

## Effects of Language Spread on a People' Phenomenology: The Case of *Sheng'* in Kenya

Jayne Mutiga

Email: [jmutiga@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:jmutiga@uonbi.ac.ke)

Department of Linguistics and Languages  
University of Nairobi

### Abstract

*Sheng'*, an evolving Kenyan language has been blamed for a myriad of things by parents and teachers in the local communities. Among these are: Loss of paternity and patrimony, these being the identity and connection to any particular roots among the youth, especially the urbanite youth. This Kiswahili-based pidgin-like language is blamed for having negatively impacted its speakers' affinity to their past, the feeling of their continuity and their ethnic legacy as passed on from one generation to another. There is evidence too, that speakers of *Sheng'*, especially those of the second generation, meaning those whose parents also speak it, have developed monostylism thus reducing the number of stylistic variants in their linguistic repertoire. *Sheng'* has also been blamed for its speaker's poor learning and mastery of other languages. But, can it be wished away?

In this paper, I will first discuss the distribution and spread of *Sheng'* in Kenya, and secondly, I will show the effects of *Sheng'* on its speakers' phenomenology, patrimony and paternity. I will conclude by suggesting ways in which language spread can be a useful element to society and by showing how *Sheng'* can co-exist with tens of other languages spoken in Kenya, without negatively impacting on its speakers.

**Key words:** *sheng, phenomenology, patrimony, Kiswahili, Kenya*

### Introduction

*Sheng'* has been defined variously by different researchers. According to Mazrui (1995), it is a hybrid linguistic code that evolved in the city of Nairobi in the 1960s and 1970s. Githiora (2002), on the other hand, calls it a Kiswahili-based patois which has been influenced by many languages. Other researchers on *Sheng'* include Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997), Iraki, (2004), Ogechi (2005) and Momanyi (2009).

What is common among the findings of all these researchers is that they all agree that *Sheng'* originated in residential areas in the Eastlands of Nairobi and that the present '*Sheng'* speakers are youth who can speak Kiswahili competently, but who choose to defy the norm by inventing their own code for purposes of group identity.

These researchers all agree that *Sheng*' is based primarily on the Kiswahili structure and grammar with lexicon drawn from Kiswahili, English and the various ethnic languages of Kenya that are mostly spoken in towns and other urban areas. 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.

Our observation agrees with these definitions and findings that *Sheng*' is indeed a hybrid of English, Kiswahili and many other major indigenous Kenyan languages such as; Gikuyu, Kikamba, Dholuo and the Luhya dialects. *Sheng*' is thought to be a form of Kiswahili because its grammatical structure is majorly based on that of Kiswahili and other Bantu languages, and also because much of its vocabulary which, although incorporated from other languages, is adapted to Kiswahili both in sound and structure.

According to Abdulaziz and Osinde (1996:44);

when *Sheng*' first evolved in the Eastlands region of Nairobi in the late 1960s and early 70s, it was a basic code used by the youth as an in-group marker, a solidarity building language and one used to shut the older folk out of the conversation of the youth.

The genesis of *Sheng*', as Abdulaziz and Osinde (1996) observe, is argotic and its inventors were Kenyan urban youth living in multi-ethnic neighborhoods. This youth played truancy from school and experimented with smoking and drinking alcohol, and, living in small and crowded quarters, they lacked privacy from the adults as well as their younger siblings. They, therefore, needed a code that would shut out the unwanted members of their families and neighborhoods. *Sheng*' became that code, one that also helped them to express their identity as part of a larger youth group, the Eastlanders, and also one that marked them as holders of a sub-culture that separated speakers of different varieties of *Sheng*' on the basis of different estates of their residence within the Eastlands.

### **The spread and Distribution of *Sheng*'**

According to Githiora (2002) published research discussions today, show that *Sheng*' may have originated as different varieties in different residential estates in the Eastlands region of Nairobi. The variety spoken in Kaloleni Estate, for example, is different from that of Bahati Estate, which in turn, is different from the one spoken in Jericho Estate. However, each neighborhood feels that their variety is the authentic *Sheng*'.

Today, *Sheng*' is no longer restricted to the Eastlands. It has grown in leaps and bounds, and has become the basic urban vernacular for the youth in Nairobi and generally in other parts of the country as well. It has spread to all the other urban centres and is also spoken in the rural areas too. However, *Sheng*' is more widespread in the city of Nairobi including its densely populated peripheries such as Githurai, Kangemi, Kawangware and Uthiru areas, and thrives in such slum areas as Mathare and Kibera.

As a result of this growth, *Sheng*' has moved out of the narrow definition and usage where its domain was restricted within the members of the estate 'gangs', street boys

and hawkers. Its influence 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. *Sheng'* is also evidently used in Tanzania and Uganda, where the urban youth in the major cities show off their proficiency as a sign of international exposure (Momanyi 2009). Research has shown that university students in Kenya, for example, use *Sheng'* as their language of social interaction. Moreover, secondary and primary school students too, use *Sheng'* as their principle language outside of the classroom. Also, a growing adult population use *Sheng'* in certain social and business contexts such as the transport industry and traders in the formal and informal sector among others. It is also observed that an increasing number of Kenyan families are speaking *Sheng'* as the language of the home. It is worthy noting that the earliest speakers of *Sheng'*, the youth of the 1960<sup>s</sup> and 70<sup>s</sup>, are now men and women in their late-forties and early-fifties, some of these parents have completely shifted from speaking the languages of their ethnicity and now speak *Sheng'* as their primary language. The children of these people have therefore not been exposed to the ethnic languages and have not then acquired them as their primary languages; instead, they have acquired *Sheng'* which for this group is the language of the home. Later on they learn Kiswahili and English through exposure to the wider society and through the school system.

As Iraki (2010:12) states:

Socially, *Sheng's* image has improved tremendously to the extent of attracting membership from the elite classes. There are many up-market youths who are now using *Sheng'* as their preferred language of communication among themselves. In sum, an urban Kenyan can manipulate a rich patrimony of at least four languages: mother tongue, *Sheng'*, Kiswahili and English. He may in addition know other African languages (Kamba, Maasai, Giriama, etc.) and European languages (French, Spanish, German, etc.). Multilingualism is a reality in Kenya.

As a code, *Sheng'* has been found to be very popular in the local media especially in television and radio. Media presenters use *Sheng'* to identify with the large and growing *Sheng'*-speaking social class which cuts across language and social status. Examples of this include the *Syantisti*, a *Citizen Television* social talk-show and the Ghetto Radio Station whose language of broadcasting is exclusively *Sheng'*.

Local television and radio stations have also given space to *Sheng'* where certain specific programmes use this code to broadcast some of their programmes alongside Kiswahili or English. Examples of these include Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's (KBC) Vitimbi and Vioja Mahakamani as well as Citizen Television's Mashitaka and Makutano among others. These broadcasts have a lasting linguistic effect on school children and the youth since some of these young people tend to identify with certain characters in these programmes through the use of this code.

Commercial advertisers have also recently turned to an extensive use of *Sheng'* to market their products. 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 them. In particular, the two competing mobile telephone service providers, Safaricom and Airtel, have continually used 'Sheng' in their advertisements. For instance, Airtel uses *Bei poa* which means a fair price and *Kopa kredo* meaning borrow credit (airtime) while Safaricom employs *jisort na smartphone* to mean get yourself a smartphone and *Bamba 50*, meaning entertain yourself with 50 shillings!

A debate published in a Kenyan daily newspaper, the Daily Nation of February 6, 2006, showed that publishers have expressed interest to publish in Sheng'. An existing example is the book series *Kwani?* that publishes articles in Sheng'.

Sheng' has the counterpart, Engsh, another hybrid language just like it. Engsh is used by the youth living in the upper-middle, and middle income estates of Nairobi in the Western and Southern regions of the City. Engsh developed and functions much in the same way as *Sheng'*. Its grammar is, however, modeled on that of English and the speakers usually have a good command of English.

### **Sociolinguistic Background to *Sheng'***

According to a recent linguistic survey of Kenya by the Ethnologue (15<sup>th</sup> Edition. 2006), there are forty three indigenous languages spoken in Kenya today. Bantu languages are spoken by more than half of the Kenyan population and are found in the Eastern, Central, Western and Coastal regions of the country. The Gikuyu, Dholuo, Luhya and Kikamba are the largest and most populous of the ethnic language groups. Except for the Dholuo, all the other dominant language groups are Bantu. In addition, Kiswahili; Kenya's lingua franca and the language that forms *Sheng'*'s super strata, is a Bantu language too.

According to Myers-Scotton (1993), more than three quarters of Kenya's population <sup>1</sup> have a working competence in Kiswahili and a majority speaks another indigenous language as a mother tongue.

At the Kenyan coastal region specifically, and also in the major urban centres, Kiswahili is used by a large number of citizens who speak it as their first language, however, most Kenyans speak Kiswahili alongside their ethnic languages and, for the educated ones, English as well, thus, many Kenyans are multilingual and at the very, least bilingual. Bilingualism and Multilingualism are prevalent practices in Kenya from among speakers with very basic education or none at all, to those with university education, with the normal Kenyan language repertoire being: mother tongue, *Sheng'*, Kiswahili and English, or mother tongue and *Sheng'*, or *Sheng'*, English and Kiswahili.

Multilingualism in Kenya occurs at the level of the individual as well as that of whole speech communities and most Kenyans are at least bilingual and a significant number is trilingual. According to Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000), this situation has had a number of significant consequences which have led to the development of other languages and urban vernaculars as a consequence of intense language contact which usually results

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<sup>1</sup>A population of 34 million people at the time. According to the latest national census of 2009, the population now stands at 40 million

from urbanization. *Sheng'* is therefore a product of this kind of contact. Until August 2010, when Kiswahili became Kenya's second official language, English was the only official language of Kenya. English and functions as the language of international communication, school instruction and science and technology. Kiswahili on the other hand is the national language, having the functional load of giving the citizens a national identity and carrying the Kenyan cultural identity. Both English and Kiswahili are taught as subjects at primary and secondary school where they are compulsory and examinable subjects. They are taught as elective subjects at the tertiary level of education. Research shows that 63% of Kenya's population has acquired Kiswahili as a second language either formally through school or informally through social interaction. In the capital city, Nairobi, where a repertoire of languages is spoken, English and Kiswahili are used widely for business and cultural interaction as well as for enter-ethnic communication and as lingua francas (Myers-Scotton 1963).

### **Linguistic Status of *Sheng'***

Although *Sheng'* manifests pidgin tendencies (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997); it differs from well known pidgins in terms of its development and function. Whereas pidgins develop as lingua francas for people with disparate languages, *Sheng'* evolved out of contact between multilingual speakers of English and Kiswahili who had languages of mutual interaction. *Sheng'* does not fit into the language variety jargon, slang or even Creole.

As an unstable variety used primarily by the youth, many people brush it off as merely an example of extensive slang. However, this category is not suitable, as slang is actually the individual words forming part of an utterance and is not the entirety of the utterance itself Samper (2002:126)

Further, it is worth noting that pidgins develop where there is lack of a common language among speakers, but as stated earlier, in Kenya, speakers of different ethnic language already have a working knowledge of Kiswahili (Myers-Scotton 1993), as a lingua franca *Sheng'* therefore primarily functions as a social language without any communicative need. Further, *Sheng'* is also not mere code-switching between English, Kiswahili and other indigenous languages. It does not share mutual intelligibility with English and Kiswahili and speakers of these two languages who do not know *Sheng'* cannot understand it when it is spoken to them.

On *Sheng'* as code-switching, Mazrui (1995:176) states:

*Sheng'* is slang, based primarily on Swahili-English code switching with elements from English and Swahili ending up obeying the morphosyntactic structure of Swahili, whereas the reverse, where Swahili items fit into English morphological frame, does not happen. So the English verbs 'relax', 'come' and 'elapse' and many others, can take the Swahili subject, tense, aspect (and even object) markers to form words like *ali-relax*, *ana-come*, *ime-lapse* ...."

So what is *Sheng*' then? It is all the above and more. Although *Sheng*' exhibits features characteristic to pidgins, slangs and creoles, it cannot be completely classified as any of them because it is peculiar to all of them at the same time. It is a composite language that uses a Matrix Language Frame (MLF) to actualize itself. According to Myers-Scotton (1993), the MLF model spells out relationship between the matrix language (ML) and the embedded language (EL). Here both the matrix language and embedded language contribute the content morphemes but the morphosyntactic orientation and framework are set by the matrix language. In the case of *Sheng*', Kiswahili constitutes the matrix language whereas English constitutes the matrix language for *Engsh*.

According to Ogechi (2005), the matrix language for *Sheng*' varies depending on the area where that particular variety of *Sheng*' is spoken.

### **Effects of *Sheng*' on its Speakers**

Speakers of *Sheng*' are proud to speak it and some non-speakers too approve of it as suitable for the youth and the youth at heart. Many assert that it is good for street smartness. *Sheng*' is more accepted because it embraces and incorporates elements from different languages; representing many Kenyan linguistic groups and this makes it devoid of ethnicity. Therefore, its speakers view it as an inclusive and accommodative language which does not discriminate among its users, and which cuts through the national social strata, age and gender.

The underworld media, including the alternative press enjoy writing in news and information in *Sheng*' and have a very big readership among the youth and other *Sheng*' speakers. Book writers who write in *Sheng*', for the example, Kwani? Publishers, as cited earlier, say that *Sheng*' is a beautiful language that gives its speakers a medium of communication that they can relate to and which is originally truly Kenyan.

Our observation, however, reveals that *Sheng*' has produced and nurtured a mass culture among its speakers. According to Fishman (1966:408), mass culture induces antagonistic attitudes and behaviors towards particularism and traditionalism, by standardizing products and homogenizing tastes. In a society where mass culture is rampant through the ethnic vehicle, a shift in ethnic allegiance thrives. Further, Fishman reinstates that "the adolescent period appears to be the juncture at which the impact of mass culture on ethnicity-based language maintenance is best felt" Fishman (1966:409). He describes a situation where non-institutional transition takes place, replacing values, patterns, behaviour and skills; especially those of the middle class society. This happens because the culprits seek identification and acceptance outside of the family and the status they belong to.

It has been observed that, many urban youth who are *Sheng*' speakers do not know or at best are not fluent in the languages of their ethnicity (Momanyi 2009), the languages in which their family values, behaviour patterns, skills and the whole cultural output is coached.

People who get caught up in mass culture operate in subtraction and exclusion rather than addition of their cultural orientation. They tend to use mixed or hybrid languages and these serve as in-group markers. Examples of such languages abound in the world: *Nouchi* of Abidjan is a local dialect of French, *Indoubil*, a variety of Lingala in Kinshasa, *Darija* of Morocco, a mixture of Arabic, French and Spanish, *Tsotsitall* and *Is scamtho* of Johannesburg, mixture of Afrikaans and Zulu, are examples of this. For Kenya, *Sheng'*, a product of widespread multilingualism and multi-cultural output through decades of peoples' contact is a clear example of mass culture language.

*Sheng'* speakers, especially the urbanites below 35 years of age, and whose parents speak *Sheng'* too, have abandoned the languages of their ethnicity. For some, it is due to a situation where they did not acquire the ethnic language in childhood, since they did not get exposure to it for the simple reason that their parents spoke *Sheng'* and other languages at home. There are also other speakers who acquired *Sheng'* by picking it up alongside other languages. This fact of not learning and speaking the ethnic languages has created language shift in a generation (of children and their young parents), from ethnic languages to *Sheng'*.

#### ***Use of Sheng' as a Cause of Language Shift***

Language shift, also known as language transfer, is a process whereby an individual or a speech community reduces the functions of their native language or even stops using it all together and replaces it with another language. This other language is usually the language of prestige and upward mobility in society or that of peer identity. These could well be languages of wider communication but could also be the languages of the neighbouring communities. The most severe form of language shift is known as assimilation. This happens when a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language and progressively stops using their own language in favour of that other language.

Language is useful as a tool for communication when it is widespread in usage and people, children included, will not bother to learn a language simply to be patriotic to their extended families. Rather, they would learn a language that is widespread in usage and whose image is attractive to them in a personalized way. This reluctance to learn or teach or even use mother tongue to the next generation encourages the learning and using of another language; one that is viewed as more socially prestigious, economically powerful or one that promises upward mobility and a better future.

Today, however, native languages are shifting for the single reason that they are not passed on to the next generation by their speakers. No matter how large the adult-speaker population is, the fate of these languages is already sealed if they are not passed on to the next generation. The language is moribund as soon as the child and consequently the youth populations shift from it. Political and economic dominance by larger communities and western languages too, plays an enormous role in the process of language shift while peer acceptance seems to dominate the social scenario.

These languages of wider communication, be they Kiswahili for East Africa or English for the World can and do co-exist with local languages. However, more often than not, the languages of wider communication replace the local ones as older speakers die and younger ones adopt the more 'useful tongue'. In the case of *Sheng*, social pressure, the secrecy and the need to fit with the urbanite, seem to be the driving force for the shift.

When the process of language shift is completed, what follows is language death because this is the ultimate consequence of language shift and the result is language loss.

When speakers lose their language they lose their symbol of identity and this impacts negatively on their social-psychological well-being because language is not only an instrument of communication; it is the carrier of cultural norms and values of a people. The transmission of a language from one generation to another ensures the transmission of their culture and value systems to the next generation. In the event where this fails to happen, these norms and values are lost with the dying of the last generation that carried them. In the case of Kenya, it is evident that *Sheng* is fast spreading and in certain domains and areas replacing the native languages of its speakers, especially those of the second generation whose parents spoke it at home as the primary language of the home. These speakers have therefore shifted from their native language and have broken away from the feelings of loyalty and solidarity with the native languages of their parents.

Using group languages emphasizes, group feelings and the out-group is excluded from the in-group's internal transaction (Giles 1977). So when a people shift from their language, the in-group feeling of loyalty and solidarity among them is being broken and destroyed.

This is because; language carries societal meanings and connotation. This connection is what is known as cultural or ethnic identity. That way, language distinguishes one group of people from all others because it gives that group a cultural identity. Therefore, when language shift occurs, people lose their identity.

Also, language connects a people to something greater than themselves, their god, their history and their science be it medicine or rain making. These elements of self cannot be transferred from one language to another; they are intrinsically bound in a specific language. When language shift occurs, these elements remain behind and are lost.

In the traditional way of life, certain Kenyan communities say the Kikuyu or the Akamba, used to swear by the earth, by simply touching the soil, and thus evoking something greater than themselves. That way, they would henceforth be bound to telling the truth in whatever matters are at hand, or to acting justly in whatever issues are being handled. Today, however, people take the name of God, the almighty, and go ahead to tell falsehood and to act unjustly. This is because they have shifted from using a language that carries values that bind them, the meanings of their values systems have shifted and functions they are lost. Swearing by the name of a foreign god, in a foreign language, a language that does not carry one's life values and functions, thus, a language that does

not carry ones patrimony reduces that god to a foreign concept and the swearing to a misnomer. The use of *Sheng*’, an evolving language whose cultural values are still evolving, and the replacement of the native language disconnect them from their history, their science and their god. It robs them of their patrimony.

A linguistic community is a physical entity, it occupies a physical space: a region, a territory. When a linguistic community stops using a certain language, that language stop existing, it stops occupying that physical space, it dies.

Language shift kills linguistic communities by replacing them functionally and physically. Because *Sheng*’ is being used in exclusion of the other indigenous Kenyan languages and replacing them, it is essentially killing other language communities, first starting with the minority groups but eventually even targeting the majority language groups.

By shifting to *Sheng*’ in subtraction and exclusion of the native languages as s Fishman (1977) puts it; language is a symbol par excellence of ethnicity. Language therefore, accounts for three human qualities:

Firstly, language gives indigenous users paternity: paternity is the symbol which links people with feelings of continuity, their history and the future.

Secondly, it gives them patrimony: This is the essence of inheriting occupation and skills such as archery, rainmaking and medicine. Patrimony is also the value that governs who can become what leader or follower in the inherited ranks of authority, who can or cannot, may or may not have relations with whom in terms of marriage, friendship and service; thus collectively defining behaviour and legacy of a people. It governs the interpretation and perception of the supernatural phenomena of life, birth and death. It limits or delimits the constructs of self expression such as dress, dance and food; as well as behaviour, philosophy and wisdom. The values of patrimony are passed on from generation to generation through own indigenous language. When this own language is replaced by another as is the case with *Sheng*’. Patrimony is all together lost.

Thirdly, language gives its people the gift of phenomenology: Phenomenology is the meaning people attach to their legacy and their self-worth and self respect. When language shifts or is lost, a peoples’ self worthiness is lost along with it, and a non self-respecting individuals emerges.

As discussed earlier in this paper, *Sheng*’ is acquired as a first language in many parts of Nairobi by the sons and daughters of parents who themselves may or may not speak their ethnic languages as their primary languages of the home and who do not effectively teach their children these languages. This is a case of language shift, where speakers of a language reduce the functional load of that language or even stop using it all together, replacing it with another, usually a language they deem to be of more prestige and social mobility. In the case of *Sheng*’, the shift from learning and /or using the ethnic languages or Kiswahili has been occasioned by a need to be accepted and to fit in with the seemingly exposed urbanite *Sheng*’-speaking in-group.

The most severe form of language shift is language assimilation. Assimilation happens when speakers of one language become bilingual and progressively stop using their own language in favour of the new one. Our observation is that, speakers of ethnic languages as well as Kiswahili have progressively stopped speaking these languages after acquiring *Sheng*'.

By so shifting, these speakers have essentially lost their paternity, patrimony and phenomenology. This is a significant role in the breakdown of many social structures and can be observed in scenes where, for example; crime has increased to very high levels in Kenya, especially in Nairobi and its peripheries, and it is on record that the culprits are usually young people in their 20<sup>s</sup> and 30s; rape of older women and very young girls, as well as homosexual behavior has also escalated in a society where it did not exist. This can generally be attributed to a generation that has shifted its value base, one that has lost its cultural language and the values enshrined therein.

#### **Effects of *Sheng*' on the Learning and Using of Other Languages**

The Kenyan language policy for education stipulates that in the first three years of schooling, pupils be taught in the language of the catchment area of the school ( Mbaabu 1996). This essentially translates into using the languages of the ethnic communities in the linguistically homogenous rural areas. Kiswahili is used in regions of linguistic heterogeneity, such as urban centres and ethnically mixed settlement areas. The education policy states that, from Standard Four, school instruction be conducted in English as the medium of instruction. Also, both English and Kiswahili are compulsory and examinable subjects at primary and secondary school level. So, there is a big premium placed on English and Kiswahili because, Kiswahili which was previously Kenya's national language is now both the national and one of the official languages. As a national language, Kiswahili is the carrier of the people's national heritage and identity. Both English and Kiswahili are now the official languages to be used for carrying out national official business and for international communication. A good mastery of these two languages ensures a good grade at national examinations and a placement in a good school or college. According to the Universities' Joint Admission Board, a candidate must have a strong grade in either English or Kiswahili for them to get an admission to a public university.

The stakes in these languages are thus very high and because of this, *Sheng*' has then been blamed for undermining the learning and mastery of the two school languages; English and Kiswahili as observed in school meetings and other educational forums. Primary and Secondary School teachers responsible for language instruction claim that the acquisition of *Sheng*' by the youth, especially the school-going youth, has impacted negatively on the learning and good usage of standard Kiswahili and English. The very nature of *Sheng*' as a hybrid language, creating its vocabulary by mixing English, Kiswahili and many other languages is the basis for this reasoning and effort to make it the culprit here.

The following have been identified as a few of characteristics which cause interference in the learning and proficiency of the two languages of school:

- Rules of phonological processes':  
Teachers of English specifically complain that who are speakers of *Sheng* substitute 'foreign' sounds found in English with the closest sounds found either in Kiswahili or any other indigenous languages. They for example reduce different vowel qualities found in English vowels in such words as:  
cat, cut, curt to a single vowel sound /ai/.  
This therefore makes it difficult for learners to distinguish the different English vowel sounds and their qualities thus leading to inaccurate pronunciation and spelling of English words.
- They also complain that learners tend to deletion consonants in the phonological environment where a consonant occurs between two vowels, for example:  
another one → /ana:one/.  
How are you → / a; you/  
This is evident more prominent in the spoken English of secondary and college students who may have internalized a certain usage of the language.
- Reduplication of stem forms is yet another area of complaint of interference :  
This occurs when the same lexical root is repeated for the purposes of creating emphasis, for example:  
a very big man → a big- big man  
a very funny joke → a funny-funny joke
- Morphological realignment:  
This happens due to the addition of affixes and double marking of plurality. Kiswahili seems to be most affected here, with the use of noun class plural marking indiscriminatingly even on nouns that do not have an overt marking system. For example:  
Nyumba → manyumba for houses  
Vitu → mavitu for things  
and kucha → makucha for nails  
instead of *nyumba, vitu* and *kucha* as found in the standard Kiswahili plural marking system
- Code-switching: This affects both English and Kiswahili especially where both are primary languages of communication as is the case in the school set-up.

Concerning creativity and creative thinking and writing, Students who are speakers of *Sheng* have been found to be very creative in the language and yet very monostylistic in

both English and Kiswahili. They seem limited in their stylistic variants of expression both in written and spoken English or Kiswahili.

### **Conclusion**

*Sheng'* is an evolving language with a grammatical structure that keeps growing and changing. Due to the allure of making its speakers fit and get acceptance in urban social circles, it has acquired a very large population of speakers and has rapidly spread throughout Kenya and in the East African region. Many of its speakers use it as their primary language and have shifted either from using Kiswahili or the language of their ethnicity. Because of this shift it has delineated its speakers from their cultural orientations and value systems.

*Sheng'* has therefore been blamed for raising a Kenyan generation devoid of culture and cultural values. It has also been blamed by school teachers and parents for interfering with the learning and mastery of both English and Kiswahili; the official languages of education in Kenya.

However, *Sheng'* as a mass language, cannot be wished away. Its influence is felt throughout the country and Kenyans must live with it as it is one of the indigenous languages of the country. It must be accommodated.

It is our suggestion that, *Sheng'* be nurtured in the same manner other Kenyan languages are nurtured. After all, it has one of the largest and growing speech communities in the country.

One of the most effective means of nurturing it is by using it and sharing in it; 'language like love is the only other thing that grows as it is shared'. Writing and publishing in the language would also nurture it to grow, because this would open it up for wider communication and international accessibility. Media houses would attract the growing speech community if there is literature in *Sheng'* in the print and electronic media. If this were the case, *Sheng'* would then be viewed as a resource and not a problem. Kenya is multilingual and multilingualism is not a problem, it is a resource since there are many benefits to being multilingual with cultural diversity and flexibility being one of them. In today's world, knowledge societies are pluralistic and inclusive; *Sheng'* therefore should be allowed to add another 'feather' to the Kenyan *pluralistic hat*.

Kenya's language policy should be more tailored to accommodate all the languages of its citizens. The horizons should be widened to include *Sheng'* as one of the languages of the catchment areas of the many urban schools and thus make be used as a medium of instruction for the first three years of school in those areas where it is predominantly spoken as the primary language of the home. Also, *Sheng'* should be offered as an option of study at Kenyan universities and other institutions of learning. This is because *Sheng'* is now a mother tongue of a recognizable section of society and a primary language to a speech community like any other of the languages of Kenya. '*Sheng'* cannot be wished away, it should be given its space.

Further, we suggest that the co-ordinate multilingualism model of language acquisition and use be put in practice especially in the school system and also at home. Here, parents and teachers will be able to teach the learners to separate the different languages of their repertoire into different paradigms, and to use them as such; different languages and not one mixed code.

It is possible for a multilingual society to employ different languages in a diglossic manner and have all of them co-existing and enriching one another as they function in their different contexts.

When this is put into practice, then the spread of *Sheng'* will no longer be perceived as a threat to the phenomenology of its' speakers because the users will be able to balance its use and to integrate its values with those they draw from other languages through language enriching process of multilingualism. This would help them avoid operating in subtraction and exclusion but rather, in addition of their cultural orientation and linguistic repertoire.

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