

Language Policy in Kenya: Negotiation with Hegemony

by

Wendo Nabea

Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna,
Vienna, Austria

The author teaches Linguistics at Egerton University, Kenya. He is currently a final year doctorate student in the Institute of Linguistics, University of Vienna. His research interests engages ethnography, community literacies, and media and political discourse. He has contributed articles to both English and Kiswahili journals, and is currently writing two book chapters on stylistics and identity, and on language and ethnicity in Africa.

Abstract

This paper examines language policy in Kenya from colonialism to date, with a particular focus on education. The colonial period is appraised with regard to pre and post Second World War, while the independence era is analysed as pertains the government's position and the linguistic realities among lay people. Considering that in most cases lay Kenyans use language in ways that are incongruent to the official policy, the paper raises the argument that this is both mediation and contestation with linguistic hegemony. Results of an empirical study conducted in rural and urban centres in Kenya are used to validate the argument. Though the masses have shown no plan or organisation in their reaction to linguistic hegemony, the paper argues that they have mediated and contested it through abrogation of English and the assertion of African languages, appropriation of both English and Kiswahili to the people's circumstances, and through the evolution of patois like Sheng and Engsh. While both mediation and contestation are frowned upon by sticklers to the standard languages, the paper prospects that ultimately they are bound to impact substantially on the language situation and policy in the country.

Keywords: Language policy, colonial, post-colonial, hegemony, education, mediation and contestation.

Background

Language policy in Kenya cannot be addressed without taking a historical perspective. It has its basis in the colonial language policy following the scramble for Africa by European powers, which took place towards the end of the 19th Century. The boundaries of the continent were defined by Europeans in the Berlin Conference on December 1884–January 1885. In 1886, a joint commission comprising of representatives from powerful European nations like Britain, Germany and France met to deliberate on the Zanzibar's Sultan authority in the East African Coast. This led to the partitioning of African nations culminating in the European colonization. Kenya became part of the British East Africa Protectorate. There were several issues that the British had to consider in order to facilitate their rule in the colonies. Among these were language and educational policies.

The colonial language policy in Kenya is important putting into consideration that it impacted greatly on post-colonial language policy. Contrary to the long held postulation that it was the objective of the colonial government to promote English language in the colony, the colonial language policy was always inchoate and vacillating such that there were occasions that measures were put in place to promote or deter its learning. However, such denial inadvertently provided a stimulus for Kenyans to learn English considering that they had already taken cognizant of the fact that it was the launching pad for white collar jobs. This can be said to have been the genesis of English's hegemonic and divisionary tendencies, between the elite (those who could use it) and the masses (those who could not use it).

While barely a quarter of the Kenyan population can adequately use English, it remains the advantaged official language and the medium of instruction in the education system, unlike Kiswahili, the co-official language (Ogechi and Ogechi 2002). However, while the leadership appears comfortable with this linguistic situation and would wish to have the status quo maintained, the linguistic situation among lay Kenyans demonstrates that not all is well on the ground. It is for this reason that they have started both mediation and contestation of linguistic hegemony as perpetrated by both English and Kiswahili, the regional lingua franca. Mediation and contestation take place through abrogation as exemplified by Ngugi wa Thiongo's shift to writing in Kikuyu instead of English; appropriation in form of code-mixing, code-switching or laissez-faire use of non-standard language; and in creation as is evident in the use of argots like Sheng and Engsh.

First Epoch of Colonial Language Policy

Before addressing the question of mediation and contestation of linguistic hegemony in Kenya, it would be prudent to appraise the reader of the language situation. To achieve this, both colonial and post-colonial language policies require evaluation. With respect to the colonial language policy, two epochs are worthy scrutiny: Pre-Second World War and post-Second World War. In the first epoch, there were several players involved in the formulation of language policy. Among these were the Christian missionaries who thought that gospel would best be spread in mother tongue and the colonial administrators who had an interest in controlled teaching of English to Africans in order to obtain low cadre employees in their administration (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998). There were also the British settlers who feared the Europeanization of Africans through English language lest they became too educated to accept the role of wage labourers. The interests of all these players were always vacillating and inchoate, impacting language policy in a number of ways.

Take the Christian missionaries, for example. Among the first missionaries to introduce colonial education were Bishop Steere, Reverend Krapf and Father Sacleux. The language issue, thus the mother tongue, Kiswahili¹ and English; in the realm of education was discussed during the United Missionary Conference in Kenya in 1909. The Conference adopted the use of mother tongue in the first three classes in primary school, Kiswahili in two of the middle classes in primary, while English was to be used in the rest of the classes up to the university (Gorman 1974).

The missionaries also boosted local languages by according them orthography based on the Latin alphabet. A further shot in the arm for local languages happened when the Zanzibar dialect of Kiswahili was standardised by the Inter-territorial Language Committee in 1930. Local languages also got a boon when the colonizers started publishing firms. While English language was the major beneficiary of this venture, Kenyans also started producing creative works in local languages, though under the watchful eye of the administrators lest the works undermined colonial rule (Ngugi 1978). Examples of such creative works, and which were later published, include Kiswahili plays like *Nakupenda lakini ...* by Henry Kuria or *Nimelogwa Nisiwe na Mpenzi* by Gerishon Ngugi. This was a substantial boost to Kiswahili, the plays' failure to tackle the theme of commitment notwithstanding.

While the mother tongue, Kiswahili and English were used with ease at various levels of education, the colonial administration grew apprehensive over the teaching of English to Africans shortly before the 1920s. There was realisation that English education interfered with the goal of maintaining a subordinate class of workers, forcing it to review the education policy. Kenyans who had imbued a lot of English book learning were reluctant to do menial work, while preferring to take up white collar careers. Additionally, some colonialists were jealous of allowing many Africans to learn their language. Mazrui and Mazrui (1996: 272) state:

Many European settlers regarded the teaching of the English language to “natives” as potentially a subversive force. Social distance between master and subject had to be maintained partly through linguistic distance.

Arguably, the above quotation points to another factor behind the status of English as the language of the elite in Kenya. Following the review of the education policy, English was to be taught to the Africans guardedly in order to ensure that the majority of them never acquired secondary and university education. Just as Mazrui & Mazrui (1996) and Brutt-Griffler (2002) argue, this move somewhat retarded the growth and spread of English in the colony, contrary to the long held view that it was the policy of the colonialists to spread English to the colonized (Phillipson 1992, Chimera 1998). It should, however, be pointed out that denial of Africans to learn English on the contrary it provided a stimulus for them to study it. The colonized people had already realised that English language was a sure ticket to white collar employment and wealth, such that to deny them a chance to learn it was tantamount to condemning them to perpetual menial jobs. It is for this reason, for example, that the Kikuyu of Kenya started independent schools to learn English without inhibition in the 1920s (Whiteley 1974).

Going by the above, it is evident that the colonial language policy remained eclectic depending on the colonizers interests at any particular time. There were times when the administrators would favour the promotion of either African languages or English in view of their interests at stake. A case in point is the 1924 Phelps-Stokes Commission which recommended that Kiswahili be dropped in the education curriculum, except in areas where it was spoken as the first language. The Commission also recommended that the mother tongue be taught in early primary classes, while English was to be taught from upper primary up to the university. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the colonial language policy in Kenya prior to World War II was never compact, and its position as regards the teaching of English and African languages was mainly ambivalent.

Second Epoch of Colonial Language Policy

After the Second World War, there was a shift in the British colonial language policy which hurt local languages. When self rule was imminent in Kenya following the freedom struggle, the British colonialists mounted a campaign to create some Westernized elite in the country. ⁱⁱ They believed, and rightly so, that such an elite group would protect their interests in independent Kenya. This is obviously another step that buttressed English hegemony.

In 1950-1951, the Education Department Reports pointed out that it was inappropriate to teach three languages at the primary school. The Reports included Beecher's 1949, Binn's 1952 and the Drogheda Commission of 1952. The documents recommended that English be introduced in the lower primary to be taught alongside the mother tongue, and called for the dropping of Kiswahili in the curriculum, except in areas where it was the mother tongue. The implementation of this policy took effect in 1953-1955 (Gorman 1974).

Kiswahili's elimination from the curriculum was partly aimed at forestalling its growth and spread, on which Kenyans freedom struggle was coalescing (Chimerah 1998, Mazrui & Mazrui 1998). Further boost for English, at the expense of local languages occurred when the Prator-Hutasoit Commission endorsed that English be the only language of instruction in all school grades, heralding the New Primary Approach, better known as the English Medium Approach. To implement the new curriculum, teachers were to be trained in English, while their mother tongues were viewed as a premium in teaching the lower primary schools. Arguably, this was another step in consolidating English hegemony in Kenya.

Going by the colonial language policy in Kenya after the Second World War, suffice it to state that English was supported at the expense of local languages. However, it has been observed that this support was not motivated by the interest to make Kenyans learn the language, but more in the interest of preventing Kenyan nationalism which was solidifying around African languages, especially Kiswahili. The move also bequeathed Kenya an iniquitous linguistic legacy after independence, taking into account that English continued to play the divisive role of the haves (English users) and have-nots (non-English users). Nearly fifty years after Kenya's independence, English is yet to be rid of its elitist and exclusionist status.

Post-Colonial Language Policy

When Kenya attained self rule in 1963, English was declared the official language. It was to be used in all important governmental sectors, education inclusive. This is no wonder putting into consideration that this policy only re-emphasised what was already in place as a result of the colonial language policy. Additionally, those who took the helm of leadership after the colonialists were spawned by the colonial education system and in the circumstances, there was a high likelihood that they would perpetuate neo-colonialism, rather than help to bring change (Ngugi 1986). In spite of this, there were epistemological and strategic moves in form of research commissions which were carried out in order to inform the language policy, though the implementation of recommendations from such tasks has been lacklustre.

Such measures were mainly tailored to education. The Ministry of Education took several steps in line with language policy. In 1964, the Kenya Education Commission mounted a survey to establish the interests of the citizens with regard to language use. The findings revealed that most people wanted a trilingual approach to education. The mother tongue was preferred for verbal communication especially in rural areas, while English and Kiswahili were preferred for education from lower primary to the university. Kiswahili was especially favoured in education for purposes of national and regional unity. Furthermore, Kiswahili was seen as the appropriate language for the Pan-Africanism dream (Mazrui & Mazrui 1996). However, unlike English, the language was not anchored in to the school curriculum, and for a long time, it remained an optional subject.

In 1964 also, the Ominde Commission revealed that many Kenyans were in favour of English as the medium of instruction from the beginning class in primary school to the university. The Commission threw its weight behind English language arguing that it would expedite learning in all subjects by ensuring smooth transitions from “vernaculars,” and owing to its intrinsic resources (Mazrui & Mazrui 1996). English was therefore introduced in beginners’ classes in primary schools through the New Primary Approach (NPA), in which its learning was heavily emphasised. The Task also emphasised the use of mother tongue and Kiswahili in the education system, at different levels and localities.

In 1967, The Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E) started producing books in various mother tongues, Kiswahili inclusive; for use in primary schools. In the same year, Kiswahili was pronounced the language of Adult Education alongside the mother tongue (Gorman 1974). However, in urban areas, Kiswahili was to be used singularly. Nonetheless, English supremacy in the Kenya educational system was entrenched following the Gachathi Commission in 1976, which recommended that the tongue becomes the language of instruction from the fourth grade in primary school, to the university. Though the Commission also declared Kiswahili an important subject in primary and secondary classes, the language received inferior status when compared with English in the school curriculum. While English was allotted 8-10 periods out of the 40 hours per week, Kiswahili which was allotted 3 hours (Chimerah 1998).

In 1981, the Mackay Commission recommended 8 years of primary school, 4 years of secondary school and 4 years of university education. It passed that English remains the language of instruction, while Kiswahili was made a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary education. This policy was also followed by the production of Kiswahili books to meet the increased demands of both students and teachers. The Mackay Commission further advised that the mother tongue be used in lower grades of primary schools, in areas where this was possible (Njoroge 1990).

Entrenchment of English Hegemony

On the face value, the teaching of English in the Kenya education system was an advantage in the sense that the medium was already a world language that facilitated communication with the outside world. However, its teaching to the Kenyan pupils was also at a cost. In some schools, especially in rural Kenya, the mother tongue was forbidden, except in the first three classes of primary schooling, in special cases. Ngugi (1986:11) laments about his nasty experience in the primary school. He states:

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money that they could hardly afford.

While corporal punishment has been abolished in Kenyan schools, punishment is still meted out to pupils who are caught speaking local languages in some schools. Ngugi (1978) also demonstrates that the colonial linguistic conquest of African scholars has impacted negatively on them. He argues that they start deriding their national languages leading to alienation. By citing cases in schools and universities where Kenyan languages were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment; the writer states that school leavers have been graduating with a hatred for their people, their culture and languages which had brought them humiliation and harassment in their history of schooling. Hatred for one's mother tongue is a big threat to multilingualism, especially as far as African languages are concerned. Ngugi (1978:16) comments on this cultural alienation:

We have already seen what any colonial system does: impose its tongue on the subject races, and then downgrade the vernacular tongues of the people. By so doing, they make the acquisition of their tongue a status symbol; anyone who learns it begins to despise the peasant majority and their barbaric tongues. By acquiring the thought-processes and the values of his adopted tongue, he becomes alienated from the values of his mother tongue, or from the language of the masses.

While all this is happening, there is a heavy investment in English by both the Kenyan and British governments. This has especially happened when the falling standards of English have been registered in higher institutions of learning or in national examinations.ⁱⁱⁱ The end result has been the building of English supremacy at the expense of other Kenyan languages. Ogola (2003) states that the sociolinguistic situation in Kenya is triglossic in the following order: English is top of the rank as the official language; Kiswahili is in the middle of the rank as the co-official language and the local lingua franca, while at the base are the local languages or mother tongues. Most of the Kenyan languages have no written material, have never been standardised and have no orthography. They also have a limited number of speakers, and are less used in the media or in literature writing. The above rankings illustrate that the state of local languages in Kenya is wanting. The languages that are mainly used by the majority of the population are given a short shrift to the advantage of English language which is only spoken by the elite.

Just like Kiswahili the national language of Kenya, English certainly acts as a lingua franca among people who speak different African languages, and who can use it. This is a premium bearing in mind that there is a multiplicity of over forty ethnic languages which are normally deemed a hindrance in inter-ethnic communication. However, as has already been stated, English is divisionary in that it creates a chasm between the elite and the masses. Bamgbose (1999:1) avers that this exclusion is tantamount to the Biblical question of Shibboleth in Judges 12:4-6, between the /sh/ pronouncing people of Gilead and /s/ pronouncing people of Ephraim. Those who were not able to pronounce /sh/, but instead pronounced it as /s/, were killed as they were viewed as outsiders, by the tribe of Gilead. The author opines that:

The consequence of this is that two classes of citizens are immediately created, the class of the advantaged, and therefore *included*, and the class of the disadvantaged, and therefore, *excluded* ... the included are a major stumbling block in the use of African languages in a wider range of domains.

This quotation captures the situation in Kenya aptly, because those who use English are mainly the advantaged, while those who are not able to use it are the majority in society, who remain disadvantaged. In view of this, therefore, English has been used to perpetuate the class divide in the Kenyan society.

It has already been observed that English, which is barely understood by 25% of the more than 34 million Kenyans, remains the official language, and is used in most of the official realm. There has been no serious programme to make it classless, as a way of bridging the gap between the elite and the masses. It continues to be used for exclusion purposes, especially in most of the official domain. Yet, language policy is critical in East Africa in view of two objectives: National integration and social integration.^{iv} In the light of this, it is deducible that there is a problem of integration in Kenya as far language is concerned. English can foster national unity, but cannot cement social integration, unlike Kiswahili (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995).

Mediation and Contestation of Linguistic Hegemony

In the wake of English hegemony in Kenya, there is empirical evidence that people have not simply acquiesced in the situation, but have acted on it. They have both mediated and contested against linguistic supremacy in a number of ways, though at non-official levels. However, this reaction has mainly been met with scorn by the apologists of linguistic hegemony. For example, various modes of mediation and contestation are blamed for the declining standards of both English and Kiswahili in the country. By taking this line, many scholars lose sight of the contest between the standard language, local languages and several argots.

Several ways have been deployed to contest the English hegemony in Kenya. Ashcroft et al. (1989) suggest cite two ways can be followed in linguistic struggle: abrogation (denial of the privilege of English) and appropriation (moulding the language into new usages). A third way has been the creation of some patois, especially by the youth. Abrogation has already been tried in Kenya, for example, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who has been a purveyor in the return to the roots by Africans. The author has set the example by stopping to write literary works in English, for Kikuyu, his mother tongue. He asserts that by writing in his mother tongue, he has succeeded in engaging in an anti-imperialists struggle. He further states that this move has been a success in view of the type of reception his novel *Caitani Mutharabaini* (Devil on the Cross) received among the Gikuyu peasantry, reviving a reading culture, hitherto deemed as moribund. Ngugi's efforts are still underway as seen in his latest launch of Kikuyu novel *Murogi wa Kagogo* (The Wizard of the Crow).

However, Ngugi's suggestion that Africans decolonize their minds, for instance, by writing in African languages must be supported by the people themselves. While he argues that *Caitani Mutharabaini* was a hit seller among the peasants, it remains unclear as to whether this effort has helped to change the people's mentality about Kenya's local languages in the face of English. While it is barely one quarter of Kenya's population that can use English well, majority of them have a strong proclivity for it because it remains the sure way to acquiring a good job, just as was the case during colonialism. Jean – Calvet (2000:35) states:

Only rarely can a language or reform be imposed on people against their will. Is it possible to defend (or save) a language whose speakers don't want it any more? The issue is not the language itself but the importance attached to it by its speakers.

The above quotation should not be misconstrued as implying that Kikuyu speakers do not want their language any more. Instead, it suggests that Kenyan writers can resort to writing in African languages, yet fail to get good readership because many people may not be interested to read or use languages that do not promise them economic empowerment, ironically; unlike English or Kiswahili. This leaves writing in African languages as a way of checking the dominance of English a noble idea, but logically tenuous. Instead of viewing abrogation as a snub on English, it would be prudent to consider empowering African languages, but still use them alongside English. This is after all nothing strange putting into account that writers like Ngugi also translate their works into other languages, English inclusive.

Besides abrogation, Ashcroft et al. (1989) also treat the question of appropriation. This includes usage or reconfiguring English to fit the circumstances in which it is being used. Reconfiguration can be at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and even semantic levels. Some African writers who have attempted appropriation of English include Gabriel Okara in *The Voice*, George Lamming in *The Emigrants*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *A Grain of Wheat* or Randolph Stow in *Visitants* (Ashcroft et al. 1989).

According to the findings of a literacy research in rural Kenya in 2007 by this author, there is strong appropriation of English and Kiswahili languages in code-mixing and code-switching. Code-mixing entails domesticating both languages into local usage. This was found to be done at the lexical level whereby two different lexemes, one from the local Meru, and the other from either Kiswahili or English were dovetailed into one word. Considering that Meru language, which belongs to the Bantu family of languages is agglutinative, it was found that Meru speakers largely borrowed from English and Kiswahili vocabulary, which they then rendered into the agglutinative structure of mother tongue. The Meru- English vocabulary blending was seen as is shown in the following morphological analysis of the code-mixed vocabulary.

Ndekondaga (I usually record): record + Meru structure

N	dekond	a	ga
first person singular	root of record	inflection/formative morph	habitual morph/marker

Arecibagwa (S/he is usually received): receive + Meru structure

A	ricib	a	gwa
third person singular	root of receive	formative morph/reflexive marker/habitual marker	aspectual marker/past complete action

Bantrain (They trained me): train +Meru structure

ba	n	train
third person plural	indirect object	root of train

Gatwaforcethilwe (We were forced): force and Meru structure

Ga	twa	force	thi	lwe
first person plural	first person plural/tense marker/we	root of force	inflection/formative	aspectual marker/past complete action

Jiaproceswa (They were processed): process + Meru structure

Ji	a	proces	wa
they/plural	reflexive/ referent to noun	root of process	aspectual/past complete action

Nkibasabaga serve (while serving them): serve + Meru structure

N	ki	ba	sab	a	ga
first person singular	aspectual marker of complete action	third person plural	root of serve	of inflection/formativ morph	perfect mood

Utiafodi – afford + Meru structure

U	ti	afod	i
second person singular	negation/future tense marker	afford (the root)	perfect mood marker/verb ending

There was also evidence of Meru – Kiswahili code-mixing as outlined in the examples below.
Getegemeaga (It depends) Meru + Kiswahili structure

ge	tegeme	a	ga
it	root of tegemea	inflection/formativ morph	habitual morph

Gentatizaga (it bothers me): Kiswahili + Meru structure

ge	N	tat	iz	a	ga
it	first person singular	root of tata	of inflection morph	inflection/formativ morph	habitual morph

Nitwavamiilwe (we were attacked): Kiswahili+Meru

Ni	twa	vami	i	lwe
We	first person plural marker	root of vamia	Inflection/formativ	aspectual marker/past complete action

The above examples show that code-mixing is a complex morphological undertaking. One thing that can be deduced from it is that it eases conversation, especially taking into account that it is a speech phenomenon. This is because in situations where there is lacuna as far as Meru vocabulary is concerned; English and Kiswahili vocabularies prove handy in filling up the gap. This was evident from the flow of conversations in the course of the interviews. In this case, English and Kiswahili appear to enrich Meru language in regard to code-mixing, contrary to Phillipson (1992) assertion that English is causing linguicism^v to some languages. It became apparent that Meru language has the capacity to borrow and domesticate vocabulary from other languages, facilitating people's conversation.

It was also brought to fore that there was code-switching in the villagers' speech. The switching ranged from two to three languages in view of the interviews, though Meru was overwhelmingly the basis. Suffice it to state that code-switching was found to be more of the norm than the reserve in conversation. The interviews further brought to light the fact that there was also code-switching of Meru and Kiswahili, though more switching happened between Meru and English. Interestingly, code-switching was not a reserve of villagers alone. This is because among the specialists who were used for comparative purposes, language switching was found to be common. However in this case, the switches were between English and Kiswahili. Just like code-mixing, code-switching certainly eased communication among respondents, besides playing other social roles, like exhibiting their expertise in bilingualism or multilingualism. However, Meru's intercourse with English and Kiswahili is bound to cause language change, as is ever happening to many languages, English inclusive (Aitchison 1991, Schendl 2001).

Another type of appropriation that was unearthed by the research was usage of language by breaking the standard language conventions. In view of the standard language parameters, this liberal usage is incorrect. It was evident that entries into the diaries, which were done in either English or Kiswahili, could not stand the test of grammar as far as spelling is concerned. However, the villagers were found to be comfortable with this 'incorrect' usage and were able to communicate about their literacy practices. The use of 'incorrect' grammar is exemplified in figures 1 to 3.

Figure 1: showing Kiswahili 'misspelling' as written by serial number 13

'Misspelling'	'Correct spelling'	English meaning
Alafu	halafu	afterwards
Esabu	hesabu	mathematics
Hasubuhi	asubuhi	morning
Kuzipanga	kujipanga	I self prepare
Napika	nafika	I arrive
Natayalisha	natayarisha	I prepare

Figure 2: showing Kiswahili ‘misspelling’ as written by serial number 16

‘Misspelling’	‘Correct spelling’	English meaning
Alaf	halafu	afterwards
Hirikuwa	ilikuwa	it was
Kukaha	kukaa	to stay
Mbahoo	mbao	timber
Nikeda	nikaenda	I went
Nikahoga	nikaoga	I bathed
Niriamka	niliamka	I woke up
Pade	pande	zones

Figure 3: showing English ‘misspelling’ as written by serial number 3

‘Misspelling’	Correct English spelling
Wachman	watchman
Pancial	punctual
sanday service	Sunday service
Withdraw	withdrew

In several cases, failure to conform to the standard grammar can be attributed to mother tongue interference. This is evident in the writing of sounds that are alien to Mwimbi, a dialect of Meru, which is spoken in the area that the research was conducted. Such sounds are presented by use of sounds which are closer to Mwimbi dialect as per the perception of the users. A good example is in [h] sound which does not exist in Mwimbi dialect, and is therefore avoided in some cases, in the written form. Conversely, where there are supposed to be vowels, there is tendency to include the [h] sound, which in this case can be viewed as the allophone of the vowels in use.

However, in new literacy studies, caution should be taken lest such writing is viewed as non-standard or deviant, when in the real it could be expressing the literacy situation on the ground. Camitta (1993) argues that such linguistic manifestations could be meaningful and important literacy skills and resources that are disconnected somewhat from the official or standard literacy, and from the way it is conducted. Pardoe (1994:162-63) cautions that to create a symmetry of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ is falling into the trap of dominant literacy, which explains the ‘wrong’ in regard to the social and psychological reasons.

He argues that in the face of such ‘unsuccessful’ writing, it is imperative to resort to the implicit and explicit connections between positions as regards what is deemed as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. In view of this, such usage could in any case be mediation between the hegemonic language and the local language. Additionally, just as Street (1993) states, such non-standard usage of language cannot simply be dismissed as incorrect, because it could be a pointer to the rural literacies posing a challenge to the dominant or standard literacy.

Taking into account that ‘incorrect’ usage is mediation and a challenge to the dominance of English and Kiswahili, one can deduce that the people are after all appropriating the dominant practices for their own situation. Achebe (1986) suggested that instead of avoiding the use of the dominant languages like English the way Ngugi wa Thiong'o did when he shifted from writing in English to Kikuyu his mother tongue, people could adulterate it for their own, easy communication. Going by these arguments, one can deduce that the ‘wrong’ writings by the villagers could after all be a way of drawing from the dominant Kiswahili and English to express themselves in their own easy ways.

Nonetheless, Pardoe (1994) cautions that such standpoints on ‘incorrect’ grammar have been challenged for being relativistic and for tending to romanticise failure. While this criticism cannot be taken for granted, there is also the viewpoint that people who are not engaged in dominant literacy such as ex-students can draw on laid down conventions and knowledge, to express themselves in their own style. It should also be noted that in other cases, such literacies should not be viewed in a uni-directional manner since they are also capable of reproducing and buttressing the dominant literacy.

Another occurrence that can be seen as both mediation and contestation of linguistic hegemony is creation, for instance, of Sheng (deriving from abbreviations of Swahili and English) patois, which is mainly used by the youth, especially in urban areas. However, investigations have revealed that Sheng also sources its lexicon from other Kenyan languages including Kikuyu, Dholuo, Kamba, Kisii or Luhya (Ogechi 2005, Kobia & Kingei 2007). Sheng is based on the morphosyntactic structure of Kiswahili, which is akin to those of other Bantu languages. On the one hand, Sheng can be seen as a contestation of the standard co-official languages in Kenya, English and Kiswahili. It breaks the rules of these languages by thriving on what would be deemed as non-standard by some educationalists. For example, Kingei & Kobia (2007) and Momanyi (2009) state that Sheng is impacting negatively on the teaching of languages in Kenyan schools. At the same time, the patois is stigmatised as a language of the lowly and misfits (Momanyi 2009).

However, on the other hand, Sheng can be viewed as the mediation between local languages and hegemonic languages. Considering that it obtains its lexicon from Kiswahili, English and African languages and thrives on the Kiswahili morphosyntactic structure, this is a manifestation of how people are making use of the dominant languages to express themselves in their own fashion. In regard to Sheng for example, it is documented that the youth use it to cut off adults who are not conversant with the language (Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003).

In the light of this, one can deduce how societal members who subscribe to the standard norms, and in this case, English and Kiswahili denigrate variants like Sheng, while Sheng users are at home defying the standard. This defiance can be seen in a broader context as a protest to hegemony, especially considering that a language like English remains the reserve of the elite as has already been stated. What is interesting about this contestation of hegemony is that those who use Sheng are able to offer themselves an identity that is distinct from those who use Standard English or Kiswahili. It is also defiance of the standard, which also indicates the elite in Kenyan society, who are normally accused of thriving at the expense of the poor masses, just as was the case in colonialism.

Sheng can be seen in the same breadth with English argot (deriving from abbreviations of English and Swahili). Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) assert that unlike Sheng whose origin is ascribed to low income area estates in Nairobi Eastlands, English origin is attributed to the affluent suburbs of Nairobi. This distinguishes it as a distinct medium from Sheng, and even in regard to its user's identities. For example, it is the reserve of the sons and daughters of the well-to-do parents in Nairobi neighbourhoods. The only commonality between English and Sheng is that both are creations which have obtained from standard languages and which are arguably appropriating and contesting the Standard English and Swahili. They also use a code that is indistinct to people who are only conversant with the standard language usage, and who are screened out by the variants.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has focused on the question of linguistic hegemony in Kenya, largely by using English. It has demonstrated that English, and to some extent Kiswahili, have been used to propagate domination of the masses by the elite in both colonial and post colonial Kenya. The paper has shown how English learning was controlled in the colonial era to ensure that Kenyans never became too educated to do menial jobs, consequently providing a stimulus for them to learn it since they already knew that it was a prerequisite for white collar jobs and the high social class in society. It has also been demonstrated how English was promoted after the second World War at the expense of African languages, mainly to check African nationalism which had risen tremendously in the struggle for independence.

The paper has shown that English was used to create a superior class of some Africans who were somewhat acceptable to the colonialists, and on whose shoulders the running of the government in post independent Kenya was left. As regards linguistic hegemony, the paper has argued that those who assumed power after the fall of colonialism perpetuated domination through English as a means of self differentiation with the masses who could not use it. It has been highlighted that this situation has not changed much in contemporary Kenya as English remains an agent of exclusion between the elite and the masses.

While there have been attempts to accentuate and sustain this hegemony, the paper has averred that many Kenyans have simply not remained passive, in view of the fact that they have both mediated and contested it. This has been done through abrogation whereby attempts have been made to assert African languages, Kiswahili inclusive, through writing; as well as through appropriation of both English and Kiswahili in code-mixing and code-switching to suit the local circumstances. It has also been shown that there has been appropriation of dominant and local languages to create argots like Sheng and Engsh, which are nonetheless frowned upon by adherents of the standard languages. It has been argued that mediation and contestation between local languages and the hegemonic ones continues and is bound to foster other linguistic ramifications.

References

Abdulaziz, M. and Osinde K. (1997). *Sheng and Engsh in Nairobi*. International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 125: 1-21.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge.

Bamgbose, A. (1999). *Language and Exclusion – The Consequences of Language Policies in Africa*. London: Transaction Publishers.

Camitta, M. (1993). "Vernacular Writing: varieties of literacy among Philadelphia high school students." In Street, B. (ed.) *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 228-246.

Gorman, T.P. (1974). "The Development of Language Policy in Kenya with Particular Reference to Education System." In Whiteley, W.H. (Ed.) *Language in Kenya*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 397-446.

Griffler, B. J. (2002). *World English. A Study of its Development*. Cleveland: Multilingual Matters.

Jean- Calvet, J. (2000). "Users Are Choosers." *The UNESCO Courier* – April 2000. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. No.4-2000-OPI 99-590A, 35-36.

King'ei, K. and Kobia, J. (2007). Luga Kama Kitambulisho: Changamoto ya Sheng Nchini Kenya." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16(3): 320-332

Mazrui, A.A. & Mazrui, A.M (1998). *The Power of Babel*. Oxford, England: James Currey.

Mazrui, A.A. & Mazrui, A.M (1996). "A tale of two Englishes: The imperial language in the post-colonial Kenya and Uganda. In: Fishman, J. Conrad, A. & Lopez, A.L. (eds.) *Post Imperial English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 271-302.

Mazrui, A.A. & Mazrui, A.M. (1995). *Swahili State and Society*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Mbaabu, I. & Nzuga, K. (2003). *Sheng- English Dictionary-Deciphering East Africa's Underworld Language*. DaresSalaam: TUKI, i-xiv.

Momanyi, C. (2009). "The Effects of 'Sheng' in the Teaching of Kiswahili in Kenyan Schools." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2(8): 127-138.

Ngugi, T. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Ngugi, T. (1978). *Homecoming*. London: Heinemann.

Njoroge, K. (1991). "Multilingualism and Some of its Implications for Language Policy and Practices in Kenya." In Legere, K. (ed.) *The Role of Language in Literacy Programmes with Special Reference to Kiswahili* (249-269). Bonn: German Foundation for International Development (DSE).

Ogechi, N. and Ogechi, E. (2002). "Educational Publishing in African Languages, With a Focus on Swahili in Kenya." In *Nordic Journal of African Studies* II (2): 167-184.

Ogechi, N. (2005). *On Lexicalization in Sheng*. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(3): 334–335.

Pardoe, S. (2000). "Respect and the Pursuit of 'Symmetry' in Researching Literacy and Student Writing." In Barton, D., Halmiton, M. & Ivanic, R. (eds.) *Situated Literacies-Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge, 149-166.

Street, Brian (1993). "Introduction: The New Literacy Studies." In: Street, B. (ed.) *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1-21.

Whiteley, W.H (1974). *Language in Kenya*. Oxford University Press, Nairobi.

ⁱ Kiswahili was then the national language and the lingua franca. However, this was more of the reality on the ground, than the colonial government position.

ⁱⁱ Mazrui & Mazrui (1996) make a reference of Marshad (1984:56), who highlights how the British created a Westernized elite in Kenya, in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mazrui & Mazrui (1996:281) reference the Daily Nation, June 5, 1993; which quoted Prof. Japheth Kiptoon, the Vice Chancellor of Egerton University, decrying the falling standards of English among students in public universities in Kenya. Prof. Kiptoon claimed that many university students were functionally illiterate in English, could not write simple application letters for a job, and a number of employers had expressed concern that many graduates could not communicate well in English.

^{iv} Mazrui & Mazrui (1995) define national integration as "a process of merging sub-groups identities into a shared sense of national consciousness," while social integration "is the process by which the gaps between the elite and the masses, the town and the countryside, the privileged and the underprivileged, are gradually narrowed or evened out" (p. 136).

^v Phillipson (1995:55) argues that linguisticism involves representation of dominant language, to which good attributes are made, for purposes of inclusion; and for the dominated languages, for exclusion purposes. The term is ideologically loaded in that it shows dominant languages working alongside other forces to effect and maintain unequal allocation of power and resources.