

# Societal bilingualism and the emergence of “invasive” language species: the case of Sheng

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# Key concepts and ideas

- Natural language(s) as a part of ecological reality e.g. native languages, 'full' languages
- Monolingual societies versus bilingual societies ( and individuals)
- Hybrid or contact languages (pidgins-ism and creole-ism) e.g. sheng
- Invasive species ( inspired by biological studies)
- Metro-lingualism and revisiting sheng
- Diglossia as a tool to aid competence in target languages in Education

# Linguistic ecology

- As part of wider environment ecology
- Premium on diversity ( UN document: our diversity, our cultures)
- Natural languages and desire to maintain them ( language purists)
- Fully developed grammatical, semantics and phonological systems with elaborate language acquisition frameworks
- Traditional/mainstream communities
- Monolingual societies versus bilingual societies ( exclusive versus language contact situations)
- Urbanization and globalization in spread of bilingualism

# Contact languages

- Pidgins and their development ( trade, contact situations, and communication needs : La Amistad movie watch)
- Characterization : no native speakers, simplified systems of grammar, semantics, and phonology
- From pidgin to creole: getting native speakers, expanding of systems of grammar, semantics and phonology
- Derek Bickerston proposal on creoles and universal grammar blueprint
- Onsinde study UON on Sheng as originating in Eastlands in Nairobi: the motivations, the social contexts, etc
- The spread and spread of sheng ( including dynamism)

# The sheng phenomenon

- Term a blend of Kiswahili and English to refer to a ‘new’ contact language
- Mostly based on Kiswahili syntax, phonology and semantics but freely borrowing from especially English; incorporates other ‘borrowings’ from local languages such as Dholuo, Gikuyu, Luhya, Kikamba and soon
- Associated mostly with youthful members of society but clearly not age specific
- Many ‘dialects’ of sheng recognizable across the geography of Kenya; many ‘sociolects’ recognized especially as determined by speakers ‘age group’
- Is English a variant of the same associated with social class?

# Invasive species: can we include languages?

- Invasive plant and animal species associated with massive loss global bio-diversity
- Invasive species have a tendency to DOMINATE other species e.g. hyacinth, mathenge, etc.
- The process begins with colonization; then establishment and integration into a system; and finally impact
- Invasive species get into an eco-community either deliberately or by accident
- Can contact/hybrid languages be considered 'invasive' especially given their impact on language(s) in Education?
- Sheng is blamed for falling language standards in English and Kiswahili in Kenya; the spread is phenomenon in all sectors

# Impact of invasive species: Niche

- The notion of niche represents the range of conditions within which a species can survive and reproduce
- The niche of a species in the absence of competition is termed the fundamental niche; in equilibrium with competition, the niche of a species is termed realized niche
- Interestingly, niche is dynamic, in a state of flux in life history
- Question: Is the niche of the natural languages ( L1, L2)shrinking in Kenya? Is it possible that Sheng is eating into this space/niche?
- Linguistically speaking, are we talking dynamics of diglossia in relation to language competitive roles in Kenya?

# Management of invasive species

- Within biological studies 3 methods are used: chemical control, biological control and mechanical control (e.g. of hyacinth and mathenge in Kenya)
- Another approach is prevention whereby a risk analysis is carried out incorporating ecological, economic and social welfare dimensions of an invasive species
- Have we (academics) undertaken such a study in relation to Sheng? Are we addressing the phenomenon from a point of knowledge that can inform practice and policy? Is this the way to go with the sheng phenomenon? In fact, should we be worried or can interventionist programs be started in Education sector?



# Metro-lingualism

- This term has been introduced and popularized by Pennycook, A., & Otsuji, E. (2015). *Metrolingualism: Language in the city*. New York, NY:Routledge. 206 pp.
- It is part of a series of Linguistic landscape research that these authors are engaged in.
- term metrolingualism refers to the inextricable relationship between language and the city that bustles with multifarious activities.
- Metrolingualism describes a set of creative linguistic conditions present in any time or space, despite the different relations that culture, history or politics can add to a city or social context.

## Contd.

- This term helps to describe how people with different backgrounds use, relate and negotiate their identity through language.
- Instead of looking for the connections within language systems, nationality or geographic aspects, metrolingualism analyzes how those language relations emerge from contexts where these interactions take place.
- Might this new concept help refocus on sheng with new lens within the wider language in Education context?
- Might the question of niche/ domain be the way to manage the negative impact of sheng to language education?

The end

Short story: 'the gentleman and the jungle'