion of the two languages and the arguments that they serve at best as “neutral” languages of wider communication, the

majority of Africans who still live in the rural areas and number as much as 80 percent of the total Kenyan population, use the forty (40) odd mother tongues in most of their day-to-day transactions<sup>3</sup>. In rural schools, the mother tongue used in the catchment area is used in the first three years of basic (elementary) education. Thereafter, the pupils are gradually exposed to English as the new language of instruction. However, in urban areas, where children come from different ethnic backgrounds, Kiswahili is considered the most practical language for the majority of city dwellers.

#### **4. CHALLENGES TO THE USE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

The most vibrant form of the debate regarding the promotion of African languages is usually witnessed within the field of education. The debate concerns what languages to use as the media of instruction in educational programmes. Some problems exist with regard to the use of mother tongue languages. Such problems are often based on negative attitudes towards the use of African languages as teaching media, usually due to pre-colonial prejudices or speakers' postcolonial perceptions that the languages lack value in relation to important social and economic markets. Moreover, there are a host of problems with teaching materials as well as in choice and description of language varieties to teach, and the type of syllabi to use. Since the content of the curricula is oriented towards the official and national languages, students do not get adequate exposure to literacy in indigenous languages.

Such challenges could be dealt with if policy texts explicitly stated what languages should be taught and which agencies and institutions should be responsible for implementing the relevant policies. Moreover, deliberate efforts could focus more on changing the negative attitudes of speakers towards their ethnic languages by publishing textbooks and other key reading material in ethnic languages. The challenge herein would be to ensure that there is accuracy in translation as well as the codification and standardization of these ethnic languages. According to Stroud (2001), the best way to enhance the educational use of indigenous languages lies in a management-oriented approach to programme diagnosis and remediation. Interestingly, the languages which suffer the greatest lack of materials or appropriate grammars are also the ones that have historically been considered politically "insignificant" and marginalized to the point that they hardly merit any attention from textbook writers.

Arguments about using indigenous African languages for education include claims that integrating indigenous languages such as Kiswahili or any other indigenous Kenyan language would be costly in terms of producing

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<sup>3</sup>Mbaabu (1996)

materials in different languages. Other arguments are that the indigenous languages would require adaptation to unaccustomed scientific and technological terminology, or that they lack international appeal. Ideally, from an educational perspective, Kenya's bilingual policy is intended to promote the development and use of Kiswahili and English as official languages. However, in rural areas, the language of the catchment area (usually the mother tongue of the large majority of learners) is used as the medium of instruction in the first three years of basic education.

In urban areas, however, it is Kiswahili that is expected to be used for this purpose at this level. Thereafter, English becomes the medium of instruction. However, despite the promotion of English and Kiswahili as languages of wider communication, the majority of Kenyans in rural areas use their mother tongues in their day-to-day transactions (Mbaabu 1996). Less than 25 percent of African people know ex-colonial languages well enough to develop educationally, economically, socially and politically.<sup>4</sup> According to Lodhi (1993:82), this situation:

... slows down national integration and development of the nation-state, with a national culture, creates insecurity and feeling of inferiority among those who have to operate in the foreign language of the ruling elite.

An additional challenge is that both colonial and post-colonial policies have largely neglected Kenyan indigenous languages apparently because of the attitude of policymakers, which tends to regard Kenyan indigenous languages as not being able to cope with modern realities of life and, therefore, not being effective media for imparting meaningful education, including especially aspects of modern science and technology.

English has long been considered to be a prestigious language and subsequently plays a dominant role in the process of globalization. The result of this current state of affairs is that English still carries prestigious connotations and is held in higher status compared to the other (indigenous) languages. This has created a deplorable situation in which mother tongue education exists on the margins with the relevant languages playing very little meaningful role in the lives of their speakers.<sup>5</sup> The result has been the promotion of English and Kiswahili to the detriment of ethnic languages, especially in the lives of the urban youth. It is important to note that most of the world's developed countries have developed on the basis of their national languages, as they have adapted and integrated technology within their cultural and social values, thus reaching all the people in their countries.

It is unfortunate that in the majority of African countries (Kenya included) language planning activities and issues of language policy are not

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<sup>4</sup>Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000)

<sup>5</sup>Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000)

given the serious attention they deserve. For instance, in Kenya, the language policy in education is that children should be taught in the indigenous language of the catchment area during the first three years of schooling. However, the reality on the ground is that most parents want their children to learn in English as the preferred medium of instruction. In this spirit, children are even punished for using their mother-tongues or mixed forms like Sheng in school. This trend is similar in a number of African states.

## **5. THE EMERGENCE OF HYBRID MOTHER TONGUES IN NAIROBI**

Children in urban home environments where they are exposed to more than one language begin to acquire two primary languages simultaneously. Some children start out as monolingual, and begin to acquire a second language sometime in early childhood, for example, in an early childhood programme or through other interactions outside the home, and thus can be said to be acquiring a second language.

Maintaining English as the language of instruction in Kenyan educational institutions as the medium of instruction perpetuates an injustice on children who have not been previously exposed to the language at home. Moreover, these children are forced to learn in a language they barely speak or understand as they also grapple with the task of adapting to the new school environment. Usually, children born and raised in Nairobi, by school-going age, have already been exposed to some Kiswahili in the home environment - perhaps through their interactions with the house help, watchman, etc. However, there exists a minority of children with foreign/expatriate parents or children of mixed parenthood (racial or ethnic) whose parents choose to expose them to English right from birth. More often than not, such children will be exposed to native or near-native varieties of English and attend high-cost and well equipped schools, where the teachers are native or near-native speakers of English, and where the Kiswahili teachers also tend to be excellent in Kiswahili.

At the macro-level, Kenya has been described as one of the African countries with a language policy that consciously promotes two languages. However, in such schools, children are exposed to good English from the first day of school- and if it is an international school, Kiswahili is categorized as a non-compulsory optional subject. Standard American or British English is usually the primary medium of instruction - with most of the teachers drawn from USA, Britain or other countries where English is acquired as a mother tongue. Children attending these schools are from the expatriate communities, with either one or both parents working for an international body such as the UN.

The children in such institutions are also expected to learn another global language such as French or Spanish, with little emphasis being placed

on learning Kiswahili as Kenya's official and national language. These international schools follow international curricula similar to what is followed in the home countries of the parents of the concerned children. This explains why minimal emphasis is placed on learning Kiswahili, the language spoken by a significant population of communities in East and Central Africa and taught as a foreign language in major international universities in developed countries such as the USA.

## 6. THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN CODES IN NAIROBI

Sheng and (its English-based variety) Engsh are urban codes that evolved in different parts of Nairobi and later spread rapidly throughout the city and beyond in the last three decades. Sheng was originally a stigmatized form of communication used mainly in the economically challenged neighbourhoods of Nairobi known as "Eastlands". Today, Sheng is the primary form of communication amongst school-age children, the youth and adults (in the generation currently aged between 30 and early 50's) born and bred in the economically-challenged neighbourhoods of Nairobi.

On the other hand, Engsh emerged simultaneously in the (upper) middle-class suburbs of Nairobi referred to as the "Westlands" area, which is located fairly near the Central Business District (CBD). Immediately after Kenya achieved her independence, the "expatriate (white)" areas marked the direction for the spread of Engsh, whose speakers were raised in homes where their parents were generally well-educated and had a good command of English. A significant proportion of these children were brought up by parents of different ethnic groups or races, and hence English was the automatic medium for parent-to-child communication. Moreover, since these children were brought up in middle-income households, it was not unusual for them to employ house helps not only with some good education, but also a good command of English. Nevertheless, maintaining British or American Standards of English as the language of instruction in Kenyan educational institutions is a definite injustice on children who have not been previously exposed to the language at home. Moreover, these children are forced to learn in a language they barely speak or understand as they also grapple with the task of adapting to the new school environment.

In the early 1980s, Sheng gradually spread from being the "lingua franca" of only Eastlands youth to the preferred form of communication among the youth throughout Nairobi and beyond. On the other hand, Engsh did not experience much growth although some lexical items and phrases were borrowed (and "nativized") into Sheng. A plausible reason for this unequal spread of the two urban codes is that before 1985, Kiswahili was not an examinable subject at the end of primary (elementary) and secondary (high school) education, and so the initial group of Engsh speakers was not

motivated to develop a good command of Kiswahili.

While the precise boundaries of what is erroneously referred to as 'Kenyan English' and, even more so, 'Kenyan Swahili' are hard to establish, English and Swahili form the matrix languages of Engsh and Sheng, which the author prefers to call hybrid 'codes' rather than languages. While Engsh is mainly spoken by upwardly mobile middle-class youth in Western Nairobi, Sheng is spoken by a much larger proportion of urban youth and has evolved from a stigmatized 'ghetto' code in Eastern Nairobi into a prestigious code that symbolizes ideological affinity, in-group identity, coolness, generational rebellion, linguistic innovation, and rejection of ethnic identities. With the exception of the extremely exclusive areas of Nairobi usually reserved for expatriates, children brought up in upper middle-income families acquire Engsh simultaneously with their acquisition of English. However, they also acquire some Sheng too due to exposure to it in school.

## 7. THE RAPID SPREAD AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHENG IN KENYA

The question begged at this point has to do with the spread and subsequent direction of acquisition of Sheng and Engsh in Nairobi. Why has Sheng spread faster than Engsh? What inspired today's middle-class youth to acquire Sheng (from the Eastland's economically challenged areas)? In the early 1980s, Sheng was considered a stigmatized code used by '*Matatu*' (minibus) drivers and conductors plying the Eastland's (low income) areas, youth living in overcrowded, residential areas, idle, jobless/ homeless youth spending time in the back streets of Nairobi, amongst other economically challenged areas. It would seem more logical for this category of youth to imitate the hybrid Engsh used by the upper middle class youth who are more educated, privileged financially and have a better command of English than their Eastland's counterparts.

As hinted above, my hypothesis is that the shift and increase in number of Sheng speakers began around the mid-1980s when Kiswahili was made a compulsory and examinable subject for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). When the Government of Kenya took a more serious position to ensure that the Primary and Secondary Education Syllabi balance the learning and acquisition of English and Kiswahili, the upper and middle class children had no option but to deliberately learn good Kiswahili which forms the matrix (underlying grammar) of Sheng. This code uses the morpho-syntactic rules of Kiswahili to manipulate borrowed words from English and four of the major ethnic languages spoken in Nairobi, namely Kikuyu, Dholuo, Kikamba, and Luhya.

To speak Engsh well, one would require ample exposure to native or near native speakers of English. The upper middle-class youth born and bred in the

high-income Westland's area have been exposed (perhaps from day one) to the speech of parents with good education and hence tend to have a good command of English. Moreover, these children watch foreign movies and listen to Western FM music stations where they receive frequent exposure to native-speaker accents of American, British, Canadian and Australian English - both in their standard and slang forms. They generally attend high cost schools with well-educated teachers who also have good command of English. Consequently, the middle class youth in Nairobi acquire both the hybrid codes Sheng and Engsh simultaneously from the different exposure found in the varied environments, whereas the Eastland's youth have ample exposure to Standard Kiswahili as well as Sheng from their environment. However, they are challenged in acquiring a good command of English (on which Engsh is based), because this calls for frequent exposure to (near) native English, American and British slang as well as opportunities to practice the codes with their peers.

A third possible reason for the rapid spread of Sheng as an urban mother tongue is the desire for both Sheng- and Engsh-speaking urban youth to identify with popular Kenyan hip hop rap artists who appeal (across the board) to the youth born and raised in the Eastland's neighbourhood. All the the names of local Kenyan musical artists such as "*Jua Kali*", "*Rabbit*", "*Nameless*", "*Rufftone*", etc are pseudonyms for celebrities who grew up in Eastlands. The list grows longer if Kenya's famous footballers such as Dennis Oliech, Victor Wanyama, and Mariga are included. Moreover, the most popular '*Matatus*' (minibuses) and flea-markets/second-hand markets (*Gikomba*, *Mutindwa*, *Toi*, etc) are located close to slums and sell fashionable clothes that are affordable to the youth.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Children possess the ability to competently acquire their mother-tongue, and successively proceed to learn a second, third, or even fourth language, including a national *lingua franca* and an international language for global interaction, where necessary. Fluency and literacy in a mother tongue establish the necessary cognitive and linguistic foundation needed to learn other languages. Incorporating mother tongue as the language of instruction has proven to be effective when this language is also the primary language spoken in the catchment area, and hence, the child's mother tongue prior to enrolling into a formal school setting. Indeed, this is the sociolinguistic reality for the majority of school-age children attending schools in rural Kenya. Fluency and literacy in a mother tongue establishes the cognitive and linguistic foundation needed to learn other languages.

As has been reiterated in my discussion, incorporating the learner's mother tongue as the language of instruction is effective when this language

is the language of the catchment area and the child's mother tongue prior to joining a formal school setting. The criterion for selecting the medium of instruction in multi-cultural and multilingual settings in an urban setting is a challenge. However, there are good social, psychological and cognitive reasons to suggest that basic education needs mother tongue (in our case, African) languages, spoken by the majority of Africans, not the languages of former colonizers.

The promotion of mother tongue use will create a shift that will help facilitate the social, intellectual and emotional development of African heritage. In so doing, the "third space" of alternative paradigms of education, development and social growth will take place with a gradual decolonization in the transfer and reception of knowledge, teaching and learning within the education system and beyond. The paper advocates for a multifaceted approach where Kenyan languages including the hybrid codes of Sheng and English are integrated as alternative media of instruction. In so doing, the learners will appreciate that their mother tongues are as important as the foreign languages.

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