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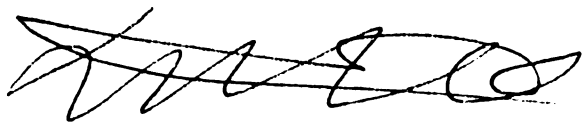

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SHENG AND VARIATION: THE CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

By

Peter Githinji

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ABSTRACT

SHENG AND VARIATION: THE CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

By

Peter Githinji

This dissertation addresses the issue of how variation in Sheng — a contact linguistic code spoken in Nairobi and other urban areas in Kenya — represents the different identities of the speakers of those different varieties. My chief goal is to underscore the relationship between language and identity by capitalizing on Sheng's high lexical variation and the implication of different symbolisms attached to competing lexical items by speakers from different backgrounds. While structural variation is relevant to this study, my major focus is the lexicon, where I demonstrate how social categories adopt specific lexical items as part of a norm that marks them as members of a distinct social category. I account for Sheng's variation by illustrating the interaction between different word formation processes and people's social realities.

The guiding logic in this study is that individual and groups exploit lexical variation to negotiate, confirm, contest, activate or modify existing identities. If words are the symbolic markers that signal a given identity, then the group's preference for certain lexical items and opposition to the use of others follows from the deliberate desire to either project desired identities or to reject contested identities. This study recognizes the 'baze,' a local hang-out joint, as the minimal social unit that exhibits a high degree of cohesion and through which the most dynamic interaction practices can be observed. I argue that while different bazes have unique linguistic markers that distinguish them from other groups, they are very fluid and vulnerable to outside influence. The movement of

members in and out of their bazes during inter-group interaction results in the adoption of linguistic markers identified with the baze in question. In the process, members gain multiple identities, which are activated when the necessary interaction conditions demand it. While language is the main focus of this dissertation, attempts are made to show how linguistic practices act in tandem with other discursive practices in enforcing group norms and hence enhancing group identity.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Director of Starehe Boys Center
Dr. Geoffrey William Griffin 1933-2005
an educationist who raised eagles to aim and fly high
creating wholesome individuals from characters destined to perish.
to whom I owe a great deal of my academic achievements.

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The dissertation is the culmination of so many years of schoolwork, right from nursery school, through primary school, secondary school, and university. As I celebrate the achievement of my intellectual dream, I would like to acknowledge all who have played a part in nurturing my academic abilities. From my primary school teachers at Ngorika Primary school who gave me the academic foundation, the secondary school teachers at Starehe Boys center who inculcated discipline and character in me and finally my university professors who sharpened my skills in the conduct of intellectual inquiry. If I am the finished product, then all these people and others are the producers in the knowledge industry where I was produced.

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Special thanks go to my guidance committee for all the support and comments during my comprehensive exams which shaped the way I looked at issued discussed in this study. I gained a lot from Dennis Preston the co-chair of the committee, not only in terms of intellectual guidance, but also professional development. Deo Ngonyani, my other co-chair was magnanimous. Not only do I owe him my teaching skills, but he also

initiated me to scholarly publication though co-authored work. I also acknowledge Professors Grover Hudson and David Dwyer for their constructive comments and suggestions that have informed the structural description and ethnographic account of vital arguments presented in this dissertation.

Thanks also to all my research assistants, the principals, headmasters and teachers who allowed me to conduct research in their schools and the support they gave me to ensure that I succeeded in my mission. I would not forget all the school students who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, and the *mebeshte, mababi, wanati* na pia *mafala*. Without them, there could have been no data for this research. Finally, I acknowledge Professor Kimani Njogu and the staff at Twaweza Communication for their assistance during the collection of data. I cannot forget my host Kimani, my sister Wambui, and nieces Nyambura and Gathoni, for making my stay in Nairobi enjoyable.

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Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES.....xii

LIST OF FIGURES.....xiii

CHAPTER 1
SETTING THE STAGE: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY.....1

1.0. Introduction.....1

1.1. Making choices.....3

1.2. The consequences of choice: Sheng and the Kenyan challenge.....5

1.3. Guiding questions.....8

1.4. Hypotheses.....9

1.5. Major assumptions.....9

1.6. Definition of terms.....10

1.7. Plan of work.....13

CHAPTER 2
SHENG'S SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....15

Part I. Linguistic and demographic backgrounds.....15

2.0. Introduction.....15

2.1. Languages of Kenya.....16

2.2. Multilingualism in Kenya.....18

2.3. Socio-demographic description of Nairobi.....20

2.4. Demographic facts: A history of residential disparity.....22

2.5. Informal settlements.....25

2.6. The Language Policy in Kenya.....28

2.6.1. After independence.....29

2.6.2. Sheng as linguistic capital in an alternative linguistic market.....36

Part 2. Literature review and Methodology.....40

2.7. Brief outline.....40

2.7.1. What is Sheng?.....40

2.7.2. Categorization of Sheng within variation.....42

2.7.3. The politics of Identity: the definition.....48

2.7.4. The relationship between language and identity.....52

2.7.5. Identity in previous studies on Sheng.....56

2.8. Methodology.....59

2.8.1. Data collection, instruments and interview procedure.....60

2.8.2. Data interpretation.....65

CHAPTER 3
A DIAGRAM OF VARIATION: EXPLORING FORM AND NATURE OF VARIATION IN SHENG.....67

3. Linguistic variation and social reality.....67

3.1. Sheng's structure: two varieties or one?.....68

3.2. Drawing from Swahili grammatical patterns.....71

3.3. Word formation processes in Sheng.....74

3.4. Synonymy: some of the lexical differences.....85

3.5. Morphophonological variation and its connection to speakers' identity...87

3.6. Some background on the users of these synonyms.....90

3.7. Dominance of certain words.....91

3.7.1. The gender factor in variation.....92

3.7.2. The schools and variation.....93

3.7.3. The age and neighborhood factor in variation.....95

3.7.4. Who are the innovators?.....97

3.8. From the estates to the bazes.....100

3.8.1. The Bazes.....102

3.8.2 .The relevance of *bazes* in lexical variation.....108

3.9. Other factors responsible for variation in Sheng.....112

3.9.1. Socioeconomic factors: The south C baze.....113

3.9.2. Residential factors.....115

3.9.3. Relevance of occupation in Shengs variation.....116

3.9.4. Ethnicity as a factor.....118

CHAPTER 4
LEXICAL CHOICES, DISCOURSE AND OTHER DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN THE COPNSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY.....122

4. Introduction.....122

4.1. Lexical items as linguistic signs and symbols.....123

4.1.1. Ambiguity, bazes and identity.....124

4.1.2. Age determined interaction.....126

4.1.3. Signifiers of identity: frozen in oldskool.....129

4.1.4. Gender signifiers: revisiting variation in gender terms.....134

4.1.5. Definition by the other: derogatory gender metaphors.....137

4.1.6. Rejecting negative identity by contesting derogatory gender labels.....140

4.1.7. Positive self-defining signifiers.....144

4.2. Inter-group categorization: comparative labels.....145

4.2.1. Socioeconomic symbolism: The wanati vs. the mababi dualism.....146

4.2.1.1. Babi: a person from Ubabini.....149

4.2.1.2. Babi: People in white-collar employment.....149

4.2.1.3. Babi: Mom's boy.....150

4.2.1.4. Babi: Just anyone you aspire to be economically.....150

4.2.1.5. Babi: One who speaks inferior Sheng.....152

4.2.2. The cosmopolitan symbolism: Beshte vs. fala distinction.....157

4.3. Performance and negotiation of multiple identities.....162

4.3.1. Non-conscious activation of layered identities.....162

4.3.2. Negotiating multiple identities by accommodating to other's linguistic behavior.....169

4.4.1. Vernacular discourse: A different perspective on local reality.....181

4.4.2. Michongoano: Performance of identity in verbal contest.....191

4.4.2.1. Mchongoano within the general discourse of verbal art.....194

4.4.2.2 Structure of michongoano.....198

4.4.2.3. The art of kuchongoana: Playing by the rules.....201

4.4.2.4. Michongoano as face threatening acts.....205

4.4.2.5. Affirming identity: Michongoano as an in-group activity.....206

4.4.2.6. The language of delivery.....209

4.5. Other ways of constructing identities.....210

4.5.1. Diet and dining habits.....211

4.5.2. Dressing.....213

4.5.3. Style of music.....215

4.6. Construction of identity in other discourse sites.....216

4.6.1. Popular culture: Sheng hip-hop.....216

4.6.2. The media.....220

4.6.3. The internet.....224

4.7. Attitudes and value judgments.....226

4.7.1. Respondent's subjective judgments: Relative comparisons and identity.....226

4.7.2. The question of proximity.....235

4.8. Summary.....236

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....238

Conclusions.....238

Apppendix A. Questionnaire 1: For school children under 18 years old.....247

Appendix B. Questionnaire 2: For Subjects over 18 years.....248

Appendix C. Rift Valley Academy (RVA) Lingo.....250

Appendix D. Synonym frequencies.....251

Bibliography.....247

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Population growth in Nairobi, 1906-1999.....22

Table 2. The choice between *buda* and *mbuyu* among the students.....94

Table 3. Ages when respondents claim to have started using Sheng.....95

Table 4. Demographic composition of the *bazes*.....103

Table 5. Frequency of variants for the word 'boy'.....135

Table 6. Frequency of variants for the word 'girl'.....136

Table 7. Names for 'girl', 'breast' and 'butt'.....142

Table 8. Different *bazes'* comparison of their Sheng with that of other estates.....228

Table 9. Respondents comparisons of their Sheng with that of other estates.....230

Table 10. Respondents judgments of the variety of Sheng in different estates.....232

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Languages of Kenya.....17

Figure 2. Urban expansion.....21

Figure 3. Diferent estates in Nairobi.....24

Figure 4. Kibera slum.....153

Figure 5. A house at Riverside drive in Westlands.....154

Figure 6. The reply of a sound is a sound.....201

Figure 7.Outsiders neither know the safe topics nor the rules in ritual insults.....207

Figure 8. Verbal duels are an in-group thing.....208

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: Undertanding the context of the study

1. Introduction

This dissertation addresses the relationship between linguistic variation and identity. I will discuss how variation in Sheng, a linguistic code spoken in Nairobi and other urban areas in Kenya represent different shades of the identity of its speakers. I investigate variation in terms of lexical choices and discourse types, as different speakers engage in social interaction. Identity will be regarded both as something that one has, as well as something that can be acquired. I will argue that individuals have and display multiple or multifaceted identities, which are mediated through language and other social practices, and are in a constant process of change. Since identity is tied to self-presentation as well as others' perception, I will focus on how identity is constructed through performance and how it is negotiated in social interactions. By negotiation here, I mean both the overt and covert interactional strategies that individuals use to cope with conflicting realities that result from their multiple identities. I have in mind strategies such as affirmation, self and other categorization, self-presentation, as well as contestations, all of which involve the modification or partial erasure of individuals' prior identities.

The major issue addressed in this dissertation is how people in small groups in Nairobi make use of the lexical resources of Sheng in projecting their various identities. Previous work on Sheng's lexicon has been confined to a compilation of vocabulary. Yet looking at Githiora's (2002) Sheng glossary, or Mbaabu and Nzuga's (2004) dictionary, one encounters many synonyms for certain words. There has not been any explanation of

this synonymy in a systematic way. This study provides an explanation for the synonymy by tying lexical variation to different realities that shape speakers' identities.

The majority of variationist works dealing with identity (e.g, Fischer's (1958) qualitative study of [ŋ]/[n] variation in a New England Village and Labov's (1972a) famous study of glide centralization in Martha's Vineyard have focused on phonological variation. Fisher, for instance, showed that the velar nasal [ŋ] was the preferred variant identified with the 'model' boys while the alveolar nasal [n] was identified with the 'typical' boys. Labov, on the other hand showed that the respondents who used the raised onsets of [au] and [ai] were island-oriented regardless of other static sociolinguistic identities.

Vocabulary has had very little such treatment, and when it has, it is often an insider relying on knowledge about their own speech community. A good example is Smitherman's (1977) study of various aspects of Black semantics. In reference to the different levels of meanings of some words used by African Americans, Smitherman remarks;

> For blacks, English words can have potentially two levels of meanings, one black, one white. Since blacks share in the consensus dialect of the American mainstream, on one level a word's referent is the same for blacks and whites. But since blacks share a linguistic subculture outside that mainstream, on another level (the Black Semantic level) the same word has multiple meanings and associations. P 59

As an example, the word bad could be interpreted with the the mainstream negative meaning e.g *I got a bad cold*, but among the African Americas the word can have a positive meaning as in *He is a bad dude*. Another notable study is Githiora's (1999) study of the social racial terms and identity in an Afromexican community.

Githiora discusses how terms like *indio, blanco, negro and moreno* could be used as footing devices as speakers align and realign themselves in relation to their interlocutors.

While these two works have made important contributions to the study of lexical variation, much still remains to be done. Since different societies experience realities differently, different languages always come up with interesting peculiarities. This study, therefore, apart from addressing a gap in the literature on vocabulary variation, also introduces interesting data from a very dynamic urban code. Since one of my major arguments is that linguistic choices are made in order to achieve specific outcomes, I will open this introductory Chapter with a brief discussion of the factors and motivation behind the making of choices with relation to identity.

1.1. Making Choices

The choice of linguistic codes by bilinguals or bidialectals is not always, perhaps not even usually, intended to accomplish communicative ends. When a speaker has an option of using either of the languages or codes available, then there must be a rationale for choosing one and not the other, although "rationale" is not meant to suggest that such choices or their causes always operate at the conscious level (some are made at the subconscious level). Code selection is usually guided by the need to optimize the interaction outcomes depending on prevailing circumstances. During codeswitching for instance, speakers evaluate potential code choices along a markedness scale depending on the goals of interaction. The marked choices are those that are not predicted by a community's interactive norms in a given situation, while the unmarked choices are those that are predictable in given situational contexts. According to Myers-Scotton's (1993b)

markedness model (MM), the choices that speakers make are indices of the desired Rights and Obligations (RO) sets between participants which might either be marked or unmarked. These (RO) sets are well known by the interlocutors and they vary depending on different interaction types. Markedness is relative; what is marked in one interaction type might be unmarked in a different interaction type and vice versa. The argument that speakers' code choices are goal-oriented and that the rational actors engage in decision-making to come up with the most optimal choice has recently been the central argument of the Rational Choice (RC) model (see Bolonyai 2005, Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai 2001). Expounding on the RC model, Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai write;

> The RC theory is based on the assumption about human cognition that actors are oriented to seek optimality of an interpersonal nature in their actions, including linguistic choices. The overall assumption is that the way speakers choose to speak reflects their cognitive calculation to present a specific persona that will give them the best "return" in their interaction with others, in whatever ways are important to them and are rationally grounded. (2001:23)

Optimatization of interactional outcomes in all the seven functions of language[1] is the rationale behind linguistic choices. Without downplaying the outcomes of facilitation of interpersonal communication associated with the interactional function of language, I restate that linguistic choices are not entirely intended to serve communicative function alone. Language also serves other symbolic functions that might even sometimes overshadow the communicative function. In this study, I will be dealing with how speakers of an esoteric linguistic code manipulate lexical variation for the symbolic purpose of indexing different aspects of their identities. It will be demonstrated that although lexical choices are used to highlight different identities, they do not always

[1] Halliday (1973) identifies the seven functions of language as instrumental, regulatory, heuristic, interactional, personal, imaginative and informative,

follow along the RC model. In fact, some lexical items that are subconsciously selected seem to challenge the very logic of the RC model. This is due to constant performances that have caused these choices to become engrained in the speakers' habitus, such that speakers become disposed to use them in their group interactions, in the process activating some aspects of their multifaceted identity. This study goes beyond the notion of "activating a specific persona" and will provide in more detail an account of linguistic choices, which are consciously and deliberately adopted, as Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai put it, "in whatever ways, important to them", as well as the counterargument for conscious activation of identities through lexical choices.

In this introductory Chapter, I will give the reader an idea of what this study is all about. This begins with a background of Sheng, the linguistic code and the topic of this study, from its evolution to the present situation. This will be followed by the statement of the questions that this study seeks to answer, and then the general hypotheses that guide my investigation. I will then define some of the terms that the reader might encounter in the course of the dissertation which I think should be known early enough, before concluding the Chapter with an account of the general organization of this dissertation. Let us now turn to Sheng.

1.2. The consequences of choice: Sheng and the Kenyan challenge

Sheng, usually regarded as an acronym for "Swahili-English" slang in previous literature (e.g, Mazrui 1995), is believed to have evolved in Nairobi in the 1960s and 1970s. Its evolution has been attributed to an inadequate knowledge of the standard languages (Swahili and English), a need for a language of identity (Osinde 1986, Samper 2002, 2004), its ability to obscure meaning as a secret language (Mbugua 2003, Githiora 2002),

and its cognitive efficiency (Kangethe 2004) among other reasons. Though a product of multilingualism and language contact phenomena, Sheng defies the traditional pidgin/creole classification of similar contact languages due to the fact that there existed a widely spoken lingua franca (Swahili) at the time of its evolution. However, if its phonotactics and morphosyntax are used as the criteria for its classification, then it can confidently be regarded as a variety of Swahili. I will revisit this issue in a later Chapter.

Originally, Sheng was restricted to the poor residential areas of the Nairobi Eastlands, and then it gradually spread to other poor residential areas and has today spread to all areas of Nairobi and beyond[2]. The initial hostile attitude towards Sheng was due to its association with wayward youth, drug users, and generally people who engaged in antisocial behavior. Nowadays, Sheng is not restricted to the youth as was the case during its formative years. Many young people claim that they speak Sheng with their parents, though they also add that the kind of Sheng they speak with elders is quite different from the variety that they speak with their age-mates. As recent as July 2005, President Kibaki (in his 70s) was reported in the Kenya media as calling people to have fun by using his now-popular idiom *mji-enjoy* (enjoy yourselves) while in 2003, Justice Samuel Bosire, a senior judge in Kenya was reported in the media saying *poa* (OK, fine) to a witness during a commission of inquiry, a serious public proceeding. While *poa* is derived from a Swahili verb *ku-poa* 'to cool down', *mji-enjoy* is a combination of two Swahili morphemes; *m*, a nominal classifier, and *ji*, a reflexive morpheme attached to the English verb *enjoy*. This underscores the pervasive nature of codeswitching in Sheng.

[2] See appendix (III) for some Sheng words that appear in the Rift Valley Academy (RVA) Lingo. RVA is an American Christian school located about 50 km from Nairobi whose student population predominantly comes from overseas.

While isolated cases such as these that surface once in a while provide evidence of adult use of Sheng, we can not tell with certainty to what extent adults use Sheng since no conclusive study has yet been done to address the issue.

Sheng has been blamed for students' poor performance in national exams. Due to the predominance of English and Swahili (both the official and national languages) in Sheng's lexicon, students normally blur the boundaries that demarcate Sheng and these languages. This is not helped by the fact that the bulk of the Sheng speakers are from poor residential areas where language learning resources as well as qualified instructors are lacking. Writing in the Sunday Nation of January 9th, 2005, Kimani Njogu, a leading language pedagogue and Chairman of CHAKITA[3]-Kenya, lamented that primary school teachers are expected to teach all subjects, irrespective of whether they had passed the language exams or not. The result is a situation whereby students are taught language by teachers who are ill-prepared for the task of language pedagogy. This affects students' general performance because other school subjects are taught in English.

Since Sheng is just not going to fade away, it is time that the language planners in Kenya came up with practical ways of addressing the issue rather that just saying that parents and teachers should discourage students from speaking Sheng. Considering that Sheng has various social advantages outside the four walls of the classrooms, of which the most important is serving the identity function, its study will provide insights for language and education planners when formulating language policies. Too much time is normally wasted lamenting the corrupting nature of Sheng, but hardly any effort is made

[3] Acronym of **CHA**ma cha **KI**swahili cha **TA**ifa, (National Kiswahili Association) An organization of Swahili scholars and writers in Kenya involved in the development and promotion of Kiswahili.

to understand why its use persists in spite of its obvious disadvantages. It is high time those language planners appreciated Sheng's social advantages and work out how it can exist alongside other mainstream languages. Apart from contributing to the general advancement of knowledge and addressing such language planning issues, I seek to give a clearer understanding of the dynamics of an urban code by looking at the different patterns of identity that Sheng and its speakers represent. As a starting point to my study, I begin by stating the general question that will be addressed in my discussion.

1.3. Guiding questions

Although other issues may arise, this study will be guided by the following principal research questions:

- How is the use of Sheng socially demarcated and what role does it play in the daily lives of each category of its speakers?
- How distinct are the Sheng varieties in Nairobi, and what are some of the feature(s) that distinguish one variety from the others?
- Under what circumstances do speakers shift from one variety to another; what are the major motivations for such shifts?
- What is the relationship between these distinct varieties and the identity of the individuals or groups that use them?
- What is the place of different local varieties of Sheng in the identity of the speakers of those varieties vis-à-vis the broad identity of all Sheng speaker in Nairobi and Kenya, in general?
- How do the groups enforce norms in their varieties and how do the individuals who subscribe to the group's norms refine and modify the identities of others in the group?

I will not try to answer each question in isolation since the answers sometimes overlap. Even so, I will make as much effort as possible to stay focused on these questions. To answer these questions, I will adopt the following hypotheses;

1.4. Hypotheses

1. Different identities are reflected by the use of different names for the same referent.
2. Different meanings for the same referent are a reflection of different identities.
3. Sheng speakers can learn and use the words that are identified with groups other than their own.
4. Speakers shift identities both consciously and uncounsciously.
5. Shifting of identities is greater in densely populated residential areas as opposed to sparsely populated residential areas.
6. Sheng speakers identify with Sheng varieties that are similar or close to their own.

1.5. Major assumptions

The guiding assumption of this study is that the identity of Sheng speakers in Nairobi is multifaceted. These different facets of the Sheng speakers' identity manifest themselves as they (speakers) weave through different social units with their unique Sheng variety. Rather than being in opposition, these different aspects complement each other akin to the different parts of the body, without which the body cannot be whole.

I also assume, following Githiora (1999:4), that the lexicon is the most important area in the projection of identity as opposed to syntax or phonology, at least partly because words carry a whole system of history and meaning and other levels do not seem to be as varied. The morphosyntactic variation, though crucial in lexical coinage does not

exhibit a great variation disparity. In any case, phonotactics and morphosyntax are intertwined with lexical manipulation in various Sheng varieties. Therefore, if lexical items are the most important markers of the group's identity, then the speakers who wish to gain acceptance into any prospective group have to learn the lexical items associated with the group in question. This does not necessarily lead to erasure of prior identity but rather the modification of earlier identity. In fact, earlier identity can be regained through the speakers' re-entry into the earlier group.

In addition, even within a given social category, all the people do not occupy the same position. There are some who are at the core of the group and others are at the periphery. The position one occupies within the group is usually reflected by that speaker's mastery of the group's linguistic code. This mastery is itself determined by (a) the duration of time one has identified with the group, (b) the level of participation in other social activities that are considered important by the group, and, for the case of outsiders, (c) the group's willingness to accept him/her among its ranks. This creates a hierarchy of identities in any group.

1.6. Definition of terms

Having provided the general background of the study, I will proceed to the task of defining some of the terms that will recur in my general discussion, and which might be confusing to the reader. I will first define those terms and then explain how I use them in my discussion.

Matatu [ma[4]+tatu]. *Tatu* means 'three' in Swahili. When the *matatu* began operating as an alternative means of transport way back in 1953 (Mbugua 2003), they were charging three cents per trip, hence the name ma-*tatu (*plural of tatu*)*. *Matatus* are the privately owned commuter vehicles that supplement the organized transportation in Kenya. Although the passenger capacity should be 14 passengers for the small vans and 26 passengers for the minibuses, the rules are not normally adhered to and rampant overloading of passengers is common, thanks to the traffic policemen who overlook such transgressions after receiving bribes from the *matatu* crew.

Manamba [ma+namba] *Namba* is borrowed from English 'number'. These are the crews who operate the *matatus* and are called so because their work involves shouting the m*atatu's* route number, loading people and their luggage, as well as charging fares. In the common Kenyan mindset, the *manamba* are known for their transgressive acts such as pick-pocketing, extorting sexual favors from female passengers whose fare has been stolen on a *matatu* by a conductor's accomplices, and physical confrontations between crews and/or passengers (Mbugua 2003). The *matatu* work, according to Mbugua has been a predominantly male affair, though some women are nowadays taking up jobs as *matatu* drivers or *manamba.*

---

[4] A convention in Bantu language study (e.g. Bleek 1862:97-100, Meinhoff 1932, 39-40) has been to assign numerals to noun class prefixes. Prefixes *m-, wa-*, and *ma-* are class 1, 2, and 6 nominal classifiers respectively (Bleek p.189). As in other Bantu languages, Swahili classifies all animates under class 1 (singular) and class 2 (plural). Most borrowed nouns are classified in class 5 or 9 (singular) and 6 or 10 (plural). From this classification, *Babi* is a borrowed clipping and thus belongs to class 5 (singular, *babi*) and class 6 (plural, *mababi*), but it is also animate, which explains the confusion when some people classify it as class 1 (singular, *Mbabi*) and class 2 (plural, *Wababi*).

Mababi (ma+babi): Generally, these are the people from the affluent neighborhoods in Nairobi. The name *babi* is a clipping from Babylon, a pointer to the influence of reggae culture. The term is attributed to the teachings of Marcus Garvey, who equated the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean and Americas with the Biblical enslavement of Jews in Babylon. The metaphor captures the socioeconomic domination according to which the wealthy oppress the poor. I will discuss various significances of this metaphor. *Babi* will be used alongside *Mbabi*, and *mababi* will be used alongside *Wababi* because the respondents alternated between the two during the interviews. The use of *babi/mababi* and *Mbabi/Wababi* results from speakers' confusion as to whether to classify them in either class 1and 2 or 5 and 6.[5]

Mabeshte (ma+beshte): From the English word 'best'. Although *beshte* like *babi* has various significances, its most unmarked sense is 'best friend' or 'very close buddy.'

Baze: This term was given to me by the Sheng speakers themselves. They used it to refer to the local place where they usually went to pass time. Although I do not have the etymology of this term, there is a possibility that it is derived from the English word 'base'. I will use the term to refer to the local network comprising of people who know each other and interact with each other often via shared linguistic norms.

Although there are various other terms that need to be defined, I will restrict my definition to these five terms on account of their uniqueness and relevance to my study.

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[5] See footnote 4 above.

Matatu and *manamba* are especially problematic to people who have never had the Nairobi transportation experience; on the other hand, the terms *babi* and *beshte* have been isolated due to their opacity. Other terms will be defined in the course of the discussion.

1.7. Plan of Work

The five Chapters of this dissertation are organized as follow; Chapter 1 has given insight into the issue at hand. I have generally talked about language choice and then given a background of Sheng as an example of a linguistic code that involves making linguistic choices. The definitions of the problems as well as the issues that will be dealt with in this study have also been addressed. In Chapter 2, I will provide a description of the setting of this research, review the literature, and elaborate on the research and analytical methodology and theoretical frameworks. That Chapter will also give an overview of the linguistic background, the demographic patterns and Kenyan language policy, all of which have implications for the overall problem of Sheng, its status, use, and users. A literature review and background research on the issue of identity, the relation between language and identity, and how the identity issue has been treated in previous work on Sheng, will also be discussed. The section on methodology and theoretical frameworks concludes the Chapter

Chapter 3 presents the picture of variation, beginning with Sheng as a linguistic code for its speakers as members of social categories. Beginning the discussion with structural variation, I will then proceed with a discussion of various Word Formation Processes (WFPs) that promote lexical variation in Sheng. The outcome of these WFPs (data) will be presented as lexical variables, which are treated as synonyms. This will be followed by the patterns of Sheng variation according to sex, schools, and

neighborhoods. My unit of analysis — baze or local network and its relevance in variation and identity will also be discussed. The Chapter concludes with the discussion of other factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, as well as residential areas, which are responsible for Sheng's variation.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the construction and performance of identity in both discourse and non-discourse sites. I begin with the role of ambiguity in lexical signifiers and the reality they represent to both insiders and outsiders. These will be discussed in terms of the young/old, male/female, urban/rural, rich/poor dualism, all of which mirror the insider/outsider or us/them distinction. I will show how insiders categorize outsiders and how the categorized groups sometimes contest the negative labels that have been attached to them. I will then illustrate how identities are activated non-consciously and not necessarily as outcomes of what might be called "rational choice" in spontaneous discourse. Cases of linguistic crossing will be discussed as the deliberate efforts to adopt the linguistic norms identified with a different social category. Vernacular discourse such as vulgar speech and verbal contest will be shown to be important diagnostics for social positioning within a social category. This will be followed by an examination of other non-linguistic ways of constructing identity and the other discourse sites where variation in Sheng reflects differences in identities. I conclude the Chapter by trying to combine the construction of identity with people's attitudes.

Chapter 5 will sum up the major findings in Chapters 3 and 4 and highlight the contribution that this study has made to the advancement of our knowledge about Sheng. I will also point to the challenges that Sheng poses in the field of language pedagogy in Kenya's education system and suggest areas for future research.

Chapter 2

Sheng's socio-demographic background and research methodology

Part I. Linguistic and demographic backgrounds

2. Introduction

This Chapter will deal with the linguistic, historical, and demographic, as well as the methodological aspects of the dissertation. The linguistic background begins with a brief overview of the languages of Kenya, starting with major language groups and other classification issues. I then touch on multilingualism and its impact on the interaction patterns in Kenya's urban areas. This will be followed by a discussion of the historical background of Nairobi, the setting of this research from the times it became an urban center, through its various expansions to the present development, with special emphasis on demographic distribution. This is crucial because, in later discussions, I will show the relevance of demography on the interaction pattern that have an impact on Sheng and the whole question of identity. The discussion of language policy and its contribution to the development of Sheng in Nairobi will complete part I of this Chapter. Part II, will be a review of the literature, beginning with the definition of identity to the relationship between language and identity and the way identity has been treated in previous work on Sheng. This will be followed by a section on methodology, in which I outline the methods and procedures that were used in the collection of data. This will pave way for the discussion of the methods of data interpretation beginning with the quantitative methods and the qualitative methods, which are inspired by various theoretical frameworks. After a brief explanation of how these theories will be used, I will then

conclude this Chapter with a brief summary. To begin this Chapter, I will now turn to a discussion of the languages in Kenya.

2.1. Languages of Kenya

Indigenous languages in Kenya have been classified into three language groups — Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Myers-Scotton 1993a). According to the *Ethnologue* classification based on Greenberg (1966), Bantu languages belong to the Niger Congo family, Nilotic to the Nilo-Saharan family, and the Cushitic to the Afro-Asiatic family. Bantu speakers are the majority at 65%, followed by the Nilotes at 30%, and the Cushites at around 3%; the rest are speakers of foreign languages (Whiteley 1971, Rhoads 1977, Fawcett 1970), see also Githiora (2002). The major ethnic groups are Gikuyu 22%, Luhya 14%, Luo 13%, Kalenjin 12%, Kamba 11%, Kisii 6%, Meru 6%, other Africans 15%, non-Africans (Asians, Europeans, and Arabs) 1% (CIA factbook, 2004). These seven major ethnic groups make up 84% of the total Kenyan population.

The exact number of languages is contentious. *Ethnologue,* for instance, gives the number as 61, but other sources (e.g. Mbaabu 1996, Chimerah 1998, and Rhoades 1977) give the number as 40. This is due to the grouping of mutually intelligible languages under a common label, as is the case with the Luhya, Kalenjin and Meru. The Bukusu, Nyore, and Idakho, for instance, are regarded as Luhya dialects, yet in *Ethnologue* map (Figure 1) they are coded as separate languages. Similarly, Tharaka and Mwimbi are normally classified under Meru, while in the map they are represented as separate languages. The Sabaot, Pokot, and Tugen, normally classified under Kalenjin, are coded as autonomous. *Ethonologue* representation of Kenyan indigenous languages is shown in Figure 1.

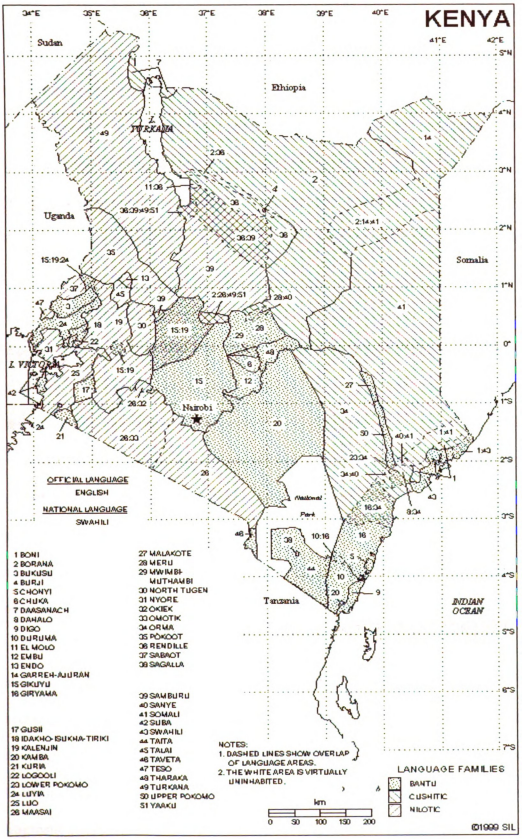

Figure 1. Languages of Kenya (source: *Ethnologue)*

Non-indigenous languages spoken in Kenya are European languages such as English, German, French, Italian and Spanish; Asian languages such as Hindi, Gujerati, Punjabi, and Urdu, spoken exclusively by the Asians (see Gorman 1974); and Arabic, mostly spoken at the coast. English is the most important foreign language, having been inherited from the former colonizers. Other European languages such as German, Italian, French, and Spanish, together with the upcoming Asian languages such as Chinese and Japanese, have no major significance outside the tourism industry.

2.2. Multilingualism in Kenya

Multilingualism in Kenya is a norm rather than an exception. Language contact, especially in urban centers has resulted in widespread codeswitching and the development of an urban mixed code known as Sheng. It is difficult to determine the extent of multilingualism in Kenya before colonialism. Since the traditional political economy, save for nomadic pastoralism, was self-sustaining at the local level and provided limited opportunities for mobility, there were few possibilities for language contact. Therefore, the worldview of most Africans was restricted to local ethnic boundaries with occasional contact with immediate neighbors.

Colonialism transformed the linguistic landscape as Africans were gradually integrated into the colonial economic system, though at a subservient level. In order to accommodate the British settlers, Africans were confined to native reserves, a development that led to the enhancement of interaction beyond the clan or kinship level. Urbanization, one of the features of colonial economy, brought Africans from different linguistic backgrounds together, and they had to confront communication barriers as one

of their challenges. Although the ensuing language contact accelerated multilingualism, these urban centers did not become linguistic melting pots because the colonial structures were not designed to fully integrate Africans into the economic system. Instead, the colonial system designed strategies that were geared towards the perpetuation of the unequal economic model where privileged colonizers occupied the top of the hierarchy.

At the linguistic level, a language was only important as long as it propagated the status quo; otherwise it had to be subverted. In 1920 for instance, Harry Thuku, one of Kenya's pioneer nationalists, used Kiswahili, the lingua franca that was becoming increasingly popular in the urban areas, to organize people from diverse linguistic affiliations against the *kipande* (ID Cards) system (Mkangi 1982). Recognizing the power of Kiswahili as a uniting language, use of ethnic languages was encouraged by the colonial government in order to cultivate ethnic mistrust and thus curb the threat of interethnic unity against colonialism. The colonial ideology guided the language policy, where Kiswahili, vernacular languages and English, the language of the colonizers, operated under circumscribed domains. This is the genesis of multilingualism, a characteristic phenomenon in Kenya's urban areas.

Multilingualism in Kenya posed a challenge to the independent government's unity agenda. The failure to redress the colonialists' mistake through lukewarm commitment to the promotion of Kiswahili as a national language left the urbanites groping in the dark in the multilingual jungle. As urbanites waded through this confusion, multilingualism, which was at first a disadvantage, was turned into a powerful resource for self-identity, an identity that drew from the rich cultural linguistic diversity, while at the same time transcending the restrictive boundaries of ethnicity. Sheng, a linguistic

code born through a combination of language contact and poor language policy, was weaned on codeswitching, linguistic borrowing and lexical innovation and has been perpetuated by the functional and social benefits attached to it by its speakers. It is these functional and social benefits that are the subject of this study.

Having discussed the linguistic background, I now turn to socio-demographic reality in sections 3 and 4 and 5. Section 6 discusses Kenya's language policy and its contribution to the emergence of Sheng and winds up Part I of this Chapter. In part II, section 7 is a literature review, section 8 contains the methodology, and section 9 gives a summary of the Chapter.

2.3. Socio-demographic description of Nairobi

Nairobi started as an internal depot for the Kenya-Uganda Railway in 1899. Its name is derived from "Nyarobe", a Maasai word that means 'the place of cool waters,' due to the presence of the Nairobi River. This river was important to the Maasai herdsmen whose economic lifeline depended on good pastures and watering places. Like the Maasai herdsmen, the Railway constructors found Nairobi to be a convenient place for an internal depot due to its suitable climate and landscape. It was more centralized and cooler than the drier areas of Ukambani, which made it an ideal resting place before descending the Great Rift Valley.

After completion of the railway, the imperial administration shifted its headquarters from Mombasa to Nairobi. An urban center measuring 18km^2 was created, with its main features being the railway buildings, and different residential quarters for Europeans and Asians. The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEACO), which was

a predecessor of the British colonial administration, moved its headquarters from Mombasa to Nairobi, which culminated in the elevation of Nairobi as capital of the then British East Africa Protectorate in 1907.

The extension of Nairobi has been at the expense of the neighboring districts of Kiambu, Ngong, and Machakos, which have been annexed to pave way for its rapid expansion. The original 18km^2 urban boundary of 1900 was extended to 77km^2 in 1927, with other minor expansion during the later half of the 1940s. This was further increased to 686 km^2 in 1963, and there has not been any other increase since then. These extensions are illustrated in Figure 2.

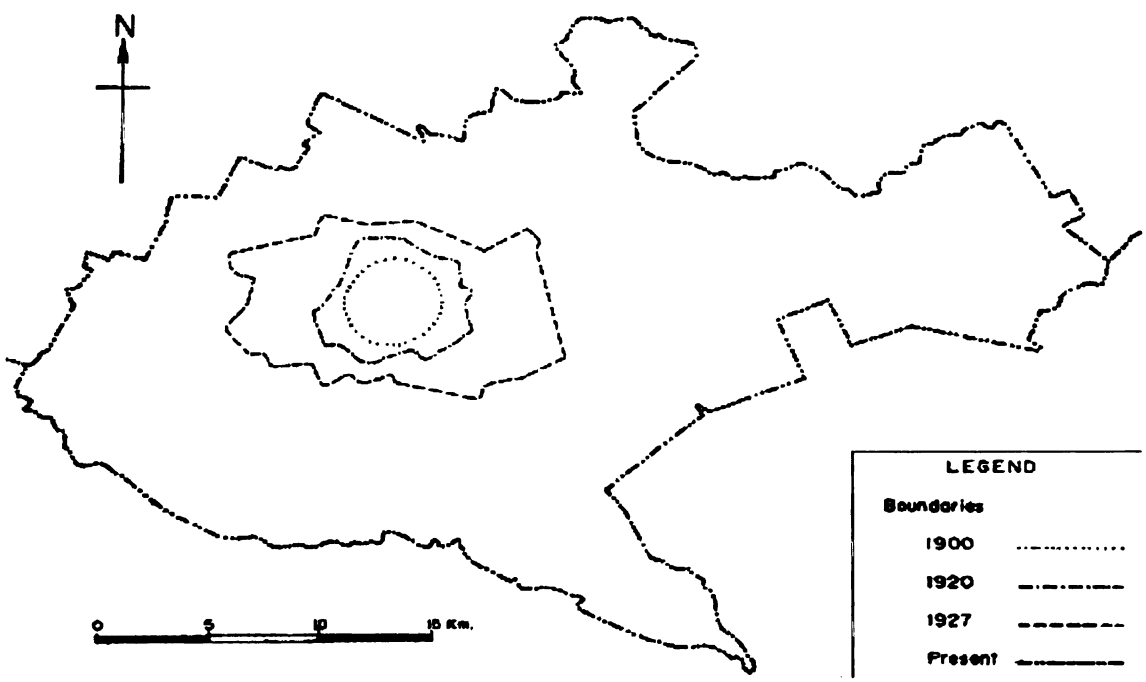

Figure 2. Urban expansion (*Source: Kenya Bureau of Statistics*)

In 1906 the population stood at 11,000. Four years later when Nairobi became a municipality, it had only increased by 4,000. By the time of the first extension in 1928, the population had almost doubled to 29,864. On the eve of the country's independence

in 1963, the number had increased to 266,975, thus prompting another extension. Currently, the population is estimated to be close to three million. Table 1, adapted from Olima (2001), traces the population growth from the time Nairobi became incorporated to the most recent census data.

Year	Area in hectares	Population	% increase
1906	1,813	11,520	-
1928	2,537	29,864	159.4
1931	2,537	47,919	60.5
1936	2,537	49,600	3.5
1944	2,537	108,900	119.6
1948	8,315	118,976	9.3
1963	68,945	266,795	124.2
1969	68,945	509,286	90.8
1979	68,945	827,775	62.5
1989	68,945	1,324,570	60.0
1999	68,945	2,143,254	61.8

Table 1. Population growth in Nairobi, 1906-1999

While the huge leap in 1928 can be attributed to the increase in the size of Nairobi, the rapid increase from 1963 is a result of both migration and natural population growth. The relevance of this increase to this study will be addressed in the following section.

2.4. Demographic facts: A history of residential disparity

Nairobi's original territory had no residential areas designated for the Africans (Mitullah 2003). This changed with the entrenchment of the colonial economy that required African labor to perform tasks that were considered too low for the Europeans and Asians. By then, the Indians who had come to Kenya as casual laborers during the construction of the railway had already established themselves as the trader class, though they were still below the Europeans with regard to social status. A three-level hierarchy based on race

ensued which manifested itself at all levels, including the residential set up. The European quarters, for instance, were located in the spacious areas west of the Central Business District (CBD), and the Asians lived close to the CBD, in such estates as Ngara and Parklands, or in their business premises within the CBD itself. The Africans were confined in crowded quarters in the Eastern side of the CBD. The independent government inherited this residential pattern and perpetuated it, though the hierarchy was no longer based on race but on socio-economic disparity.

After independence, there was an unprecedented influx of people into the city, driven by the following two factors: 1) the urban movement of Africans was no longer controlled, as was the case during the colonial period: 2) the search for blue-collar jobs and the allure of the city life attracted many people to Nairobi. This stretched the ability of the post-independent government in the provision of basic services — a trend that has persisted to date.

Currently, it is estimated that there are more than 194 urban centers in Kenya with a total population of about 10.0 millions, representing 34.8% of the country's population. Nearly half of this urban population lives in Nairobi (Olima 2001, quoting GoK sources). As the population figures in Table (1) show, the Nairobi population almost doubled within a span of 6 years, and has been increasing steadily ever since. It is expected to hit the 6,000,000 mark by 2015. This growth has not been matched by the infrastructural development to cater to the expanding population. The original estates (those close to the Central Business District (CBD), have better road network compared to those away from the CBD which were added during the expansion of Nairobi, as shown in Figure 3.

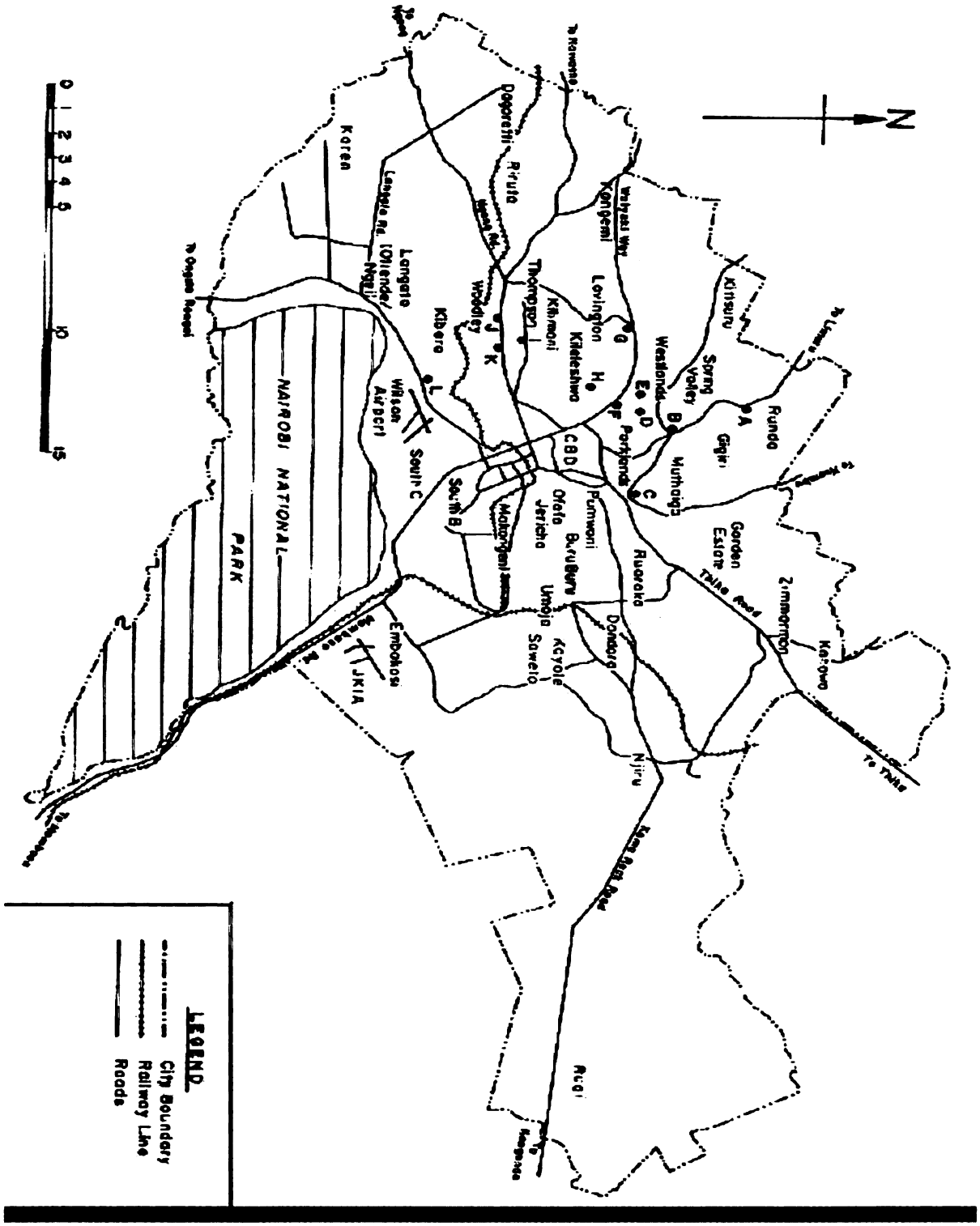

Figure 3. Different estates in Nairobi

Figure (3) shows some of the estates in the expanded map of Nairobi that was shown in Figure (2). The 'original' Eastland estates (only those close to the CBD) are Ofafa

Jericho, Makongeni, Buruburu and Umoja, while the Westland areas close to the CBD are Westlands, Parklands, Kileleshwa Lavington and Kilimani. Generally, people who live in the western suburbs are affluent while the lower and the middle-income elements still dominate the eastern suburbs (Mitullah 2003). The government's lack of a sound housing policy, official corruption, land grabbing, failure of the City Council to enforce the by-laws governing the construction of structures within the city, as well as the city residents' inability to afford quality housing has resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements (shanties and slums). It is estimated that 60% of the total population of Nairobi lives in informal settlements. These informal settlements occupy roughly 5% of the total residential area, which means that over half of the urban population lives on 5% of the total residential land area. The characteristic features in the informal settlements are unregulated housing structures, filth, unemployment, illiteracy, and rampant crime. A brief look at the informal settlements sheds more light on the popularity of Sheng and the kind of reality it represents.

2.5. Informal settlements

Rapid urbanization in Kenya has exerted pressure on the government's provision of basic facilities. The population increase has not been matched by similar expansion of services. The original map of Nairobi was well planned in terms of infrastructure; however, it was only planned for a small population, and the city was unable to cope with the huge influx of people, especially after attainment of political independence. Even after the city's boundaries were expanded, the government was still unable to provide basic infrastructure such as housing, which led to the mushrooming of informal settlements.

The problem was exacerbated by the land grabbing phenomena, where public land meant for road reserves or public facilities such as public toilets, parks and social halls were fraudulently allocated to well-connected individuals who were allied with public servants such as grassroots administrators, i.e. chiefs and the local councillors. These land grabbers then erected structures in areas unfit for human habitation and became absentee landlords. Since the owners of these structures did not live in them, they did not feel the need to provide basic facilities for the tenants. It is thus common to find a block of mud-walled or corrugated iron-walled 10ft x10ft rooms with no bathroom or public toilet, as was the case in Sinai, one of my interview sites.

The situation in Kibera is much more complex, and the contention regarding the status of the residents has always confounded the policy makers in terms of service provisions. The owners of these plots do not have the title deeds to their pieces of land. This means that they cannot invest money in the development of the plots since they do not know what the government's intentions are. The owners' suspicion of the government has always been manifested when plans are suggested about a Kibera slum-upgrading project. Every time such plans are proposed, the owners think it is a government trick to drive them out, and they always respond by demonstrating in opposition to these noble plans thus perpetuating their squalid living conditions.

People go to the slums because the cost of housing and living there is generally cheap. Here the residents are cut off from regulated society. The areas are not patrolled by police, nor are the various informal businesses regulated. As a result, the owners of these small-scale businesses do not pay taxes, and this makes their services to be rather cheap. This might explain why my respondents in Sinai said they would not consider

moving out of the slums because houses and food are cheap, and they can smoke marijuana and drink chang'aa[6] with impunity. As a result of this, crime is rampant in these slums since criminals can commit crimes and then disappear with the knowledge that police will not be able to penetrate deep into the slums. Opposition to upgrading of the slum is thus usually viewed as a way of making life difficult for the poor, who cannot afford decent houses in regulated neighborhoods. In this study, I consider these realities in the slums are the raw materials with which the slum dwellers construct their identity.

As far as Sheng is concerned, the slums provide a favorable setting for intense interaction and conduct of social discourse. Not only do people from various linguistic backgrounds live together side by side, but we also see that the general neglect that characterizes their lifestyle is reflected in the educational system, which denies the children of slum residents the resources to learn standard languages. It is not the use of Sheng that inhibits the learning of standard languages, but poor instruction in standard languages is partly responsible for the persistence of Sheng.

This brief description suffices to demonstrate the socio-demographic reality of the setting of this research. However, the demographic issues are not solely responsible for Sheng's persistence. I now shift to the issue of language policy as a contributing factor to the development and perpetuation of Sheng.

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[6] An illicit alcoholic drink locally manufactured and consumed in people's homes. It is popular because it is cheap and very potent. Deaths and loss of eyesight after its consumption have been reported in local dailies. (See also http://news.bbc.co.uk/ on Nov 20 2000.)

2.6. The language policy in Kenya

Language policy is the official action of governments to determine the status of languages and the nature of their makeup. The actions include executive pronouncements and legislative bills or court judgments on matters affecting learning, use and maintenance of language. Mbaabu (1996, 2000) argues that language policy is part of public policy as formulated by a government to affect its nationals. Mbaabu further argues that both *action* and *inaction* by the government constitute a policy. This definition will suffice in my brief survey of language policy in Kenya.

Most writers have maintained that Kenya has a trifocal language policy (Habwe 2000:168, Mbaabu 1996, 2000:224, Whiteley 1969), where English is the official language and Kiswahili, the regional lingua franca, is the national language (Harries 1975, Mbaabu 1977, Habwe 2000, Barasa 2000). The demarcation between the official function and the national function of these two languages is not clear-cut and is characterized by constant overlap. In addition, there are other languages of ethnic affiliation, but again, there are some people who cannot identify with any of Kenya's ethnic languages and therefore use only the two languages for their social interaction.

During the colonial era, Kenya's language policy oscillated between Kiswahili, English and the vernacular languages. In the 1920s, for instance, the administrators, the educational leaders and the missionaries all pursued different language policies. The Phelps Stokes commission[7] of 1924 recommended the use of vernacular languages in education, such as Kiswahili, Gikuyu, Luo and Nandi (Mbaabu 1996). Twenty vernacular languages in which teaching materials were to be developed were identified. As a result,

[7] Set up by the colonial office in London and charged with examining the educational systems in the colonies and advising how education of the 'natives' could be improved.

some ethnic groups were taught in non-local languages[8], a situation that was met with opposition in some cases. Towards the end of the colonial period, the policy was shifting in favor of English, which greatly reduced the role of Swahili in education (Musau 2000). This issue continued to dog the post-independent governments, who established various commissions to look at the issue of languages.

2.6.1. After independence

At independence English had already established itself as the language of upward mobility that everyone was keen to acquire. It was only accessible to the minority class that had managed to acquire formal education and took up jobs previously held by the Europeans. This class, who now controlled government policy, ensured that the colonial trend that had benefitted them was retained. English thus continued to be the medium of instruction in school from primary to university level — a trend that has continued to date. This does not mean that the government has been inactive in propagating an official policy, but it has been poorly articulated (Barasa 2000:194). To the contrary, there have been sustained calls for an official language policy by language lobbyists and official pronouncements, as well as the setting up of commissions that have come up with various recommendations on language issues.

In 1969 for instance, the ruling party KANU (Kenya African National Union), decided that Kiswahili would be the national language by 1974 (Mbaabu 1977). This was

[8] Giriama, a coastal language for instance, was chosen to serve all the nine tribes that comprised the miji Kenda group (Giriama, Kauma, Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai, Duruma and Digo), while Gikuyu, was chosen to serve all the tribes around mount Kenya region, such as Gikuyu, Igembe, Chuka, Tigania, Tharaka, Embu, Mbeere, etc). The logic of mutual intelligibility overrode all other considerations—such as cultural hegemony and linguistic domination of other tribes.

opposed by the then Attorney General, who insisted on the need for internationalization and efficiency in the use of the legal language (Harries 1975). In spite of this, on July 4, 1974, President Kenyatta announced that from that day on, Kiswahili would be the national language in Kenya. The opposition by some parliamentarians, who lacked good command of Kiswahili, coupled with the technicalities in drafting and debating of bills, prevented this presidential decree from being completely implemented. In addition, English had already assumed a symbolic index of sophistaction on top of the economic rewards it afforded the country's burgeoning elite. Since then, language policy has been addressed in various commissions set up by the government, as well as in various other arenas such as mass media, religion, music, constitutional reform, economic affairs, and lobbying.

Starting with the commissions, the Ominde report of 1964, for instance, recommended the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools. It noted the importance of Kiswahili in building national solidarity and promoting regional communication with neighboring countries. The commissioners recommended that Kiswahili should be taught as a school subject, but students did not have to sit for a Swahili exam at the end of the primary school cycle. Vernaculars were dismissed as unimportant in education because they were deemed poorly equipped for pedagogic tasks. The Wamalwa report of 1971 went beyond pedagogy as the driving force of language policy by introducing economic and administrative angles. Noting the importance of German and French in tourism and international conferences that were constantly being held in Nairobi, the committee called for the enhancement of training capacity in those languages. It also recommended the teaching of Kiswahili in civil

service institutes to equip administrators with a suitable communicative medium with the public they were being trained to serve.

Four years later, the Gachathi report of 1975 recommended the language of the immediate catchment area[9] to be used as the medium of instruction for the first three years of school. English as a medium of instruction was to begin in the fourth grade. At the same time, Kiswahili was to be introduced as a class subject. The report further recommended that Kiswahili proficiency be tested at the end of the primary school cycle to stop teachers from viewing it as expendable. Still, it was not until 1985, following the Mackay report of 1981, that this recommendation regarding Kiswahili was implemented. The Mackay report was titled "Report on the Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the Second University in Kenya." It recommended the restructuring of the educational system from a 7-4-2-3 system (7 years primary, 4-secondary 2-high school, 3-university) to an 8-4-4 system (8 years primary, 4-secondary, 4-university). It further recommended the establishment of the African language division, incorporating Kiswahili and making Kiswahili compulsory in the Second University.

From these commissions, both in their frames of reference and in their recommendations, it is evident that Kenya has not had a clearly articulated language policy; we also see that these commissions were geared toward inculcating linguistic attitudes that would evolve a language policy that reflected the official aspirations. Attempts have however been made by lobbyists to have the language policy entrenched

[9] "Catchment" refers to the community where the school in question was located

in the constitution — a feat that was accomplished in the recent constitutional review as affirmed in Chapter 2 section 9 of the zero draft[10].

> (1) The national language of Kenya is Kiswahili
>
> (2) The official languages of Kenya are Kiswahili and English, and all official documents shall be made available in both languages
>
> (3) The state shall respect and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya and shall promote the development and use of indigenous languages and sign languages
>
> (4) The state shall promote the development and use of Braille and other appropriate modes of communication for persons with visual and other impairments.

It is unclear what 'development and use' means in the case of indigenous languages. Most likely, they will be relegated to the traditional roles they have always occupied[11].

The intertwining of language policy and public policy brings us to other arenas where language issues are played out. In the mass media for instance, Kiswahili and English dominate other languages (King'ei 2000, Musau 2000). In radio and television, English takes the lion's share followed closely by Kiswahili. FM stations such as *Nation, Capital, Kiss,* and *Metro* all broadcast in English while *East FM* broadcasts in English and Hindi. In contrast radio stations such as *Iqra, Biblia Husema* and *Citizen Radio* devote a considerable amount of airtime to Kiswahili. As for the vernacular stations, Gikuyu dominates with three FM stations—*Kameme FM, Coro FM* and *Inooro FM.* In television broadcasting, English dominates, with little competition from Kiswahili. No local language is used on TV. Driven by entrepreneurial considerations, most radio

[10] The final report of the 2003 draft constitution. While there are many issues that have not been resolved to date, there is little likelihood that the section on language will be altered since it is not one of the contentious issues.

[11] These roles include traditional dancing troups to welcome foreign dignitaries at the airportsand entertaining tourists and guests during political rallies (Musau 2000:130).

stations adopt the most optimal language. The only logic behind language choice is how to maximize listeners' satisfaction in their enterprises. It is therefore no surprise that Sheng, a language that plays no part in Kenya's official language considerations so far, is widely used in these radio stations, which are dominated by youth from program anchors to the audience.

English dominance is sustained in the print media. For instance the four major dailies, *Nation, Standard, People* and *Kenya Times*, are all in English, while the only Kiswahili paper, *Taifa Leo,* has limited readership. Compared to a vernacular language like Gikuyu, which boasts around four magazines, we see Kiswahili being outperformed by the vernacular languages in the dissemination of news. While we cannot talk of any mainstream media that broadcast or write in Sheng per se, we find Sheng material in various media outlets, as the following sentences from leading newspapers show:

(a) so I decided to *dandia* (hang onto) the matatu's door. (*Pulse*, East African Standard, April 8 2005)

(b) We are surprised *odieros* (whites) are not the only people in this resort (*Buzz*, Sunday Nation, May 15 2005)

(c) During the Easter holidays I was *bila plot*...(without any plan) (*Pulse* April 22 2005)

Another interesting area to look at linguistic practices in Kenya is music. Until the early 1990s, vernacular and Swahili music competed for airplay with foreign music in the Swahili service of Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. Political themes during the clamor for a multiparty political system at the beginning of the 1990s attracted the wrath of government censors, who invaded production studios and confiscated music. Citing linguistic limitations, the government-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Corporation ceased playing vernacular music, while giving considerable airtime to foreign music. The irony

that foreign music in languages such as English and Lingala (a Congolese language) was inaccessible to the majority was lost. Some vernacular musicians' attempts to compose in Swahili to cheat the language barrier were unsuccessful[12]. This situation persisted until the late 1990s with entry of independent broadcasting stations that were sympathetic to vernacular musicians like *Radio Citizen* and later *Kameme FM.*

On a positive note, the implicit ban on vernacular musicians created a void that a new breed of artists attempted to fill. Musicians such as *Poxi Presha*, *Hardstone*, and the group *Kalamashaka* adopted African American hip-hop style and blended it with traditional beats while employing the linguistic medium Sheng that their audience could identify with. Emboldened by the success of these musicians, other aspiring young musicians employed Sheng in their music, and it received a warm reception. Since then, Sheng has become a characteristic of Kenya music, which has witnessed a kind of rebirth. Through Sheng, and its adaptability to hip hop, these upcoming local artists have succeeded in overcoming the language barrier that had dogged their vernacular predecessors. The casualty has been vernacular music and foreign music, especially Congolese Lingala. By using the language that the youth identify with, these musicians have not only won fans, but also the support of the media that highlight what is happening on the entertainment scene. These musicians have also been able to link with Kenyans in the diaspora, who feel connected to their music by the use of a linguistic medium and styles that reflect the global trends.

In people's everyday life, religion plays a very central role. Use of language in the religious arena thus becomes a matter of interest to anybody interested in linguistic

[12] A good example is Peter Kigia (Wa Esther), Simon Kihara (Musaimo) and Albert Gacheru (Wamaitu)

variety in Kenya. In the Christian churches, for instance, rural services are conducted in local vernaculars. In the urban centers, services may be conducted in a vernacular if the congregation is comprised of mono-ethnic members, which is not uncommon in Nairobi. Kiswahili is used in multiethnic congregations. This contrasts with youth services and also the educated middle class, where English is widely used. In mixed congregations English is used with a Kiswahili interpreter or vice versa. In the mosques, Kiswahili dominates. According to Habwe (2000:173), to accept Islam is to accept the use of Swahili. This affinity between Kiswahili and Islam derives from a long history of contact between the Swahili people and the Arab world, the cradle of Islam. As a result, most cultural religious terms in Kiswahili have Arabic origin. Other aspects of traditional African religion are carried out in the linguistic medium of the community in question.

Finally, I will look at language policy in the economic sphere. As the official language, English is used for all legislation pertaining to economic policies. In addition, English is associated with high status, due to its appropriation by the upper and the middle class. Since these are the people who control all means of production, it follows that English is the dominant language in formal economic circles. In the informal economic sphere, Swahili and Sheng are dominant in the urban areas, although vernacular languages are also used. This again reflects the socio-economic divisions, where people of low social economic status lack the means to cultivate competence in English and hence use the linguistic mediums that are readily available to them.

Following Mbaabu's (2000) argument that language policy involves both action and inaction about language, we can argue that Kenya's language policy has been very dynamic. However, its fuzziness has also given room for unbounded linguistic practices

as well as freedom to choose the medium that the speakers prefer. It is in this context that Sheng was created, nurtured and sustained. Gradually, it has cut its niche in Kenya's linguistic market by filling the linguistic resource gap created by dire economic situations and poor language legislation. As Kenya's urban situation became more and more complicated, this linguistic creation, once frowned upon, assumed a kind of value among its users. If Sheng is viewed in terms of Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of language and symbolic capital where languages are regarded as items with symbolic value, it can then be argued that it gave the users the accumulated prestige and honor in which to build their identity. With the new dynamics where Sheng's influence in cultural creation is being felt, its symbolic value as it competes with other mainstream language cannot be ignored. I expound on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital in the proceeding section.

2.6.2. Sheng as linguistic capital in an alternative linguistic market

The linguistic marketplace model regards language as a signs of wealth regarded as a form of cultural and social capital which can be cashed in economically (Downes 1998). Competent language users are viewed as possessing linguistic capital capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit (Bourdieu 1991:66). 'Utterances', according to Bourdieu, 'receive their value (and their sense) only in their relation to a market characterized by a particular law of price formation' (p. 67). The price formation imposes linguistic hierarchies relative to the social relations of power in multilingual situations. In formal interactions for instance, the languages used by those in authority are allocated the highest value while the minority languages are allocated the lowest value.

Bourdieu's concepts of languange and the *symbolic capital* can be traced to his idea of different kinds of capital. He names the three types of capital as (1) *economic capital* that deals with economic resources such as cash and assets, (2) *social capital* revolving around group membership, relationship, network of influence and support and (3) *cultural capital* associated with socialization processes where knowledge, skills, education are imparted in order to enable individuals to interact with others successfully. Symbolic capital on the other hand is associated with prestige, honor, fame and reputations which signal the difference in identities. What is different between the different types of capitals is the defference in terms of values and how one kind of capital can be converted into another. Economic, cultural and social capital can all lead to symbolic capital. Since the linguistic market is part of the broader symbolic market (Eckert 2000), the symbolic power represented by language should in theory be congruent with economic, social and cultural resources. This logic seems to have influenced Sankoff and Laberge (1978), who formulated a model of calculating a linguistic market index by determining the role that a form of language played in speakers' daily lives. Their model equated the index of economic activity with competence in the legitimized language. Linguistic capital in this context can be regarded as part of cultural capital, which is manifested through fluency and competence in the language in which individuals carry out their transactions.

A mismatch may result if people endowed with linguistic capital of legitimized languages lack its accompanying social symbolism, as in the case of educated but jobless people. These people seek an alternative linguistic market where they can spend their linguistic capital without creating a mismatch. Codeswitching and language mixing

should be viewed as speakers' attempt to spend their linguistic capital in order to gain symbolic capital. This allows them to participate in the mainstream linguistic market as well as the alternative social markets. Such people are able to participate in both markets with minimal contradictions to their identities. We can also regard these people as employing different strategies in order to satisfy the market requirements.

This concept of symbolic capital can be tied to the distinction between the languages of status and solidarity as the two antagonistic alternative markets. The higher you go up the status scale, the lower you descend on the solidarity scale, (see the model developed by Ryan and Giles (1982) in Downes (1998)). According to this model, the more a language or a speech variety is stigmatized in the mainstream linguistic market, the more its status rises in the alternative market. A good illustration is given by Preston (1986), who has shown how speakers of the stigmatized Southern United States dialects evaluate their own speech positively in terms of social solidarity. Preston argued (p 315) that preference for local norms along affective lined was greater in areas where there is linguistic insecurity. Aware that their speech was stigmatized, the Southerners experienced linguistic insecurity and they sought to escape this linguistic insecurity by tapping the pride associated with southern cultural values.

Sheng speakers can be viewed along similar lines. Their participation in the linguistic market would be along the affective dimension. The core speakers in the ghettoes lack the symbolic capital to participate in the mainstream linguistic market. To overcome their linguistic insecurity, they create an alternative market that is not governed by the norms of that mainstream market. In this market, they define what is acceptable

and what is not. Since language represents, manifests and symbolizes authority (Bourdieu 1982:109), it follows that the alternative linguistic market that Sheng operates in has its own hierarchies and values. In this alternative market, the roles are reversed. The speakers of authority languages in the mainstream are subjected to a different value system which puts them at a disadvantage. All the people who make up the 'Nairobi speech community' participate differently in these two markets.

Considering Nairobi's multilingualism, the linguistic market is very versatile with the national and official languages competing with the vernacular languages for space in the market. This kind of linguistic environment, in combination with other non-linguistic factors, makes bilingualism inevitable. Kiswahili has dominated in both ethnic and cross-ethnic interactions. In formal domains, English occupies the apex of the linguistic hierarchy and competence in that it not only symbolizes wealth (both material and symbolic), but also authority (power). On the other hand, ethnic languages have always been used as languages of solidarity. In ethnically heterogeneous urban localities where youth have low mastery of their ethnic languages, Sheng becomes the default local code of solidarity in the place of ethnic languages. This has raised its status in the alternative market. Notice that Kiswahili cannot serve this role because it is also associated with formality, due to its recognition as a national language. This study focuses on the dynamics of Sheng in the alternative linguistic market.

The preceding discussion enhances our understanding of the context and background surrounding the development and use of Sheng. This sets the stage for a critical evaluation of Sheng from the classification perspective, as well as literature review and discussion on research methodology.

Part II. Literature review and methodology

2.7. Brief outline

This section begins with a clarification of what Sheng is and how it will be treated in this study by distinguishing it from Standard English or Standard Swahili, proceeding with an attempt at classification of Sheng within various linguistic categories. The discussion surrounding identity politics will mostly focus on how the issue has been treated in linguistic study. While the review of previous work is intended to show what has inspired this study, the review of previous study on Sheng will point to gray areas that this study seeks to address. Finally, the methodology section describes how data was collected, and the way it was analyzed.

2.7.1. What is Sheng?

Sheng means different things to different people. To some, any non-standard features in spoken discourse constitute Sheng. In section 1.2, I mentioned Kibaki's codeswitching utterance *mji-enjoy* which is normally regarded as Sheng. Kibaki might have given his whole speech in English, or Swahili, or switched between both, but it is the use of just one word *mji-enjoy*, that makes the people conclude that he spoke Sheng. To others, Sheng refers to speakers' alternation between English and Swahili with varying degree of vocabulary contribution from the local languages. In this case, everyone who is unable to maintain a conversation in one of these languages for a stretch of time and thus resorts to codeswitching is also regarded as using Sheng.

Careful examination therefore demonstrates that Sheng is purely a lexical issue with additional interplay between phonology and morphology. A non-Sheng speaker can

easily follow the conversation between two Sheng speakers through syntactic cues, but it only takes the insertion of a strange vocabulary item or the manipulation of a familiar vocabulary item to keep that outsider off-track. This explains why people who are not familiar with these words constantly claim that young people speak in a language they cannot understand. A brief look at some examples validates this claim.

a. ...I had strutted through the building with a sizeable chunk of gum on my **manyake** (*butt*)
b. Having lived in **stato** (*United States*) for long
From the *Pulse* magazine 8th October 2004

In (a) it is evident that the sentence is basically English, but the utterance is regarded as Sheng just because of the word *manyake* (butt) while in (b) the word *stato* qualifies the whole utterance as Sheng. Someone who is not familiar with Sheng could follow the issue until such words are encountered. This kind of Sheng is common in written genres where English syntax and phonology dominates. The final vowel in *manyake* is pronounced as /e/ instead of /ɛ/ as the Swahili derivation would dictate. *Stato* is also pronounced /ste:to/ instead of /sta:tɔ/ which provides further evidence that the structure is heavily influenced by English. This contrasts with spoken and musical genres, where, Swahili is dominant, as in (c) below

c. nakupenda mpenzi usiyependa **chapa**
nakupenda mpenzi usiyependa **doo**
tikisa!
shore wa kweli
manzi wa kweli

Translation;

I love you my girlfriend who does not like *money*
I love you my girlfriend who does not like *money*
shake it!
The real *girl*
The real *girl*
From the track 'mpenzi' by Dudubaya

In this track, the first and the second lines are the same except for the last Sheng words, both of which mean 'money'. If we replace these Sheng words with their Swahili equivalent, *pesa*, the sentence becomes pure standard Swahili. Similarly, the fourth and fifth lines are also the same apart from the first words, both of which mean 'girl'. Replacing them with the Swahili word for girl *msichana,* would render them Swahili. Hence, it is the insertion of these words that makes the verses be regarded as Sheng.

There is also a semantic level on which familiar words deviate from standard meaning, similar to the way African Americans use the word *bad* mentioned in section 1.0) above. A case in point is the verb *lengae* which in Swahili means 'aim' or 'target', but 'evade' or 'avoid' in Sheng. As my data will show, the sentence structure is mostly Swahili, with few a cases of English syntax. A linguist writing a Sheng grammar will essentially be writing a Swahili (or English) grammar. It is due to the realization that Sheng is to a large extent a lexical issue, that words are the major focus of this study.

2.7.2. Categorization of Sheng within variation

A discussion of Sheng's classification within linguistic cateegories is important because it promotes a better understanding of what Sheng is which in turn makes it easier to understand what we mean by Sheng's varieties. The reader might have noticed my deliberate avoidance of the term "language", or any other mainstream terms such as

dialect, pidgin/creole, jargon or slang (apart from the derivation of the name Sheng as Swahili-English Slang) in my reference to Sheng. A critical look at Sheng shows that while it does display aspects of all these linguistic categories, it cannot conclusively be classified into any of then without raising some problems of definition, as will become clear through a quick review of all these categories.

In the literature (e.g. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 1994) pidgins are usually defined as contact languages that arise in trade settings where the speakers do not have sufficient time to learn each others' language. Normally, one language, known as the superstrate, dominates in the vocabulary of pidgins because of the social and economic dominance of its speakers. The nondominant languages are called the substrate and their speakers are motivated to learn the language of the dominant group in order to derive both social and economic benefits. Classic examples cited in literature are the Chinook Jargon spoken by the Native American, British and French traders in the Pacific Northwest during the nineteenth century (Thomas 1970), and Tok Pisin, spoken in Papua New Guinea (Holm 2000). A creole, on the other hand, is usually defined as a pidgin that has been used for a long period and has acquired native speakers — although there are some creoles that cannot be linked to any specific pidgin

Due to Sheng's linguistic hybridity, it fits the definition of a pidgin, though 'grammatical simplification' criterion as argued by Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994), is not evident since Sheng' inherits the full grammar from the participating languages as can be seen in the example below.

Sheng: Buda-**ko** **hu**-hep-**a** job **ku**-swing **na** gate
9 *father*-2poss hab-*evade* fv job inf-swing with gate
'Your father skips work in order to swing with the gate'[13]

Swahili: Baba-**ko** **hu**-epuk-**a** 9kazi **ku**-pembe-a **na** *m-lango*
9*father*-2poss hab-*avoid*-fv job inf-*swing*-fv with 3*door*
'Your father skips work in order to swing with the gate'

Of interest here is the grammatical similarity in these constructions. In bold are some of the grammatical elements that appear in both Sheng and Swahili. In both constructions the subject is in 9th nominal class, suffixed with 2nd person singular possessive *–ko*. In the predicate, Swahili habitual tense is marked by *hu-* and the verb ends with the –a vowel associated with all Swahili verbs of Bantu origin. The Sheng construction inserts an English object *job*, and and English verb *swing* in the adjunct as well as the English noun *gate* in the prepositional phrase. Grammatical simplification therefore cannot be used to qualify Sheng as a pidgin. Another problem comes with the concepts superstrate and substrate because in Sheng, Swahili is the dominant language and not English. Regarding its creole nature, there are young people who claim that they were socialized in Sheng, which again justifies its creole definition; however, there is no conclusive data to support this claim. In any case, the fact that not all ceroles pass through the pidgin stage means we can not rely on 'native speaker' criterion. Mufwene (2003:8) warns that "the

[13] The following abbreviations will apply for all the examples in this dissertation. Arabic numerals = nominal classes, **poss** = possessive pronoun, **hab** = habitual tense, **fv** = final vowel, **inf** = infinitive, **neg** = Negation, **sm** = Subject marker, **om**= object marker, **past** = past tense. **pl** = plural, **sg** = singular **dem** = demonstrative, **passive**= passive morphology, **cop** = copula, **pres** = present tense, **cond** = conditional, **agr** = agreement, **caus** = causative, **perf** = perfect tense, **fut** = future tense, **de** = deverbal affix, **int** = interrogative, **inv** = inserted vowel

dynamics of language contact are so complex that people should resist the temptation of accepting the explanation that 'jumps out' first'

The distinction between the *register* and *dialect,* according to Brizuela, Andersen and Stallings (1999) is that a *register* is a language variety that reflects the characteristics of the situation in which language is being used while a *dialect* is a language variety that reflects characteristics of the users. Downes (1998:24) gives a clearer definition of register as the varieties defined by social function of language. An advertisement would be different from scientific prose or a piece of poetry, because both are governed by different stylistic conventions. Although linguists define a dialect in terms of geographical as well as social factors, the popular definition of a dialect as an inferior subdivision of language still persists.

While Sheng's use is more widespread in informal situations, the fact that it can be used almost everywhere (e.g, workplace, clubs, music, home, school, writing, etc.) creates problems with the register definition. It is highly probable that the different varieties of Sheng can be classified as registers, but the construct "Sheng' in its broad sense cannot be. Regarding the dialect, Sheng fits the linguistic definition, but not the popular use of the term. Unless Sheng is regarded as a variety of Swahili varieties as Githiora (2003) proposes, then the dialect definition is also lost.

The two other categories that I will mention are *jargon* and *slang.* Elder (1954) equated jargon with technical vocabulary that is deliberately constructed to serve the needs of members of a given field. It aids in describing concepts that might otherwise require long explanations. A broader meaning of a jargon would then be a lingo or specialized vocabulary used by a group that deviates from the mainstream language such

that an outsider cannot understand it. Doctors' professional vocabulary and thieves' paracodes are classic examples. When doctors use medical terminology, non-medics cannot get the gist of their talk. Likewise, thieves with special vocabulary can conspire to rob a victim within earshot of their prey, thank to their effective lingo. According to Reves (1926) the pioneer dictionaries associated slang with illiterate people, inelegance, lowness and vulgarity. Nowadays, it is usually associated with informality and discreetness thus putting it on a par with jargon. While the current definition endeavours to remove the negativity of the term, the demonization of slang has not completely withered.

Viewing Sheng as as jargon or slang has its advantages. It identifies its speakers who use it for specialized functions in both professional and social circles. The discreetness that Sheng offers promotes social solidarity that propagates the 'us vs. them' boundaries. However, problems arise when we consider the codeswitching elements of Sheng in contexts where codeswitching has become the 'unmarked choice' (Myers-Scotton (1993b). In such a speech community, the issue of specialized usage does not factor in because everyone engages in the practice. As an example, president Kibaki's favorite, *mji-enjoy,* cannot qualify as jargon, or even slang. The same applies to Sheng innovations such as *mbuyu* and *buda,* both meaning 'father', which are so widespread that they can hardly be identified with any social group.

Examination of the merits and demerits of these traditional classifications exposes flaws which can present descriptive problems in the study of Sheng. In light of these shortcomings, I propose an alternative way of looking at Sheng which takes its various dynamics and peculiarities into account. This alternative perspective is the 'order of

discourse' mentioned by Bourdieu (1990), and it is concerned with how different discourses are interwoven together. In an unpublished work '*The dialectics of discourse*' Norman Fairclough (2001) writes, "an order of discourse is social structuring of semiotic difference — a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning" (p 2). In view of the different domains of language use in multilingual Nairobi, Sheng qualifies as an order of discourse laden with symbolism and ideology that characterize other orders of discourse that it relates to. If different bazes in Nairobi are taken as quasi-institutions, where different discourse types takes place, then it becomes possible to talk of discursive practices within these institutions with their own sets of norms governing text production and interpretation.

While Sheng as an 'order of discourse' is well justified, this study does not focus on Sheng speakers as a meta-category, but on various subcategories of speakers whose discourse types are dictated by contextual factors. In this respect, Bourdieu's sense of *field* as social context, as elaborated by Thompson in the introduction of Bourdieu (1991), is useful in the discussion of Sheng's variation and identity with respect to diferent bazes. Thompson (1991:14) writes:

> A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of forms of capital specific to it. The individuals who participate in these struggles will have differing aims — some will seek to preserve the staus quo, others will change it — and differing chances of winning or losing, depending on where they are located in the structured space of positions. But all individuals, whatever their aims and chances of success, will share in common certain fundamental presuppositions.

Taking the capital in this case to be the symbolic capital associated with different discourse types, it can be hypothesized that as Sheng speakers engage in discursive practices associated with different fields, their discourse is modified to conform to the

acceptable norms. It is these norms, which are based on 'common fundamental presuppositions', which in this case refers to the norms governing lexical usage that characterize and preserve the uniquness of the baze. It should be pointed out that the transition to different discourse types does not necessarily have to result in a total overhaul of their prior identities, hence the different identity hierarchies among members of bazes.

2.7.3. The politics of identity: definition

The term 'identity' is not very easy to define. The reason is that it is used in different works for different purposes. The problem is compounded by the fact that researchers have come up with very different forms of identity; there is individual identity, group identity, ethnic identity, national identity and so on. This lack of consensus on what can be regarded as identity, or what it does, has further complicated its ambiguity because the definition is usually left to the discretion of the researcher and the discipline in which the researcher operates.

In scholarly work, identity has been treated from different perspectives of self. There is the *standard view*, in which identity is regarded as the 'self-definition' and 'other-definition' of individuals according to the shared social meanings associated with specific roles in a social structure (e.g. Stryker and Burke 2000, Burke and Reitzes 1991, see also Berger and Luckman 1966). In this case, individuals are perceived as *static* entities that map into socially constructed categories such as ethnicity, age, sex, social status, etc. (see Turner 1982). This view has dominated the definition and identification of social variables in sociolinguistic work such as Labov (1972a) and Trudgill (1974).

In contrast to the standard view, the *dynamic* view of identity (Le Page and Tabouret Keller 1985, Turner 1982) rejects looking at identity as frozen in stable categories. Instead, identities are regarded as fluid and in a continuous process of negotiation and construction (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001, Bucholtz 1999). This view is increasingly gaining ground, especially in the communities of practice theory (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999, Eckert 2000,) and other studies on language and gender. Identities are seen as being constructed through practice, where individuals recognize themselves as part of a larger complex entity, endowed with choices and capabilities to cast and re-cast themselves in different identities.

While these two ways of looking at identity appear to be in conflict, their boundary is indeed very thin. According to Tajfel (1982), it is difficult to divide them into two separate packages. Le Page and Tabouret Keller propose that they are in a symbiotic relation, both mutually benefitting each other. This becomes clear when we recognize that the negotiation of identities does not take place in a vacuum, but that they are constructed through discursive practices in social interaction. Categories are therefore needed to act as reference points for the individuals who are continually modifying their identities.

'Brubacker and Cooper (2000) criticize both approaches by claiming that the essentialist view (static) is too strong, while the constructionist view (dynamic) is too weak. The thrust of their argument is that a strong conception of identity preserves the common meaning of the term, by assuming homogeneity, which is important for analytical generalization, but its disadvantage is that it is full of reified connotations. On the other hand, the weak sense of identity erodes the word's everyday meaning, which

makes the term so elastic that it becomes almost useless in theoretical generalization. Brubaker and Cooper's solution is fragmentation of the term identity so as to "unbundle the thick tangle of meanings that have accumulated around the term 'identity' and to parcel out the work to a number of less congested terms" (p. 14). These less congested terms are (a) identification and categorization (14-17), (b) self-understanding and social location (17-19), and (c) commonality, connectedness and groupness (19-21).

The advantage of identification and categorization is that theare derived from two are processual active verbs (i.e., identify and categorize) that lacks the reifying connotation of 'identity' that invites us to specify the agent that does the identifying and categorizing without necessarily implying internal sameness, distinctiveness or bounded groupness. Although they point out to the dialectic interplay between the internal self-identification and categorization, they also mention a form of external identification that is a 'formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorizations developed by authoritative institutions' which has no internal counterpart.

Regarding self-understanding and social location, they argue that self-understanding is a dispositional term designating 'situated subjectivity' which they explain as 'one's sense of who one is, one's social location and how they are prepared to act' (sic). Brubaker and Cooper claim that self-understanding lacks the reifying connotation of identity without being restricted to situations of flux and instability. This is because self-understanding can vary across time and person, yet still exhibit a kind of stability, because individuals have a conception of who they are.

Commonality, connectedness and groupness are the final clusters that Brubaker and Cooper propose. While commonality refers to the sharing of a common attribute,

connecetedness refers to the relational ties that link people. Groupness denotes the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bonded solidary group.

Brubaker and Cooper endeavour to come up with terms with descriptive adequacy is a radical step in the right direction. Their proposed terms provide a great deal of insight, but sorting out the identity politics is beyond the scope of this study. In spite of their insights, I have still relied on the constructionist model while also borrowing the concept of self-understanding. If we are to talk about construction and negotiation of identity, then the subjects must first understand who they are in social space, and they must also recognize the existence of other distinct categories. Only then can they determine the terms under which they will relate with them.

Following Chomsky's, (1977:54) idea that language operates at a high level of abstraction, which involves idealization (e.g., a homogenous speech community) in order for its study to be scientifically grounded, it becomes obvious that the reified identity cannot be discarded, in spite of what Brubaker and Cooper recommend. While I do not wholly agree with Chomsky when he downplays the importance of sociolinguitic variations, I agree with him that we need abstraction for meaningful intellectual work. Idealization of social categories is important because it is inconceivable how an academic discipline can advance if attention was paid to specific peculiarities of every individual without some basic assumption about the sameness of social categories under study. If individuals belong everywhere, then they belong nowhere; that is, if they have all these identities, then they have no distinct identity in the true sense of the term. This however does not imply that individuals are automatons who map into social categories without contributing any input to these categories. Yet, the essentialist's strong view of identity

implies predictability of a subject's behavior given the prevailing context, akin to the behaviorists' interpretation of human behavior in terms of stimulus/response dualism.

The behaviorist approach has been faulted for ignoring the fact that humans are rational creatures whose actions cannot be fully studied in the 'Skinner's box'[14]. In terms of language use, for instance, people make rational linguistic choices to optimize their interactional outcomes. This is the major reason behind the shifting of linguistic codes (read 'linguistic crossing') as well as adopting the discourse norms of outsiders. The addressors'/addressees' dualism in human interaction means that these outcomes must be conceived both psychologically and sociologically, a dilemma that will always dog the politics of identity. In this study, I will mostly rely on Sebba and Tate's (2002) definition of identities as 'texts of social practice' based on identifications made in interactions between individuals whose key strength lies on it emphasis on interaction. I will analyze linguistic material to demonstrate how identity is constructed through social discourse, although I will also employ more traditional, quantitative methodologies.

Having defined identity as well as reviewed the politics of identity, I now turn to a discussion of the relationship between language and identity, before giving a brief background of previous work of identity in Sheng. This will complete the background necessary for my later discussions.

2.7.4. The relationship between language and identity

Language and identity is a multidisciplinary concern that has occupied the attention of psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and educators, as well as linguists—

[14] Used here to refer to the observatory apparatus used by psychologist B. F. Skinner in his study of operant behavior.

especially sociolinguists and second language acquisitionists. Since identities are formed through social interaction, I place language at the center of the identity project. I follow Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) declaration that all linguistic utterances are 'acts of identity', in which speakers highlight particular aspects of their multifaceted identities by selectively using linguistic resources at their disposal. Speakers' choice of languages, words in a language, or certain ways of pronunciation, as well as their other linguistic practices, can either act as a key to their identities, or as the very representation of those identities. Underscoring the importance of language in identity, Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) stated that identities are constructed, negotiated and renegotiated through linguistic practices.

Languages, and especially native or ethnic languages, are usually regarded as speakers' 'identity cards' (Macaulay 1997) and have been used to index speakers' ethnocultural identity (e.g. Fishman 1994). Although the relationship between language and ethnocultural identity cannot be denied, there is another view. Myhill (2003), in a rejoinder, rejected Fishman's X/Xish[15] claim by pointing out that there are other ways of constructing identity. Citing the Jewish diaspora in different parts of the word, Myhill argued that religion, common ancestry, etc., could work just as well in ethnocultural identity. While Myhill offers very valid arguments, the role of language in identity cannot be ignored. Bourdieu (1991) for instance remarks that "it is very rare in everyday life for a language to function as a pure instrument of communication". Apart from communication, languages serve other symbolic functions, such as identifying the

[15] This captures the argument that speakers are identified by their languages, e.g. English speakers are Englishmen, and German speakers are Germans etc. The counter-argument is that a community's culture can be expressed in a non-native language.

speakers who speak them. Identification is accomplished through engagement in discursive linguistic practices that reflect the multiple positions that speakers hold and hope to hold in terms of their identities, both within and across multiple discourses (Giampapa 2001). In the extreme, a language can lose its primary communicative function and remain only with its symbolic function (see Edwards 1985).

There is a vast amount of literature on the relationship between language and identity in monolingual and multilingual situations and also in intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic studies. In multilingual contexts, for instance, and especially in language contact situations, the widespread code-switching phenomenon is usually attributed to the speakers' desire to index co-membership in different speech communities with their accompanying symbolisms.

A study done on children of Dominican immigrants in Rhode Island (Bailey 2000) for instance, showed that those children switched between English and Spanish to highlight their Hispanic, Dominican or American identities. Other studies in which language switching was shown to index multiple identities include Italian-English code-switching by Italian youth in Toronto (Giampapa 2001), English-Chinese-Japanese-Korean codeswitching by second generation Asian youth in Los Angeles (Lo 1999), Hungarian-English (Myers Scotton and Bolonyai 2001, Bolonyai 1998, 2005), English-Tonga code-switching by transgendered males in Tonga (Niko 2003), Swahili-English in Nairobi (Myers-Scotton 1974, 1992, 1983, 1993b, 1998), and the use of Maori, a local language, by Anglos (called locally "Pakehas") in New Zealand (Bell 1999).

In a majority of studies where only one language is involved, dialectal variation in terms of lexical and phonological differences have been associated with the identity of

the speakers of those variants. Variation in glide centralization in Martha's Vineyard, Labov (1972a), was attributed to the degree of loyalty to island identity. Meyerhoff (1998) demonstrated that in Bislama, interlocutors could manipulate pronouns *yumi* (inclusive) and *mifala* (inclusive) and *yu* (generic) to confirm or contest a shared identity. Along similar lines, Ito and Preston's (1998) study of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift in northern Michigan demonstrated that an unconscious choice of vowels reflected the identity of the individual in terms of their desire or lack of desire to remain in the local area. In another study, Schilling-Estes (1998, 2000) showed that use of the local dialect, called the 'brogue' on Ocracoke Island and the 'Lumbee dialect' by Lumbee Indians in Robeson County in North Carolina, was motivated by the need to enforce the identity of their respective speakers. Schilling-Estes' study can be compared to Hazen's (2002) work in Warren County, North Carolina, where copula absence (e.g., *She gonna go to the store*), levelled *was* (e.g., *You was the man*) and levelled forms of past negative *be, wont* (e.g., *You wont gonna go*) were regarded as markers of the local cultural identity. Hazen argued that the rate of use or non-use of the stigmatized non-standard forms marked one as either oriented to local identity represented by those forms, or expanded cultural identities that deviated from those forms. In Eckert's work (1998, 2000), stylistic use of language was regarded as one of the identity features that distinguished the 'Jocks' from the 'Burnouts' in Belten High — a suburban school near Detroit. While the Jocks spoke the more standard variety, the burnouts' language was characterized by high use of vernacular features. In a study on fraternity men, Kiesling (1998) showed how standard features could be manipulated by different speakers in the same setting to project the identities that speakers wished to in display. In addition, Bucholtz (1999) studied

linguistic practices paired with social practices in a community of 'nerd' girls in the construction of nerd identity.

Outside the United States, (Hoare 2001) has discussed how the Breton accent is used in Brittany as a mark of Breton identity. Gardner-Cloros (1997) has also claimed that codeswitching between French and a local Germanic dialect in department stores in Strasbourg, Alsace, distinguished between 'Alsatians' and the 'French from the outside.' Likewise, a study by Dirim and Hieronymus (2003), showed how adolescents in the German city of Hamburg created new identities by code-switching between Turkish and German, even when none of the speakers was Turkish. In the UK, Sebba and Tate (2002) studied how the British born Caribbeans used the *patois* or *Creole* to project a transnational non-territorial identity of the African/Caribbean Diaspora and the localized *Black English* to project urban identity within the British Black culture. Earlier, Trudgill's (1974) Norwich study had shown that the use of the coronal and velar nasals, [*n*] and [-*ŋ*] respectively identified the socioeconomic class and sex of the speakers.

All these studies emphasing the centrality of language in the construction and negotiation of identity provide a rich background for studying how different varieties of Sheng are used to construct different identities in Nairobi. Before plunging into the task at hand, I briefly review how the issue of identity has been treated in previous work on Sheng.

2.7.5. Identity in previous studies on Sheng

Various works on Sheng mention its function as an identity marker of its speakers. Beginning with Osinde (1986) and Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997), identity was advanced

as the major factor behind its formation. They actually claim that Sheng was invented by the urban youth for the specific purpose of maintaining solidarity among members of various peer groups. Although Mazrui (1995) does not claim that Sheng was invented specifically to serve an identity function, he mentions identity as one of its functions, among others, such as serving as a criminal para-code. In Githiora (2002), respondents' description of Sheng included such phrases as 'it's a gangster language,' 'it's a dirty language,' and 'it's a secret language.' Considering that linguistic categorization reflexts the categorization of the speakers of the language, we can rightly say the Sheng speakers are associated with attitudes expressed in the descriptive phrases attributed to their langauge. This is an indication that the external identification of Sheng speakers follows along a hegemonic discourse identified with the dominant institutions of authority. A comment like '*Sheng inaongewa na wakorawakora'* — 'Sheng is spoken by dodgy people', made by one of Githiora's respondents is not likely to have come from the Sheng speaker, unless the speaker has surrendered to the ideology propagated by the institutions of authority.

Like Githiora, I (Githinji, 2003) showed how the folk used descriptive labels to categorize Sheng speakers. In addition, the majority of my local Nairobi respondents' hand-drawn identification maps showed that Nairobi people could easily identify areas where Sheng is spoken. Although some respondents indicated Sheng being spoken in almost all areas of Nairobi, it was apparent from a majority of the maps that Sheng is identified with specific localities. Respondents also claimed that a person could be identified as a resident of certain areas by speaking a variety of Sheng stereotyped with that area. Even Spyropoulos (1987) associated Sheng with a certain group of speakers

(people engaged in the informal sector) such as shoe shiners, curio-sellers, hawkers and parking boys[16]. It is interesting to note that all the works cited above take the static view of identity, where identity is viewed in terms of social hierarchies based on membership in idiosyncratic groups.

The recent dissertation by Samper (2002), on the role of Sheng in the construction of identity and youth culture in Nairobi, is the pioneer project that focuses solely on identity. In Samper's work, identity is constructed through Sheng, but can also be mediated by other aspects of popular culture such as hip-hop music, the *matatu*[17] culture and the mass media. Regarding Sheng and identity, Samper (2003: 4) writes;

> Sheng has become a badge of a new, dynamic, and cosmopolitan youth culture that looks to the west for inspiration. Sheng is a linguistic strategy through which they can articulate and enact different forms of identity outside the ethnic hegemony.

Samper appreciates the complexity of the identity of Sheng and its speakers. His awareness of the existence of different varieties is captured by his statement that "Sheng varies by the speakers' estate, age, peers, economic level, education, ethnicity, gender, occupation and time" (p8). Samper works within the framework of hybridity theory as propagated in the works of Bhabba (1994) and Nedervene-Pieterse (1995). He defines hybridity as the merging of two different systems to come up with a new system, which combines elements of its different components. Viewing Sheng in similar terms, we can think of it as an entity that combines local and global fragments, both in terms of linguistics and culture, to project an identity that reflects both. Sheng inherits all the symbolism associated with its components. It indexes status because one of its linguistic

[16] Young men who direct the motorists to empty parking spots for a 'fee' and also guard the vehicle against vandalism.
[17] Refer to definition in the previous Chapter.

components, English, symbolizes status, and it indexes solidarity because its principle language, Swahili is a language of national solidarity.

Although Samper's dissertation is a milestone in Sheng research, there are still some areas that were beyond the scope of his study. On (p.9) for instance, he writes 'in a day, an individual may move between several identities and use several Sheng lexicons for each'. He also notes that young people in Nairobi express their identity as members of different groups by using the Sheng associated with those groups. Knowledge of a group's variety of Sheng enables individuals to be included, thus maintaining group solidarity and self-identification. Throughout his dissertation, Samper gives very many good examples of Sheng vocabulary, but apart from some few cases, he fails to link those words with the groups that use them. This might be due to the orientation of his work, which was to look at Sheng from a holistic perspective. In this study, I build on Samper's work by focusing on Sheng's lexical variation and associating the linguistic markers of variation with the groups that use the variants. It is these issues that my hypotheses seek to address.

2.8. Methodology

My methodology involved the filling in of open questionnaires, recorded interviews, and personal observations. In addition, articles from newspapers were especially crucial in providing background information. I also did online research where I found some of the *michongoano* (verbal duels) from various Kenyan online forums as well as some cartoons that are used for illustration. Although there is some quantitative data, a huge part of this work is based on ethnography. Below is a description of how I went about collecting my data, and how these data are interpreted in this study.

2.8.1. Data collection, instruments and interview procedure

My interviewing techniques involved written questionnaires (see the appendix) both in English and Swahili. I also recorded around 20 hours of oral interviews where all groups were asked to respond to specific questions, though sometimes I took the freedom to deviate from the written questionnaire to follow up the respondents' answers. Personal communications with other researchers who have worked in related fields such as Kimani Njogu and Mbugua wa Mungai provided helpful insights. Reconnaissance tours to the research areas allowed me to make my own personal observations. Articles relating to Sheng were obtained from the library of the East African Standard newspapers, while the auothor of the dissertation on *matatu* provided a digital copy.

Two types of questionnaires were used. One had only 12 questions and targeted primary and secondary school subjects aged 18 years and below (appendix I). These questionnaires elicited socio-demographic information, such as age, sex, and linguistic backgrounds, such as the languages they speak, when they started speaking Sheng and with whom they speak Sheng. The educational background was not intended as an analytical variable but to show the school locations, which were considered important because they would demonstrate whether the lexical terms used by the students draw from the area in which the school was located. Since the residential areas in Nairobi are demarcated along socio-economic lines, they were regarded as cues to socio-economic status as disccussed on the section on Nairobi's demographic pattern.

To establish whether the respondents were aware of variation in Sheng, they were asked a flat question about whether all people spoke Sheng the same way. The questionnaire was then modified to include a list of selected lexical items against which

the respondents were asked to write down the Sheng equivalents that they used. This was intended to elicit the synonyms which have been used to show that different words are used for the same lexical item in different neighborhoods in Nairobi.

These questionnaires were filled out after the students had signed the University Committee for the Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)–approved consent forms. For the school students, the class teacher also read a statement to them explaining that the interview was not a school activity and that they were free not to participate. Apart from some few cases, the questionnaires were filled out in class during the lunch break or in the evening after the normal classroom sessions. Authorization to conduct research in Kenya was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Additional authorization to conduct research in secondary and primary schools had to be obtained from the Provincial Director of Education and the City Directorate of Education respectively.

The subjects who were over 18 years old were all non-students, and their task involved filling out more detailed questionnaires (see appendix II) as well as being tape-recorded in an oral interview. They also signed (UCRIHS) consent forms. The first part of the interview was similar to that of the subject under 18 years. In addition, they were asked to compare themselves with Sheng speakers from other estates and mark whether they spoke 'exactly like me', 'little like me', 'different from me', or 'I can't understand them'. They were also asked to rate how Sheng speakers from other estates spoke Sheng by using qualitative judgments such as 'very well', 'not so bad', 'not well' or 'bad'. This was prompted by my assumption that speakers would draw the boundary between the Sheng variety that they spoke and the variety that others spoke. As a result, they would

not identify or seek to acquire a variety that they despised. This was indeed confirmed by Shauri Moyo respondents who claimed that they could not speak the Sheng of Makongeni because they considered it 'childish' and 'old fashioned', in spite of the fact that the two residential areas neighbor each other. In any case, attitudes towards a variety were likely to be influenced by other factors which had nothing to do with linguistics. The prediction was that a variety could be labeled 'good' if it approximated the raters' identity, or the identity they aspired to acquire. Similarly, a variety could be labeled 'bad' if it deviated from the raters' variety, or was associated with values that that raters would not want to be associated with.

Unlike the respondents below 18, who were all students, the respondents aged over 18 were all non-students and they were not provided with a list of lexical items. Instead, they were asked to explain the ways in which their Sheng was different from that spoken by others. In tape-recorded interviews, they were urged to give the words that they used in their local networks, which were not used in other areas or by other groups. As the interview moderator, I constantly intervened to seek clarification and ensure that the interview did not get out of hand. The term *baze* was adopted for this study because it was considered possible to perceive the interaction networks of small clusters of Sheng speakers without the dangers of erroneous generalization which could have resulted if estates were takens as the units of analysis. Estates were seen as being characterized with different clusters of speakers with each cluster displaying their unique lexical variations. As a minimal category, the respondents in a *baze* could be regarded as exemplar speakers whose speech behaviour represented the speech habits of the entire *baze*. This could not have been the possible to do with the category 'estate'.

I had a number of assistants who introduced me to my respondents similar to the 'friend of a friend' method adopted by Milroy (1980) in gaining contact to the subjects. A friend of mine introduced me to his friend who works in a barbershop in Nairobi's Eastlands. This barber asked his friends to come to his barbershop where I conducted the interview. Since these respondents came from different residential areas, they offered to introduce me to other groups in their respective residential areas. This turned out to be a big advantage because it reduced suspicions and made the oral interview sessions informal, even with the presence of a tape-recorder. This casualness was due to the fact that the task of filling out the questionnaire had already convinced them that these were just harmless questions after all. I also made efforts to communicate in Sheng whenever possible to encourage them and also to try to cultivate a sense of closeness with them. In some cases, the research assistants also participated in the interview, though at a very marginal level. In a majority of bazes, the interviews were markerd by overlapping and shifting identities, through the the use of English, Swahili and the inserted Sheng words.

Interaction networks were considered crucial in this study because individuals and groups identify with other individuals and/or groups that they interact with. To investigate the nature of interaction networks, some of the questions were tailored along Milroy's (1980) conditions for calculating network scores, though this study was not interested in network scores.

Although I chose the social variables that are used in some of the quantitative analysis, such as age, residential areas, bazes, and school, the linguistic variables came from the respondents themselves. My analysis focused on the interaction between these social factors and the lexical variables among different groups of Sheng speakers, and

their implications for identity. From the onset, the interview sessions themselves had relevance in terms of identity. As a person who understands Sheng, though an 'outdated' version, I asked the respondents to feel free to use Kiswahili, English or Sheng. I had expected that since Sheng follows Swahili structure, the respondents would be very comfortable completing the Swahili questionnaire; however, I realized that the majority preferred to fill out the English questionnaires, even in cases where their mastery of English was poor. Some preferred to seek clarification in Kiswahili but write in English. When it came to the oral interviews, all communicated very well in either Swahili or Sheng. Hence even without considering the substance or their responses, the linguistic choice during the interviews displayed this element of shifting identities. Recall my earlier discussion on language use in Kenya where I pointed out that English is the high status language. Since these respondents were filling questionnaires in front of a Kenyan who studies in America for the highest academic degree, their preference of English can be viewed as the negotiation of status or an attempt to accommodate to the perceived linguistic preferences of the interviewer. If the choice of a language is a statement of the speaker's affiliation in the sense of La Page and Tabouret Keller (1985), it can rightly be argued that the respondent's preference of English was a way of telling the interviewer that they have another persona symbolized by the language of status.

We might also attribute it to the fact that these interviews were carried out after the respondents had just signed the consent forms — a very formal exercise usually associated with English. Having already assumed a responsive identity demanded by the formality of the exercise, the switch back to a different identity was just not quick

enough. Hence their preference for filling out the English forms as opposed to the Swahili ones was possibly a carry-over from this formal exercise.

2.8.2. Data interpretation

Both the traditional quantitative approaches as well as qualitative analysis of ethnographic data have been used in the interpretation of data. The quantifiable data was entered into Excel spreadsheets, which were then converted into Excel 3.0 workbook files. These Excel 3.0 files were then imported into Systat, a statistical software program for frequency and percentage tabulations. Most of the statistical data and the summaries presented in form of tables in this study come from the Systat tabulations.

A great part of my interpretation, however, is qualitative where the conversations with different Sheng speakers are analyzed to demonstrate what it reveals about their identity. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)[18] that looks at language as a social practice, using Fairclough's (1995:97) multidimensional approach that combines linguistic *description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and the interpretative) discursive processes of the text, and the *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the text has been used. By text here, I do not just refer to written texts alone, but also the spoken text. The relationship between the text and the social practice was captured in Fairclough (1995: 133):

> The connection between the text and social practice is seen as being mediated by the discourse practice: on the one hand, processes of text production and interpretation are shaped by (and help shape) the nature of the social practice, and

[18] Although CDA, has mostly been used to study ideology and power (e.g Fairclough 1995, Ngonyani 2000), the question of power is beyond the scope of this study, although we can clearly see the representation of power dynamics in Sheng texts.

> on the other hand the production process shapes (and leave 'traces' in) the text, and the interpretative process operates upon 'cues' in the text.

It is important to consider that language mediates between the group and its texts because social discourse is to a large extent conducted through language. Since the ideology of the speakers is encoded in their texts and expressed through language, it becomes crucial to tie the texts to the identity of their producers. It is out of recognition of this fact that the 'cues' in the respondents' texts will be analyzed for the 'traces' of the social practices, which pervade their discourse. These social practices will be shown to reveal various aspects of the speakers' identity, while also influencing their personalities and in the process modifying those very identities.

The findings are discussed within the framework of different sociolinguistic theories such as network theory, facework and politeness theory, social identity theory, accommodation theory, linguistic marketplace theory, communities of practice theory, as well as the audience and referee design theory. A brief explanation of these theories will be given within the context of the issues they are intended to address. All the tapes collected in the field were not transcribed, but were coded and their main ideas summarized. Although their data does not feature in the discussions, they have influenced some of the claims and generalizations that I have made in this study.

Chapter 3

A diagram of variation: Exploring form and the nature of variation in Sheng

> Language is a guide to "social reality." Though language is not ordinarily thought of as of essential interest to students of social science, it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in objective worlds alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression of their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of a group. No two languages are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached (Sapir, *Language* 1929)

3. Linguistic variation and social reality

The above quote will serve as a preamble to my discussion of variation in Sheng within the general discourse of identity construction. Sapir's powerful words show how languages play a central role in peoples' adjustment to their social reality. The social reality is not constructed by the language that people speak; instead, language plays the role of 'a guide' to understanding that social reality. I use Sapir's quote above to construct my central argument that different varieties of Sheng represent different social realities. Githiora (1999:4) writes that lexical choices serve a symbolic function in indexing the social identities and relationships being constructed during face-to-face interactions. I follow this argument in demonstrating how lexical variants in Sheng are used in both self and other categorization and identification. Speakers create their desired world through lexical choices and in the process confirm or contest prior identities. In this study the widespread variation in lexical items is taken as evidence that different social groups use Sheng for different purposes. This will be the bulk of my discussion in

the next Chapter. To lay the foundation for discussing the construction of identity in the next Chapter, I will present the diagram of Sheng's variation in the rest of this Chapter.

Variation in Sheng is both structural and lexical. Although there is variation at other linguistic levels, such variations are not the object of this study. I will begin by discussing the structural variation and its implications for the issue of identity; however, my focus will be the lexicon. My discussion of variation begins with a brief account of variation in Sheng's structural templates. I will then proceed with the examination of lexical variation, whose dependence on elements such as word formation processes and different backgrounds, such as education, occupation, ethnicity or neigborhood is the foundation of identity-making in Sheng.

3.1. Structure of Sheng: two varieties or one?

It is widely accepted that there are two structural varieties of Sheng. One structure is English-based and the other is based on Swahili grammar. Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) call the Swahili-based variety *Sheng* and the English based variety *Engsh* (Sheng with syllable rhyme and head inverted). On his part Samper (2002) chooses the folk terminologies (*maghetto* for Sheng and *mababi* [Babylonians] for Engsh). The two varieties are shown in (1) and (2) below.

1. *Sheng/maghetto*

a. Si-na *ganji* si-na *ganji*, si-na *njaro* za ma-*ganji*
1*neg*-with money, 1*neg*-with money, 1*neg*-with means of 6-money
' I got no money, I got no money, I got no means of getting money'
from the track *Superstar* by Delicious.

b. Hi-yo *munde* i-li-kuwa ma-*two thao* hivi
9-*Dem*-that money 9*sm*-past-be 6-two thousand like
'That money was like two thousand'
from a story narration by a respondent in Githurai

2. *Engsh/Mababi*

a. There is this *chile* I used to *vibe*
There is this girl I used to seduce.

b. I hope your *matinas* are better...
I hope your 6-tina- pl are better...
'I hope your butts are better...'
(from *www.mashada.com*)

In (1) we see the typical Sheng/maghetto characterized by Swahili structure with insertions of coined words while in (2) we have a typical Engsh/mababi variety where either Sheng words or English slang is inserted. Another distinction according to Samper is between *basic* and *deep* Sheng. While *basic* Sheng requires only bilingual knowledge of the languages involved, *deep* Sheng is a codified resource of an in-group that shares a certain fluid and intersubjective reality and thus requires initiation into the group and participation in its activities in order to comprehend its discourse.

Adopting a completely different view, Githiora (2002) rejects the two varieties and claims that there is only one variety — Sheng, the Swahili-based structure. He dismisses the English-based variety as slang— English laced with Swahili slang. There is a good deal of support for his argument. The following sentences from *mashada.com* internet forum are examples of full English structures with one or two slang words.

3. My **zaks** beat a guy once
'my **father** beat a guy once'

4. You need to graduate **chuo kwanza**
you need to graduate *college first*
'you need to graduate from **college first**'

In (3), *zaks*, a slang coined from Swahili *mzee* 'old man', is inserted into a complete English structure. The word final **–s** violates the rules of Standard English because it pluralizes a singular noun. In (4) two Swahili words end the English construction. Again, the exclusion of the preposition *from* shows the deviation from the rules of Standard

English. Further support for Githiora's position comes from the respondents themselves. During my field study in 2001, for instance, my respondents from the University of Nairobi, when asked to name the languages they spoke claimed they spoke Sheng and slang among others (Githinji 2003:17).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the English structure goes beyond lexical insertion as shown in sentences (5) and (6) below.

5. The thought of being *vunj-w-a-d...*
   the thought of being *break-passive-fv-past.*
   'The thought of being beaten up'

6. Incidentally, the *mboches* was *karibu hapo*
   'incidentally, the housemaid was near there'

We note in sentence (5) above that a Swahili verb is not only inserted into the English syntax, but is also passivised and concatenated with English past tense morphology while the inserted verb from Swahili *vunja* 'to break' undergoes a semantic shift to mean 'to be beaten up badly'. In contrast, sentence (6) inserts the coined word *mboches* (housemaid) and Swahili locatives, but the structure remains basically English. More importantly, the way the Swahili or the Sheng insertions are pronounced have their own peculiarity that deviates from Swahili, English, or any of the other donor languages. While the two examples might be regarded as just cases of codeswitching, they go against the *system morpheme principle* (Myers-Scotton 2002:59):

> The System Morpheme Principle: In the Matrix Language, + Embedded Language constituents, all system morphemes which have grammatical relations external to their head constituents (i.e. which participate in the sentence's thematic role grid), will come from the Matrix Language.

In (5) for example, the syntactic relation in the Noun Phrase (NP) indicates that English is the matrix language and Swahili the embedded language. Pasivization of *–vunja* in Swahili, followed by English past tense morphology complicates the classical idea of codeswitching because the system morphemes come from both languages, unless we argue that *vunjwa* comes into the grammar already passivized. This indeed seems to be that case because its semantic features deviate from the ordinary use of the word. We can therefore argue that in (5) it is the semantic shift of the verb that signals that the construction is Sheng rather that just a case of ordinary codeswitching. In spite of this limitation, Myers-Scotton's claim is very important in determing the baze languages of Sheng as discussed in this study. The functional or grammatical morphemes (system morphemes) in Myers-Scottons words, such as inflections, prepositions, articles as well as auxiliary verbs are the most obvious signal of base languages in codemixing. A brief look at Swahili verbal and nominal forms shows that Sheng is a Swahili-based code.

3.2. Drawing from Swahili grammatical pattern

A simple Swahili sentence follows a Subject Verb Object (SVO) order. The subject and object are both nominal forms, and are morphologically marked unless they appear as pronominal affixes (i.e., personal pronouns). The nominal forms include nouns and adjectives Mohammed (2001). The noun contains the noun class prefix, marked in numerical numbers, the root and sometimes, deverbative elements as shown below.

7

a. m-toto	wa-toto
1-*child*	2-*child*
'child'	'children'
b. m-fug-a-ji	wa-fug-a-ji
1-*breed*-fv-de	2-*breed*-fv-de
'livestock breeder'	'livestock breeders'

c. u-shind-i
14-*win*-de
'victory'

In (7a) we have a noun root *toto* that can be prefixed with either a class 1 singular marker (*m*) or class 2 plural marker (*wa*). In (b) the deverbative *mfugaji* is derived from the suffixation of a nominalizer *–ji* and prefixation of the verb *fuga* with class 1 and 2 nominal prefixes. Finally, (c) is also a deverbative fromed from the verb *shinda* 'win' which is prefixed with class 14 noun prefix to yield an abstract noun victory.

The verbal constructions are also characterized by morphological complexity due to the agglutinative nature of the Swahili language. The verbal structures display more complexity than do nouns. Inflected verbs can have the following elements in linear order — a subject marker (SM), the tense marker (T), the relative pronoun (REL), an optional object (OM), verb root (VR), and the verbal extentions depending on various derivations as shown in the sentence below.

8 U-huru tu- li- o- u-pig- an- i- a
14-*free* 1pl-past-rel- om-*hit*-recipl-appl-fv
'The freedom that we fought for'

In the predicate above, the verb root is preceeded by four morphemes and followed by two more. All verbs do not have to have all these elements, but the extension part can include various derivations, such as applicatives, passives, statives, reduplications, causatives, reciprocatives, etc. that either add or reduce the verb's arguments. During Swahili-English codeswitching, verbal extensions might be present or absent, but normally, an English verb root is inserted while the pronominal subject marker, tense and the verbal endings which are all part of grammatical relations come from Swahili. The

same happens with all other foreign material. In the examples below, taken from a conversation between South C respondents, the Swahili grammatical frame is evident. .

9. a. Wa-show
3pl sm-*show*
'Tell them'

b. Tu-na-meet
1pl sm-pres-*meet*
'We always meet'

c. Ma-boy-s
6-*boy*-pl
'guys'

Looking at the examples above, with the exception of (c) we see that all the morphemes that contain grammatical relation come from Swahili. In Myers-Scotton's (2002) 4M-model, the reason for double morphology in (c) is because the two plural morphemes are activated at different levels during the production process. I will not go into the details of the Myers-Scottons production model, but I will note that these examples suffice as illustrations of the Swahili base in Sheng.

I have shown this structure because of its implication in Sheng's innovation. In the section on word formation processes below, it will become evident why Sheng should be viewed as an offshoot of Swahili. Not only is the frequency of Swahili elements higher, but there is the dominance of Swahili morphosyntactic pattern in both noun and verbal derivations as outlined above. Even so, I restate my earlier claim that Sheng is basically a lexical issue and one should not be confused by the high rate of Swahili material. It can also be recalled that I mentioned that Swahili words can have a totally different meaning as is common in slang cross-linguistically.

While making a categorical distinction between the two varieties is beyond the scope of this study, I should point out that since *Engsh* was created by the youth from the affluent areas as a conscious reaction to Sheng (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997), it should not be treated autonomously outside the general Sheng discourse. On the same note, any discourse on Sheng would not be complete without touching on the issue of *Engsh*. In this study, I will treat the two structures within the broad umbrella of Sheng. This said, juxtaposing these two structures is of utmost importance because they form the templates that lexical items are mapped into. I have already pointed out that lexical variation forms the most important manifestation of variation. This is not to downplay variation that may manifest itself at other levels of linguistics such as phonology, morphology and intonation. However, this study focuses on the lexicon because of its breadth, which at times incorporates areas of morphology and phrasal categories. This claim is made with the assumption that even the lexical examples that exhibit syntactic and phrasal properties are mostly uttered as a chunk, as will become clear in the discussion of word formation processes below. I begin with word formation processes.

3.3. Word formation processes in Sheng

Like in all human languages, lexical coinage in Sheng operates under cross linguistic word formation processes. In this section, I examine some of the ways that are used in the formation of Sheng's vocabulary. I discuss cases of affixation, compounding, borrowing, coinage, calquing, syllabic inversion, and reduction.

Affixation: affixation might change the lexical category of the word in the derivation of another term. In other cases, idiosyncratic morphemes are used to give the new word a completely novel appearance; as the words in (10) shows.

10.	a. m-less 1-less 'child'	English 'less'
	b. ma-finishings 8-finishing-pl 'butt'	English 'finishing'
	c. ni-a-sa-je cop-iv-is-int 'how are you/how is it?'	Swahili slang *ni-aje* 'what's up?'
	d. anti-nyita anti-*catch* 'fool'	English and Gikuyu
	e. un-bwog-able un-*shake*-able 'unshakable'	English-Dholuo-English

In (a), *mless*, an English adjective *less* is prefixed with the Swahili class 1 nominal classifier *m* to derive a noun. In (b) an English gerund '*finishing*' is prefixed with Swahili class 6 nominal classifier *ma* to yield a noun, while in (c), *niasaje*, an idiosyncratic syllable *sa* is infixed to the Swahili slang item *niaje* 'what's up'. This syllable is derived through infixation of *s* followed by a vowel that harmonizes with the preceding vowel (see Gathigi 2000:11)[19]. In *anti-nyita*, an English negation prefix *anti* 'against' is affixed to a Gikuyu verb *nyita* 'catch' to denote a fool — one who does not catch or understand anything. Finally, an English adjectival morpheme is suffixed to a Dholuo verb *bwogo* 'to scare, or to frighten' (Hofmeyr, Nyairo and Ogunde 2003: 374) to yield the adjective

[19] Other examples from Gathigi are *husuko* from *huko* 'there', *husuyu* from *huyu* 'this' (animate), *hasapa* from *hapa* 'here'

bwogable which is in turn prefixed with an English negative adjectival morpheme to give the final derivation *unbwogable*.

Syllabic inversion: Syllabic inversion is similar to metathesis in phonology. In metathesis, the expected ordering of sounds is reversed such that if the expected order was ...*xy*..., we get ...*yx*... (see Hume 2004: 203). In Sheng, the focus is not on the phonological sequence but rather the syllable sequence in words. Githiora (2002) has called it *Pig Latin* while Mazrui (1995) and Gathigi (2000) call it *backslang*. I prefer the term syllabic inversion because it avoids the baggage involved in *Pig Latin* or the more confusing *backslang*. Examples in (11) are typical cases of syllabic inversion in Sheng.

11.

new word	*old word*	*gloss*
a. m-di-ki	m-ki-di	'kid'
b. mba-nyu	nyu-mba	'house'
c. e-nda	nda-e	'car'
d. di-ngo	go-ndi	'thief'
e. le-mbe	mbe-le	'front, first, ahead'

In the first example, English *kid* is made to conform to Swahili CVCV syllable structure, and then affixed with Swahili class 1 animate marker *m*. During syllabic inversion, the noun class markers remain unaffected. The words *mbanyu* and *lembe* are borrowed directly from Swahili and then swapped, while *enda* and *dingo* were previous Sheng words with similar meaning that have undergone syllabic swapping. This is a very dynamic process in the creation of new words. Any Swahili word or previous Sheng word has a chance of being relexicalized through syllabic swapping, although the nouns swap more than the verbs.

Compounding: This process involves the combination of two or more words to create a new word. In Sheng, the two words do not necessarily have to come from the same language as illustrated in the examples in 9 below.

12.	*compound*	*gloss*
	a. zeiks-man 9sm *old*-man 'father'	zeiks (mzee '*old*') + man
	b. ku-uma vako inf-*bite fake* 'resting'	kuuma (to bite) + vako (fake, lie)
	c. ku-la njaro inf-*eat quiteness* 'resting'	kula (to eat) + njaro (quietness)
	d. ku-tia ndani inf-*put inside* 'to eat'	to put inside
	e. ch-ombo ch-a kazi 7sm-*tool* 7-agr-*of work* 'butt'	tool for work

In (12a), *zeiksman*, the resultant Sheng word is a second level Sheng derivation. The former term *zeiks* (see *zaks* in 3 above for its variant) combines with *man* to derive a word for 'father'. When *zeiks* combines with *woman*, the resultant derivation means 'mother.' In examples (b) and (c) Swahili words *kuuma* 'bite' and *kula* 'eat' combine with Sheng words *vako* and *njaro* respectively to yield Sheng phrases. Interestingly *kuuma* and *kula* are some of the Swahili verbs that are commonly used to derive Swahili idioms[20]. These two terms are still used in Sheng; though some speakers regard them as *oldskool* or 'oldschool'[21]. Examples (d) and (e) show ordinary Swahili constructions

[20] Examples are *kula njama* 'conspire', and *kula rushwa* 'take a bribe',

[21] This term is applied to refer to Sheng lexical items that have gone out of use and are no longer fashionable. It should be pointed out that what is oldskool among some Sheng

being assigned meanings that differ from their literal meaning. This is crucial since one might think that the conversation is going on in Swahili while in real sense the semantic shift has turned the words into Sheng lexical items.

Borrowing: Word borrowing is the most common linguistic phenomena in language contact situations (Stojičić 2004: 30). In linguistic borrowing, the donor language does not lose its words, nor is there a possibility of giving back the borrowed word. Borrowed words are usually treated in order to conform to the morpho-phonological constraints of the recipient language. Without prior knowledge, one might not know that the Sheng word *pare*, is a borrowed word from the English word 'party' because of its complete adaptation into the Swahili phonology. This is not always the case as the words *sniper* and *kahiu* in 13 below demonstrate.

13.

borrowed word	*gloss*	*origin*
a. manga	'eat'	French
b. sniper	'thief'	English 'sniper'
c. dishi	'eat'	English 'dish'
d. lenga	'evade'	Kiswahili (aim, target)
e. kahiu	'money'	Gikuyu (knife)

In (13) *manga*, is borrowed from the French verb *manger* 'eat'. It is ambiguous and may either refer to eating or having sex. This is not unique to Sheng. In Gikuyu, the verb *rĩa* /rea/ means 'eat', but also can have a metaphorical meaning of 'sex' or 'kill'. *Sniper* is a very recent derivation following the sniper scare in Washington DC in 2003. Since this was an international topical issue, the name *sniper* generally came to symbolize a very

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speakers might still be in common usage among a different group of Sheng speakers. See Chapter 4 for more on 'oldskool'.

antisocial and dangerous person. Considering that the Washington sniper had demanded payment as blackmail, the term's association with 'thief' is hardly surprising. In (c) *dish* has undergone semantic shift from a noun into a verb while *lenga* yields the exact opposite meaning from its Swahili counterpart. Finally, *kahiũ* remains unchanged but like the rest, has shifted.

Normally, nouns are borrowed more often than the other lexical categories. This, according to Trask (1996:23) is due to the following reasons; (a) nouns are more numerous than other classes of words, (b) new things are more likely to be denoted by nouns than other words, (c) new nouns are often easier to accommodate within the grammatical system of the borrowing language. In Sheng, borrowing is the most important word formation process.

Coinage: Coinage still remains a very important way of forming words. As one respondent said, word coinage can be spontaneous while at other times it is a deliberate activity that has to be justified and thoroughly explained. The examples in (14) show recently coined words, though the extent to which they are used cannot be established.

14.

coined word	*gloss*
a. murungaru	'police chopper'
b. weng	'wheel of a car'
c. wanoto	'mean guys'
d. makabelo	'teeth'

The word *murungaru*[22] was coined from the name of the former minister in the office of the president in charge of the internal security docket, *Chris Murungaru*, under which the

[22] The said minister has since been transferred to the Ministry of transport and communication.

police department falls. The invented word *weng* is an example of spontaneous coinage by the car washers at Shauri Moyo baze whose daily activities involve dealing with vehicles, hence the numerous descriptive terms for car parts. In the following conversation, Stevo, a Shauri Moyo respondent explains to me (PG) about the spontaneity of coinage in Sheng.

1. Stevo: ....haina ati mwanzo..... ...haina ati *setwork*
2. PG: mm-hm
3. Stevo: ...Sheng inakujanga vile siku zionaenda
4. PG: mm-hm
5. Stevo: ...every new day you discover something new...
6. PG: yeah
7. Stevo: You form a word for it unaona?
8. PG: yeah
9. Stevo: ...Sheng inaweza kuwa hata huyu...
10. PG: mm-hm
11. Stevo: ...kwa mfano anakimbia akaenda kuanguka
12. PG: yeah
13. Stevo: ...aka*make* sound...unaona?
14. PG: mm-hm
15. Stevo: ...*next time* itaita kuanguka hiyo sauti ali*make. Do you understand? That how* Sheng huja

The following is my translation

1. Stevo: it has no beginning...it has no setwork
2. PG: mm-hm
3. Stevo: ...*Sheng comes the way days are passing*
4. PG: mm-hm
5. Stevo: ...every new day you discover something new...
6. PG: yeah
7. Stevo: You form a word for it, *you see*?
8. PG: yeah
9. Stevo: ...*Sheng may be even this guy...*
10. PG: mm-hm
11. Stevo: *for example he is running and as he goes to fall*
12. PG: yeah
13. Stevo: *he makes* a sound...*you see?*
14. PG: mm-hm
15. Stevo: ...next time *it (Sheng) will call falling that sound he made.* Do you understand? That is how Sheng *works*.

This exchange coming from a member of the group that has already coined new Sheng words is a good illustration of how metaphor and onomatopoeia operate in spontaneous coinage of words. Other examples are *makobelo* 'teeth' (d) and *wanoto* 'mean guys' (c), coined by two upcoming musicians who I interviewed. While the coiner of *makobelo* claimed that he was inspired by a newscaster who had 'funny teeth', the coiner of *wanoto* did not offer an explanation for his coinage. I was not able to establish whether these words are used outside those musicians' local networks. However, they are testimony to how spontaneous coinage contributes to the array of lexical choices that Sheng speakers can make. The use of these coined words alongside the already existing words expands the Sheng vocabulary in addition to providing Sheng speakers with linguistic resources to make their group distinct.

Clipping and phonological reduction: Clipping involves removing some parts from a word. The term 'shortening' (e.g. Kouega 2003:519), might also apply in this word formation process, but his application of this term to Camfraglias — a creole language in Cameroon also includes acronyms and abbreviations, which I treat as separate processes. In Sheng, this word formation process manifests itself in the clipping of syllables where some elements of the previous word remain. These words may either be new loanwords or previous Sheng words. In some compounds, the second part of the compound may be discarded while in others; morpho-phonological reduction takes place. After these processes have taken place, phonological modification gives the Sheng words new appearence as can be seen in (15) below.

15.

reduced word	*gloss*	
a. paroz	'parents'	
b. hao	'house'	
c. daro	'class'	(cf. darasa in Swahili)
d. dashi	'female breast'	(c.f. ***dash***board)
e. maflai	'police'	(c.f. ***ma-flyi***ng squad)

In the Swahili-based Sheng variety, words ending with a consonant, such as *paroz,* are not so common, but they are very common in the English-based variety. However, what is interesting is how the word 'parents' has undergone phonological reduction in the derivation of *paroz*[23]. *Hao* is clipped from the English word *house*, and *daro* is clipped from the Swahili word *darasa* with a similar meaning. In the word for female breast, a Sheng term *dashboard*, coined by *matatu* people, has lost the second part of the compound to derive *dashi*, the new term for the Shauri Moyo group. Shedding of the second part of the compound also applies to the term *maflai* 'flying squad' (British English), an elite police division that deals with violent crimes. Other cases of clipping involve chopping off of phonological material from proper names eg, *Omosh* from Omollo, *Tash* from Gitau, *Nai* from Nairobi etc. although the subsequent phonological treatment might lead us to regard only *Nai* as "pure" clipping in these words.

Calquing or loan translation: Sometimes, words might not be borrowed from the donor languages but the meaning might. Calquing involves translation of the semantic components of words and phrases from the donor language into the recipient language. According to Trask (1996) a foreign word is taken and translated morpheme-by-morpheme. The English words *superman* and *world-view* are borrowed from German

[23] *Paro* is the singular form of this word. *Paro* is sometimes pluralized into *mapero* thus sticking to the Swahili structure instead of the English structure that derives *paroz*

Übermensch and *Weltanschauung* respectively. In Sheng, this morpheme-by morphemes translation might not be transparent because of the agglutinative nature of its Swahili base language. I regard literally translated words that retain their similar meaning as calques. My examples in (16) below might not be regarded as classic examples of calques in Trask's definition.

	calque	*compare with*
16.	a. ji-to-a refl-*remove*-fv 'to take leave/go'	English expression 'remove yourself'
	b. genge 6 *gang* music	English popular music genre 'gangster'
	c. throw wood 'be mad'	earlier Sheng version 'ku-tup-a mbao' inf-throw-fv 9timber/wood 'to be mad'

Jitoa has been used by the Sheng speakers for a long time. It is a calque from the English verb 'remove'. Literally translated, it means to 'remove oneself'. On its part, *genge* is a very recent case that can be attributed to the popularity of hip-hop music. The concept is most likely a borrowing from the African American concept of 'gangster' in hip-hop, which can be translated into Swahili as *genge*. The use of *genge* in popular culture should not be confused with the mainstream Swahili semantics of *genge* as 'gang of thieves'[24]. The final example from Mbaabu and Nzuga's (2003) dictionary is the most transparent example of a real calque. *Kutupa mbao,* a widely used term, has been translated into English morpheme for morpheme with the same semantics. Examples of calques are however not very common and this study did not come across many of them. As I pointed out, they might be contested as ordinary agglutination in Standard Swahili.

[24] *Genge* also means 'crowd'. It is possible that the use of *genge* in pop culture comes from its ability to attract huge crowds.

Initialism[25]**:** Although this term usually applies to the word formation process involving more that two words e.g. DA (**d**istrict **a**ttorney), MIA (**m**issing **i**n **a**ction), I will extend its meaning to cover cases of single words, including situations where more than two letters are taken from a single word so long as they are pronounced separately. A few examples will do.

17.	CD	condom/chapatti
	TA	teacher
	D	Dandora estate

The formation of CD further shows how complex lexical coinage in Sheng can be. The *condom* reading derives from taking two letters from the name 'condom', but the chapatti reading derives from the round shape of the chapatti, whose shape resembles the CD. TA is derived from the phonetic realization of the clipping of the word 'teacher' yielding /tie/, while D for Dandora is the best example of the most common form of initialism because it involves only one initial.

These word formation processes over-generate Sheng's vocabulary, thus resulting in many variables for a single lexical item. This semantic relation is referred to as synonymy and is responsible for the instantiations of lexical variability. Synonymy here will be regarded as the semantic equivalence between different lexical items such that one can replace the other without altering the meaning. Although the fact that full synonymy is extremely rare or even non-existent, as claimed by Pustet (2003:249); is taken into account, this study focuses on the ability of some words to substitute or replace

[25] This should not be confused with acronym. In acronym, the letters picked form a word, e.g., **laser** from light **a**mplification **b**y **s**timulated **e**mission of **r**adiation or **scuba** from **s**elf-contained **u**nderwater **b**reathing **a**pparatus

others without altering the key semantics and not whether the lexical items are full synonyms or not. The discussion in the next section provides authentic data for better elaboration.

3.4. Synonymy: some of the lexical differences

To elicit synonyms, I asked students from different primary and secondary schools in Nairobi to write down the Sheng words they used for the following concepts: father, mother, girls, boy, policeman, to rest, to eat, to sleep, to go, music, thief, house, money, fool, car, child, teacher (see appendix I). Below are synonyms of selected words.

Father: buda, budeng', budeng'deng, fatha, fathe, fusebox, gadabu, kize, mbulala, mbuyu, mdabu, mdagala, maze, oldman, papa, tifar, warinzu and zeiksman

Mother: gadama, mama, masa, matha, mathako, mathe, mathor, mdhema, mnyaka, mnyasa, mokoro, monthere, monthero, msa, mtassi, mthama, mthas, munthre, muthama, muthes, mwothes, themaa, therma, tima and zeikswoman.

Rest: bangaiza, bentle, gichi, kubanjuka, kubarizi, kubazz, kubreeze, kubuaga, kuchill, kudozi, kugandiza, kujibanza, kukeyo, kula njaro, kumanya, kumorea, kumoss, kupoa, kupoza, kupozi, kupumz, kupumzika, kurelax, kurest, kutulia, kutulix, kutuliza, kutuna, kuuma vako, kuwaka, liatu, poa, swach, take rest, tinare, tired, tulia, tuliatulia, tuliz and tuliza

Police: afuade, antimegech, babby, banga, gava, goshogi, gwang, karao, mabeast, manyani, mapolisi, mban'ga, msoro, oraka, pai, ponyi, sanse, sarka, sinya, tipoli, vedi and wachi

Girl: azguoba, bogola, buss, chibela, chik, chile, cholosa, dame, dem, gala, gwaru, hoe, jaba, kemfaa, kenta, kff, kichuna, kidalipo, mama, man, mandu, manyake, manzi, mbas, mbus, miogar, mlosho, mresh, mroro, mshe, mshi, msusu, mtasi, mtoi, mtoto, nyambizi, nyang'we, nzima, roro, shore, shwala, siste, supuu, toto and wanyina

Boy: beshte, boi, boy, boyboy, boyii, bro, chali, charty, dume, hommie, huyu boi, jamaa, kaboy, kijana, licha, mdhi, mru, msee, mthi, muthee, muthii, mzee,

Eat: bonya, dema, difu, dishi, ficha, finya, fweba, fyamba, fyenfa, hog, jibonda, jirock, jistack, jitibu, kumachez, kumatema, kupiga, kusosi, kustack, kutia ndani, manga, minya, munch, ngama, sosi, stack and venga

Sleep: K.O., bleki, kudoro, kudoroi, kudorome, kudosro, kudoz, kudoze, kudozi, kuduna, kukaita, kukata, kukoma, kulaka, kulala, kunatu, kushonga, kuswatch, kutulia, kutuna, kuuma vako, natu and swachi

Thief: bandi, bandishi, bandit, chizi, conmen, dindo, dingo, dongi, goda, gondi, goya, jambazi, jambo, jangili, kauzi, mgosa, mnati, mwizi, pinji, shifta, sinya, sniper and thegi,

House: boma, cube, digz, ghetto, hao, jake, kej, krib, kubalo, maskan, mbanyu, moroto, mtaani, riggs and wou

Money: alpundez, capital, chapa, chantu, cheda, chumbs, daf, dongera, doo, ganji, gashai, greens, hela, kenge, macheda, mafuta, majani, mapesa, monyo, munde, munke, murangi, ngoma, niado, niadu, paper, pesa, sape and winchi

Music: beats, chizi, debe, genge, gogo, hewa, lyrics, maflavouz, mahewa, malyrics, mavitu, mogithi, music, ngoma, reggae, rwembo, song, timus, vokol, wimbo, wingnimbo and ziki

Fool: anti-nyita, bani, barhe, bore, bure, chizi, chodha, chununu, danda, dula, dwan, dwanzi, fala, fika, fyatika, fyatuko, gamlez, gwethe, gweze, jamaa, kamande, kemothe, kerothi, kichoyo, kwaya, lafa, mbatopas, mbonye, mdongo, mjinga, mjeshi, mshakee, mwenda, mwere, nduwele, ng'ea, ngamres, ngamwe, ngoie, nongwe, pankass, punju, quir, shenzi, shoga, thati, tiwetini, tost, tothi, upende, weri and zushu

Go: bail, bounce, chak, cheza l, chora, dark, gich, gushia, gwan, inua, ishia, jiches, jicurve, jikata, jikate, jikov, jipanga, jitoa, jivuta, kacha, kugo, kuhepa, kula vako, kung'oka, kuwiz, kwenda, lembe, mkidi, ndae, nyaa, nyorosha, ramus, shoot, tinago, tuende, tukore and uiz

Child: chali, doli, kijanaa, mdiki, mdoido, mjunior, mkid, mless, mniaju, mtoi, myoung, ndai, tich and wothes

Car: bima, break, dinga, gari, mathree, mboko, mbokonya, mode, moti, mots, murenga, ndai, nganya, rack, ride, ticar and wheels

Teacher: D.H, mchals, mdie, mdijo, mode, mtiche, mwalimu, odich, odicha, odicho, odido, odijo, odisa, odish, odiso, odojo, ondiso, t.a, tiche, tie and udicha.

From these words, it can be observed that the words with the highest number of synonyms are 'rest' (42), 'girl' (45) and 'fool' (52), while 'child' (14), 'house' (15), and 'car' (17) have the lowest number of synonyms. It can be argues that words with the highest number of synonymy are the words that dominate the ingroup discourse of speakers as opposed to those with the highest numbers of synonyms. Speakers would, for instance, have various words to refer to their activities in the bazes, hence the high variability for the word 'rest'. Since sex issues feature prominently in the discourses of various groups, synonyms for 'girl' are many. Finally, outsiders are regarded as fools; hence the name 'fool' displays high variability because it assumes in-group relevance. In contrast, 'car' 'child', and 'house' are not in-group terms, hence the low variability.

3.5. Morphophonological variation and its connection to speakers' identity

In these examples, some synonyms display very minimal orthographic variation. This can partly be attributed to the fact that Sheng lacks a 'standardized description of its own rules' (Mbaabu and Nzuga, 2003: introduction). As such, the respondents were at liberty to write the words the way they deemed best, which sometimes yielded unmotivated variation. Taking the variants for 'mother' for instance, *mathor* and *matha* should be considered as one word, just like *m-thama* and *mu-thama*. Similar cases include *dem, dame* and *m-she, m-shi* for 'girl'. Other cases of variation can be attributed to the presence or absence of nominal classifiers, e.g,

18. **m:** ***m**roro, roro* for 'girl', ***m**tiche, tiche* for 'teacher'
ma: ***ma**hewa, hewa* and ***ma**lyrics, lyrics* for 'music'
***ma**pesa, pesa* and ***ma**cheda, chenda* for 'money'.

The presence or absence of an infinitive marker **ku** in the case of verbs can result in variation, e.g;

19. *ku-sosi, sosi* and *ku-stack, stack* for 'to eat'
ku-swach, swach and *ku-natu, natu* for 'to sleep'.

Such differences should not be considered lexical variation since they only involve orthographic or grammatical realization or lack of it. However, word-final and word-initial phonological differences are regarded as variants because Sheng thrives on relexicalization and phonological manipulation. To illustrate this, we note that there is a big difference between *mbele* and *lembe*, 'in front, before', *m-kidi* and *m-diki* 'child', *keja* and *jake,* 'house', *pesa and sape* 'money', *chali* and *licha* 'boy', *manga* and *ngama* for 'eat,' though the latter is derived from the former and they bear the same meaning. As we saw earlier, syllabic inversion is a word formation process that forms words from existing ones by transposing their syllables while retaining their meaning. Within optimality theory, swapping of syllables can be regarded as the violation or reranking of the linearity constraint, which has implication, for the word's external appearance. Speakers have a choice between using words that remain faithful to the linear order of syllables or using words that violate it. Swapping of syllables was used with a higher frequency by the Sinai girls that any other group, which sets it as linguistic marker of their identity, though it is not resticted to their group.

Similarly, *Odich* and *Odicho* should be considered as two variants because their realization depends on the speakers' lexical choices. In my discussion of word formation processes above, I mentioned that borrowed or coined words are normally made to conform to the Swahili well-formedness rule of CVCV syllable structure. Words ending in clusters or consonants are marked. It thus follows that while *odicho* remains faithful to

this constraint, *odich* violates it. If we revisit the Sheng-Engsh distinction, where we observed that Sheng uses Swahili structure while Engsh uses English structure, then we can rightly conclude that the choice of *odich/odicho* is deliberate. *Odich's* deviation from Swahili phonotactics signals a parallel word formation process. This argument for *odich* and *odicho* can be extended to other lexical variants such as *mots* and *moti* for car and *bandit* and *bandi* for 'thief'. The relevance of phonotastics with regard to identity is that those who choose English-sounding words are usually the affluent speakers from the rich neighborhoods, while those who use the Swahili phonotactics are mostly from the ghettos.

Apart from the difference in the word-final vowel, the other difference between *matha* and *mathe,* or *fatha* and *fathe* is the syllable weight. While *matha* [maða] and *fatha* [faða] ends in light syllables, *mathe* [ma:ðé:] and *fathe* [fa:ðé:] ends in heavy syllables with rising intonation, while the middle syllables are stressed. Although the word initial **o** in nouns is usually attributed to Dholuo influence (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995, Kang'ethe 2004)[26], the choice between *mdijo* and *odijo* depends on preference of the **o**-initial innovation or conforming to the Swahili requirement of classifying all animates under class 1 nominal classifier prefix **m.** I will also regard the choice of fricatives in *odi**s**o*, *odi**j**o* or *odi**ch**o* as being driven by phonological manipulation; hence they can be regarded as variables.

[26] This word initial **o** in nouns is usually attributed to Dholuo influence (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995, Kang'ethe 2004). According to Hilary K'owino (personal communication) the occurrence or word initial o- is not characteristic of Dholuo.

3.6. Some background on the users of these synonyms

Turning now to the distribution of these synonyms among different categories of speakers, we note that the most relevant categorical variation is manifested in the residential areas where speakers come from, the school location or the school itself. When drawing generalizations, it is important to take into account that there is a mismatch between the names of these three categories and the actual localness of the respondents. Taking the case of students for instance, it can be observed that due to their mobility, it is not always the case that they come from the school location's immediate neighborhoods. This is especially so with the high schools. Arya Girls High School in *Ngara* is a good example where the respondents were drawn from *Huruma, Satellite, Ngong, Utalii Village, Uthiru, Kibera, Juja Road, Zimmerman, Parklands, South C, Amboseli, Highrise, Lower Kabete* and *Buruburu* neighborhoods. Only 2 out of 14 respondents come from the immediate neighborhoods of *Parklands* and *Juja Road.* The rest are all spread out across different neighborhoods in Nairobi. At the opposite scale is the Busara primary in *Kayole* where all the pupils come from the immediate neighborhood of *Kayole.* In other schools, it is possible to have students who come from the same neighborhood. Buruburu High has for instance 4 students from *Buruburu* and several from other immediate neighborhoods, though there are some who come from as far away as *Eastleigh, Savannah, Kayole* and *Komarock.* Like Arya Girls, the case of Muthangari primary might be misleading because although the school is located in the up-market *Lavington* residential area, hardly any pupils from the immediate area attend that school. The majority of its pupils come from the outlying slums, such as *Congo, Kawangware, Kangemi* and *Uthiru.*

The above discussion shows that the relationship between the residential area, school location and the school name should be treated with caution when dealing with variation. In spite of these shortcomings, the three categorizations I mentioned can be used to draw broad generalizations about the distribution of selected lexical items and how they can be tied to the identity of their speakers.

3.7. Dominance of certain words

For each of the lexical items, two or three synonyms are widespread amongst the majority of the student respondents. In some cases, however, there is a huge gap between the most dominant synonym and its closest competitor. In the example below I show the leading variables for the words for 'father,' 'house,' 'to rest,' 'money,' 'child' and 'to eat.' Most of the other variables for these words had only one or two respondents. (refer to appendix IV for a full illustration of the frequency of different variables for each lexical item). The numbers represent the frequency of use of each term by the 212 respondents. The reader might notice that some additions exceed 212. This is because some respondents used more that one variable for a single lexical item.

20.	father	mbuyu 120, buda 92, fathe 17
	house	keja 132, hao 66, mbanyu 11
	to rest	kupozi 34, kutuliza 29, kutulia 26, kupoa 12, kurelax 12, bangaiza 10, kurest 5
	money	doo 84, ganji 76, chapa: 26, cheda 12, munde 6, niado: 6
	child	mtoi 141, mkidi 49, mjunior 12, mdiki 11
	to eat	manga 129, dema 34, dishi 20, bonya 6, hog 5

Among these five examples, *mbuyu* and *buda* dominate for 'father', *keja* and *hao* for 'house', *kupozi* and *kutuliza* for 'to rest', *doo* and *ganji* for 'money', *mtoi* and *mkidi* for

'child' and *manga* and *dema* for 'eat'. *Buda* and *mbuyu* will be used in my discussion of these types of variations and dominance according to sex and school.

3.7.1. The gender factor in variation

The use of *buda* amongst the girls is slightly higher (26%) as compared to the boys' (21%). While low participation of girls in this study might have affected the general outcome, we also reason that Sheng has for a long time been a boys' phenomenon. We note that *buda* is an older variable as compared to *mbuyu*. If the boys have been the leading users and innovators of Sheng, then we can attribute this difference to the fact that as girls catch up with Sheng, boys move a step away in order to create distance. Girls' low participation in Sheng has usually been attributed to their indoor activities that keep them away from the street where they could acquire the vernacular. A different explanation is that Sheng had been stigmatized for so long and girls who used Sheng were viewed with suspicion. Samper (2002:154) reported about a young woman called Teeka, who told him that Sheng was associated with poor people and with thugs and prostitutes and she chose not to use it in order to avoid such associations. The sociolinguistic explanation for this, following Trudgill (1974) is that vernacular features are normally associated with the covert prestige of masculinity and toughness, which are desirable characteristics for males but not for females who on the contrary are more status conscious due to the pressures from society. Women thus tend to stick to the standard features rather than adopt the vernacular. The use of the older synonym for 'father' among the school girls can be attributed to their low integration into the Sheng networks, either because boys keep them away or because they do not want to participate.

Trudgill's arguments have been challenged by Cameron and Coates (1988) who have remarked that sociolinguistic explanation tends to lump women from all social classes together, ignoring inter and intraclass variations. They also criticized what they called the 'intrinsic maleness of the norm', where men provided the standard from which women could only deviate. Their arguments are well-supported in this study. The Sinai girls, for instance, used more Sheng forms that the Kibera or South C males. There was also a high degree of difference between the frequencies of Sheng forms used by the Sinai female respondents as compared to their female counterparts from Kariobangi. I have already mentioned the pervasive inversion of syllables in their speech, which can be regarded as an innovative strategy in their verbal transactions. This shows that women are also innovators, but we have to go into their local networks and approach their discourse devoid of preconceived generalizations. This calls for a need to be more specific that the pattern of conservative norms among females is not uniform among all females. While schoolgirls might be more conservative, girls outside school might not. Futhermore, the school might have a mixture of girls from different social background, while the local networks consist of females from the local networks who share a similar social reality.

3.7.2. The schools and variation

The distribution of *mbuyu* and *buda* in schools also reveals that *mbuyu* is the more dominant variable; however, the secondary school students seem to use it slightly more at 65% as compared to primary school students at 57%. Table (2) summarizes the choices according to schools.

School	Sec/Pry	*buda*	*mbuyu*	out of	others
Arya	secondary	3	10	14	1
Buruburu	secondary	1	17	22	4
Eastleigh	secondary	9	13	25	3
Highway	secondary	6	14	21	1
Busara	Primary	7	2	20	11
Kamukunji	secondary	1	14	16	1
Muthangari	Primary	4	14	20	2
Muthurwa	Primary	8	14	23	1
Ofafa Jericho	secondary	3	11	23	9
St. Brigids	Primary	7	22	29	0

Table 2. The choice between *buda* and *mbuyu* among the students

In this table, the column for 'others' represents tokens where variables other than *mbuyu* and *buda* were used (see above for the other terms for 'father'). We note that in both Busara and Ofafa Jericho, the two dominant variables for 'father' are not unanimous; there are many variables that fall outside the *buda/mbuyu* synonyms — Busara 11 and Ofafa Jericho 9. Furthermore, it is only in Busara where the use of *buda* surpasses that of *mbuyu*. We can explain the case of Busara to the fact that it is located in Kayole estate, a more recent residential area, which is far removed from other estates in Nairobi. As a result, older term for 'father' has not changed. In addition the high number of 'others' might indicate that the speakers have come with different words that were used in their former residential areas. The high number of 'others' in Ofafa Jericho and Busara might also be a pointer to the existence of other variables in these schools. Reverting to my earlier argument that words are coined to serve certain purposes, then we can make the assumption that different synonyms reflect the use of a variable by different categories of speakers, or in different interactional contexts. If this assumption is correct, then we can rightly conclude that the term for 'father' has more in-group use or different contexts of use among the students of these two schools. This conclusion follows from the fact that

terms that are widespread can not serve as distinctive features of groups. Lexical uniformity signifies shared linguistic norms which means that the speakers belong to the same speech community in the classical speech community definition (e.g Labov 1966). On the other hand, high lexical variability signals different norms or different speech communities.

3.7.3. The age and neighborhood factor in variation

Age is an important factor in the study of linguistic variation because certain variants seem to be used at a higher rate by certain age groups as compared to others. Sheng for instance is usually claimed to be spoken more intensively by the adolescents and pre-adolescents. The relevance of age in identity is that speakers of Sheng can be categorized into broad groups that are identifiable. Furthermore, the assumption was that acquisition of synonyms follows an age progression where speakers who began using Sheng at a lower age have a high likelihood of using more variables than those who began to do so at a later age, or those still in the process of acquiring Sheng. To establish the veracity of this assumption, the respondents were asked to say at what age they began speaking Sheng. The results in table (3) excludes data from respondents who claimed they begun speaking Sheng below age 3 and after 17 years because they were judged unrealistic.

ages	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
pry	2	4	6	3	18	6	7	16	10	6	2	-	1	1	92
sec	9	12	15	9	6	4	9	18	3	8	2	7	4	1	120
18+	2	3	5	3	3	5	3	10	-	7	-	-	6	-	55

Table 3. Ages when respondents claim to have started using Sheng

Table 3 shows that a majority of the speakers acquire Sheng between 3 and 12 years. From the sample of 212 students for instance, 176 (83%) claimed to have begun speaking Sheng between the ages of 3 and 12 years while 34 (62%) out of 55 respondents over 18 claimed to have begun speaking Sheng by age 12. By age 12, the majority of students have already picked up the Sheng necessary for general communication. In table 2, we saw that the primary schools, apart from Busara, do not display a lot of lexical variability as compared to the secondary schools. If we take into account that most people join primary school between the ages of 6 and 7, it follows that the majority acquire Sheng during the 8 years in primary school. Therefore, by the time they join secondary school between 14 and 16 years they have already acquired Sheng. It is also worth noting that most primary school students tend to attend schools near their local neighborhoods, hence the kind of Sheng that they speak is more localized, with few variants. Unlike primary school students, secondary school students do not necessarily attend school in their local neighborhoods. When students from different neighborhoods converge in the secondary schools, different variables are brought into contact, which results in synonymy. We thus expect more lexical variation in secondary schools as opposed to primary schools. That is why in table 2 primary schools (apart from Busara) seem to have fewer tokens in the column 'others' as compared to the secondary schools.

The secondary/primary distinction also makes sense in terms of age in that language learners normally have fewer synonyms as compared to competent speakers. The youngest respondent in primary school was 11 years while the oldest was 17; the youngest respondent among secondary school student was 13 while the oldest was 19. The average age of the primary school students was lower as compared to that of

secondary school students. The relevance of this age disparity is that younger Sheng speakers (primary) exhibit little variation as they are still in the process of learning, as compared to older Sheng speakers (secondary) who have already learnt. In addition, we expect that transgressive behavior and sub-cultural elements that require obfuscation such as discussing sex issues, smoking, and going out with friends are practiced more by the older secondary school students as opposed to primary school students. This then could partly explain the higher lexical variability among secondary school students as compared to primary school. More studies focusing on the specific words that display high variability would confirm this claim. It is also probable that secondary school students had the academic edge in understanding interview instructions. As a final comment, in this discussion on age and neighborhood factors, I note that although schools, especially secondary schools, strive to teach the students standard languages, they (schools) also provide the environment not only to learn Sheng, but also for people who use different variants to compare notes. As far as Sheng is concerned, therefore, secondary schools act like two-way traffic, where students bring with them the lexical items from their neighborhoods. If other students find them cool, they adopt them and take them to their neighborhoods.

3.7.4. Who are the innovators?

I have already discussed the different word formation processes that are responsible for the high variation in Sheng's lexicon. What remains is a description of where these words are created and who creates them. While schools have their own kind of Sheng (Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003), the most intense creation of words takes place outside the schools. The

manamba in the *matatu* industry (Mbugua 2003) are a good example. According to Mbugua, Sheng constitutes an instance of hidden transcripts where the *matatu* crew exploits its opacity to cover their antisocial behavior. Viewing the *matatu* phenomenon within the context of a subculture, we realize that the members have every need to create the words that are useful to mask their activities. Such activities include raising fares, impressing female commuters and cutting off commuters in their conversations. Raising fares without passengers' knowledge, for instance, explains why we have such a high number of enumerative variables for money, which facilitates their coded communication (Mbugua 2003). Another group responsible for the high rate of innovation is the parking boys[27] who, according to Spyropoulos (1987), invented various words for policemen because of their constant confrontation with authorities. Looking at my list of lexical items above, 'police' and 'money' have a very high rate of synonymy. It should be pointed out that the fact that some groups seem to lead in innovation of certain terms does not exclude other groups from innovating other terms for similar lexical items. Indeed, it is the very cornerstone of my argument in this study.

Money terms further complicate the picture of variation in the variables that refer to different denominations of money. I will provide a few examples that this study collected, and which are corroborated by Gathigi's examples (2001:16-17) and Githiora's (2003) glossary, as well as Sheng dictionaries such as Moga and Fee (1993, 2004) and Mbaabu and Nzunga (2004).

[27] See footnote 13. Nowadays, the concept of parking boy has been replaced with 'street boys' or *chokoraa* (derived from the Indian name *chokkra* for 'boy' (Spyropoulos 1987, Githiora 2002).

21	5 shillings	ngovo, kobole
	10 shillings	ashu, ashara, imiku, kinde
	50 shillings	fije, guoko, jet, ndege, kaufifty, hamsa
	1000 shillings	mote, tenga, ngiri, kavu, ndovu, thao

Variation in enumerative terms for money also provides evidence of the use of Sheng in various commercial activities. This lexical productivity can be attributed to the informal nature[28] of these commercial activities. Operating outside of formal boundaries, they are not bound by the mainstream language of commerce. The variation of the activities as well as the informal nature of these transactions corresponds to the variation and informality of the linguistic mediums in which these transactions occur.

It is therefore obvious that the creation of words, to a large extent occurs outside the school compounds. To explain this, we recognize that while school-life is characterized by routines, life outside the school is more diverse and dynamic. Schools can be viewed as an extension of the students' social reality; or a temporary stopgap in their daily transactions that involve interactions with significant others who speak Sheng. This requires them to learn how to balance their different personas, which might either be complementary or in conflict. While the social reality in their neighborhood demands that they use Sheng to cultivate solidarity with their significant others[29], the school imposes another reality characterized by inhibitions through prohibition of vernacular usage and other non-mainstream features of languages. Even in cases where the school might not impose overt proscriptions, the language policy that prescribes a certain medium of

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[28] *jua kali* means 'hot sun' in Standard Swahili (see Samper 2003, Spyropoulos 1987) is the common name given to the informal sector in Kenya. It derives from the fact that they are conducted in the open under direct sunlight.

[29] Kariobangi female respondents claimed that using standard Kiswahili or English among their friends, some of whom were not well-educated, would be considered showing off.

instruction as well as the social expectations has an impact on their level of mastery of the linguistic codes spoken in their neighborhoods. The school reality remains a key element of their complex persona and does not necessarily erase their identities as members of neighborhood groups. In any case, they will eventually return to these neighborhoods, unless they are lucky to secure white-collar employment or join the university. It is with this in mind that I now turn to look at these neighborhoods that are responsible for the existence of different variables in the lexical forms. I move away from the schools for a brief discussion of the bazes where I conducted the recorded interviews. I am guided by the logic that although the bazes are the main discourse site where interaction in Sheng takes place, they are also innovation centers in their own right. I begin by defining the concept baze.

3.8. From the estates to the *bazes*

Various studies and commentaries have mentioned the variation in Sheng according to different residential estates or neighborhoods (e.g., Ngesa 2002, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Githiora 2002, Samper 2002). According to Githiora (2002), the 'estate' in standard Swahili is the same as *mtaa* which translates as 'town quarter' or 'surburb', but in Nairobi it bears the narrower and more specific meaning of the low income city council housing estates concentrated in the Eastlands, a section of the city that emerged during the colonial period as a reserved area for African workers in the city. This study deviates from Githiora's definition to include a broader definition in which the estate is regarded as the 'housing development'. Many suburban houses, especially those whose genesis can be traced to the colonial period began as housing developments; so were the

former workers quarters. Today the need for a more gereral term has extended the use of the term 'estate' to refer to any residential area with a certain peculiarity, whether in the suburban or the informal settlements. The popular view is that each estate has its own variety of Sheng, which is incomprehensible to residents of other estates. Some of these claims go as far as implying that you can tell a person's estate from their version of Sheng. While not disputing the place of residential areas in the whole diagram of Sheng's variation within the general discourse of identity practices, I conceive of estates as macro-entities comprising territorial or administrative categories that lack the social cohesion necessary for the members to perceive themselves as cohesive social categories. Conceptualizing a speech community in terms of residential estates is problematic because members are not bound by the same linguistic norms, nor is it possible to build a strong network necessary for enforcement of linguistic norms within estates. The nature of unrestrained mobility, occasioned by the squalid conditions of the residential areas in Nairobi, prevents residents from having deep emotional attachments[30] to their estates. This mobility means that linguistic habits that served in one residential area might not be useful in a different residential area. In any case, it is not possible to place a linguistic boundary between one residential estate and the next. In dialect geography, for instance, the areas of convergence of two dialects are usually characterized by bundles of isoglosses, to show the overlapping features of both dialects. Such overlapping of features results in the vanishing of isoglosses (Chambers 1995:150). This means that insisting on inter-estate variation implies assigning clear-cut boundaries that goes against

[30] Moreover, the majority of the city residents do not consider the city their home. To them the city is only a temporary place to live while making money before retiring in their rural homes.

the dialect continuum. As such, estates as the units for delimiting a speech community for the purposes of analyzing speech behavior in Nairobi are not very helpful. Perceptual inter-estate variation is probably a case of the Sheng continuum being overplayed, an abstraction that require a closer examination to analyze its dynamics.

There is, therefore, a need to look at more realistic categories for the investigation of speech behavior as far as the use of Sheng is concerned. These categories must be local enough to allow for cohesion among members. They must also be fluid enough to accommodate outsiders who aspire to join the group. Furthermore, they must be very dynamic to ensure that the bonds that bind the members are not affected beyond repair by the departure of some members, or admission of outsiders. These categories must, therefore, be self-sustaining with a common engagement that acts as a reference point. In this study, I identify these categories as the *bazes*.

3.8.1. The *Bazes*

Baze is a folk term that came to my attention during the course of my research. Members of small groups that hang out in the local neighborhood corners referred to themselves or their counterparts in the same or other neighborhoods as *bazes*. I define the baze as a local 'joint' where friends meet to relax, or work, similar to the concept of the 'set' in African Americans'street culture. Writing about the playing of dozens amongst African American, Horton (1972) wrote;

> The more or less organized center of the street life is the 'set' meaning both the peer group and the places where it hangs out. It is the stage and central marketplace of activity, where to find out what's happening" (p. 21)

Horton's definition of a set fits perfectly with the baze. Placing the bazes at the center of the discourse practices of Sheng speakers enable us to observe both the group and individual interactive practices. This category fits well into the analytical model that I advocate in this study because it is small enough to allow a researcher to focus on various discourse practices. The advantages of focusing on a small group were pointed out in Bucholtz' (1999) study of language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls in a US high school. A small group allowed her to pay closer attention to some interactive practices that would have passed unnoticed if a large group was involved.

It is these advantages that inspired my preference for a few respondents from each baze. The bazes that I visited had between 3 and 8 members. Table (4) shows the bazes visited in this study, as well as the age, sex and ethnic composition of their members.

Baze	**No:**	**Age**	**sex of resps.**	**ethnicity**
Buruburu	6	23-27	males	Luhya
Eastleigh	4	21-23	1 male, 3 females	Luhya
Kabete	4	20-30	males	Luo, Luhya, Kamba
Kariobangi (F)	5	18-21	females	Luhya, Luo, Gikuyu
Kariobangi (M)	4	22-24	males	Luhya, Gikuyu
Kibera	5	18-32	males	Nubian
Shauri moyo	4	20-23	males	Luo, Kamba, Kisii, Gikuyu
Makadara	4	23-28	males	Luhya
Montecarlos	4	18-23	2 males, 2 females	Luo, Kamba, Luhya, Gikuyu
Ngara	3	20	males	Luo
Sinai	3	18-21	females	Gikuyu, Luo
South C	8	19-24	males	Nandi, Luhya, Luo, Somali, Gikuyu

Table 4. Demographic composition of *bazes*

Table 4 shows that a typical *baze* in has about three or four respondents. The concise information summarized needs to be expanded in order to show its relevance. I will only describe three *bazes* for illustrative purposes. Like the discussion of synonyms above, which mostly focused on primary and secondary school students, this description will be another way of veryfying Hypothesis 1, which states that people of different social

groups use different lexical items as identity markers. The description of the *bazes* is intended to show that members construct narratives of identity that reflect the realities of their residential areas and their daily activities.

Sinai: The Sinai *baze* is located in the outer Western flanks of an expansive slum and is also refered to as 'paradise'. This term is a paradox when one reckons with its inaccessibility, the general lack of hygiene, and the ramshackle structures in which they live. The respondents in this *baze* were three young females Joy, Kui and Liz, all aged between 18-21 years. They were all unemployed and made their living through selling illicit alcohol and also engaged in petty prostitution. They were almost always drunk and admitted to using marijuana regulary. They described their Sheng as 'perfect', 'very good' and 'good'. All claimed to have gone to secondary school, though it was not clear whether they completed it or not. Kui admitted to having a child who was being raised by her mother, and said if she became pregnant again, she would procure an abortion. These respondents seem to have resigned themselves to their fate and have accepted struggling as part of their lives.

South C: This *baze* is located in the middle class residential estate. It is comprised of young jobless males who normally hang out near a barbershop constructed on a road reserve. Some of them could even do hair. Although this was their convergence point, they all had different engagements and schedules, with some being members of some private clubs. Three had attended school outside Nairobi, and one claimed to have traveled out of the country for further education. Unlike the Sinai respondents, they were

living with their parents, which explain the mama's boys' label given to them by the Sinai respondents. All had good command of English and mostly rated their Sheng mastery as 'fair', though some claimed to speak Sheng a lot. South C brings in a mixture of people from different ethnic groups as can be see in Table 3. This is because ethnic dominance is not a feature in such estates, and in any case, ethnic languages are not used a lot. This might also explain why there is little innovation considering that most of the lexical innovation is inspired by ethnic languages. The affluent backgrounds of South C members manifest itself in the kind of Sheng they speak, and its deviation from other varieties, especially those spoken in the ghettoes.

Shauri Moyo: This *baze* is located in the Shauri Moyo estate. The respondents were all 'self employed' as car washers, which is a feature of Kenya's informal sector known as *jua kali.* All attended primary schools in Nairobi, but one attended an upcountry secondary school, which is not uncommon in Nairobi. Not only are upcountry schools cheap, but some parents in Nairobi think it is important to send children to school in the rural areas in order for them to experience their cultural roots. In addition, lack of school upgrading has meant that the city schools do not have adequate space to accommodate the ever rising number of students. The Shauri Moyo members had a high degree of solidarity, which can be attributed to the fact that they were always together while working. When asked whether they would consider moving out of Shauri Moyo, they claimed that it was not likely, but even if they did, they would always come back to see their friends. This solidarity extended to their linguistic practices, where they considered themselves the best. Their discourse was mostly influenced by their occupation activities, both in terms of setting as well as lexical innovation. Hanging out together, whether

working or not, resulted in the establishment of a close-knit network, thus making it easy to retain their Sheng norms. That is why one speaker (Stevo) dominated the interview without being interrupted or contradicted by his collegues.

Describing all the peculiarities for each *baze* would be too big a task, but I hope that the few I have described will be sufficient to show that the *bazes* were located in various places throughout the Nairobi neighborhoods. Coming back to Table 3, it needs to be said that the *baze* normally has more that three or four members. I chose bazes with three or four people because I reasoned that it would not be possible to carry out a coherent interview with many subjects. The majority of the members of these *bazes* belong to the Luhya, Gikuyu, Kamba and Luo ethnic groups. This is not surprising considering that these are some of the largest ethnic groups in Kenya, as the section on Kenya languages discussed in Chapter 2 illustrated. When Sheng borrows from the ethnic languages, these four languages are the most important donor languages (Mbaabu and Nzuga, 2003 introduction, Githiora 2002). The summary of the composition of the *bazes* in Table 4 is crucial because lexical innovation and the subsequent construction of identity is influenced by ethnicity, sex, age, housing, occupation and socioeconomic background, as I will demonstrate later.

Baze members refer to each other as *ma-beshte* (singular *beshte*) — a truncation of 'best friend', which has been phonologically manipulated. It is when *Mabeshte* are socializing in the *bazes* that the intensity of interaction and social bonds are cultivated and maintained. Some of the social activities that take place in the *bazes* are drinking either legal or illicit alcohol, smoking cigarettes or marijuana, and chewing *khat* or

muguka — green twigs used as stimulants. In various *bazes*, khat also goes by the name *veve* or *gomba*; and chewing khat is called *ku-chana*, *ku-veveka* or *ku-chonga*. The term *kuchonga* seems to have gained in popularity since its competitor like *ku-chana* has been used for a long time and *ku-veveka* is too transparent, which has weakened its opacity advantage. Sheng's lexical items are used as the 'official' language of interaction during these social activities. Sometimes these activities constitute the subject of their discussion or a joke among the *baze* members. Other topics run the gamut of general existential issues and include personal experience narratives dealing with police escapades, the merits and demerits of certain things, memorable parties or adventures, rides in *matatus*, sexual exploits, deaths of friends and encounters with criminals. Sometimes, traditional stories are retold in Sheng, while in other times, well known stories are retold with modification to suit the discourse norms of the group.

Bazes are not just restricted to hanging out places. The Buruburu *baze* for instance doubled as a hang out joint and a small business. As a barbershop, it provides a very convenient place for the *Mabeshte*, who are jobless, to meet. Since most do not have fulltime employment, they come to the *baze* to relax when they are not working. When they are out of a job, the *baze* becomes the place where they learn of places where they can get part time jobs. At the same time, when the barber has more clients than he can handle, they can assist him to cut hair for commissions. Similarly, the Sinai *baze* doubles as a workplace as well as hang out joint. The girls who hang out in the alcohol dens for leisure also engage in petty prostitution as an economic activity. The Shauri Moyo and Ngara *bazes* were purely occupational, while the Eastleigh, Kariobangi, Kabete, South C, Kibera and Makadara *bazes* were 'estate corner' hang-out. Although Montecarlos is a

reggae dancehall, I regard the respondents I interviewed there as part of a *baze* because they admitted to being regulars who constantly interacted. However, the fact that these revelers come from different neighborhoods in Nairobi should not be lost.

It should be pointed out that *bazes* are very fluid and members do not necessarily belong to one *baze*. There are cases where members belong to more that one *baze*. For instance, one member of Buruburu also doubled as a member of Kabete *baze*, his former place of residence. Similarly, another member of Buruburu *baze* was also a member of Kariobangi *baze*, his residential neighborhood. To these two members and probably others, Kabete and Buruburu *baze* are convergence points just like the school where different lexical variables compete for space in the members' discourse. As much as they introduce lexical material from their respective *bazes*, they also carry with them the lexical material that they have acquired to their respective *bazes*.

3.8.2. The relevance of *bazes* in lexical variation

The thrust of this study as seen in Hypothesis 1 is that different *bazes* employ unique lexical items that are relevant to their different everyday realities. These lexical items constitute the core linguistic norms within the discourse practices of the *Mabeshte* who make up the *baze*. The word formation processes discussed earlier afford Sheng speakers a resource for virtually infinite lexical coinage or the modification of pre-existing terms when situations demand. Mastery of these norms is the major criterion for distinguishing those at the core or the periphery in a given *baze*. We can view the lexical items as well as meaning peculiar to a given *baze* as network markers[31] akin to the phonological

[31] The term is used here to refer to the linguistic features and social norms that make a certain group distinct and are hence regarded as symbols of the group's identity.

variants [a] and [ɛ] in Belfast (Milroy 1980, Milroy and Milroy 1985, 1992). Only the core members with strong orientation towards the *baze* have full access to these network markers and their various realizations because of constant participation in the discourse practices of the *baze*.

We are thus able to see how individuals negotiate their positions within the group through lexical choices or the meaning attached to lexical items. As a classic example, Eckert (2000) reports about how meaning was spontaneously negotiated during an interview with a group of seven high school students in California. When asked about the skull insignia, which was a symbol of their identity, they said it symbolized 'death'. However, one boy said he thought the skull's symbol meant 'pirates'. The ensuing discussion attempted to make the connection between 'death' and 'pirates' in order to accommodate his views. This showed that the boy was a peripheral member of the group, a pointer that although people might share a similar identity, we do not necessarily have uniformity since members participate differently in groups' practices. Such cases are unavoidable due to co-membership in different bazes as well as the different position that different members occupy within the group hierarchy.

Bearing in mind that some of the activities in the *bazes* are illegal explains the secretive nature of the core members of that *baze* and the adoption of opaque lexical items. In a *baze* where members smoke marijuana for instance, a newcomer has to know the entire stock of the disguise terms that members use when communicating about their indulgence in the presence of outsiders. An outsider who needs to join the *baze* regulars in the smoking of marijuana must quickly conform to the *baze* members' collective linguistic values as a show of loyalty to the *baze*. These outsiders should not be regarded

as mere conformers but also as the agents who, in their own way, modify the identity of the group since they come with features of their previous groups.

Gaining admission into a *baze* is, however, not automatic. An outsider needs to be introduced by a well-known regular. Even so, complete acceptance takes time and personal efforts must be made by the outsider seeking admission to master all the communicative norms of the *baze* in order to fit into the *baze*. *Baze* regulars assess the sincerity of a person before he/she earns their full trust, as illustrated below in the comments of my female respondents in Kariobangi:

1. PG: ...kama mimi nimekaa katika mtaa tofauti hapa, na mmeniona leo ni mara ya kwanza nikija pengine hapa kwenye kikundi chenu, ee, mnaweza mkanikubali kuwa mi ni mmoja wenu hata tukizungumza sawasawa?
2. Shiro: Ahh, ita*take* time,
3. PG: ita*take* time?
4. Pame: ee lakini *with time* tutakukubali tu. Ata wewe utaanza ku*feel comfortable.*
5. Shiro: tena ina*depend* na njia ume*come* nayo

The English translation:

1. PG: ...like me I have stayed in different residential areas here, and you have seen me for the first time today coming here probably to your group, would you accept that I am one of you if we speak the same way?
2. Shiro: Ahh...it will take time
3. PG: it will take time?
4. Pame: yes, but with time we shall just accept you. Even you, you will begin to feel comfortable.
5. Shiro: again it will depend with the way you have come

From this conversation, we understand that an outsider will have to interact with other members of the *baze* as s/he acquires the network markers identified with the *baze*. In the process s/he relinquishes part of his/her former identity (albeit temporarily) and exposes himself/herself to the hegemonic influence of the *baze* members' linguistic norms. We explain these respondents claims within the communities of practice (e.g Eckert and

McConnell-Ginet (1992, 1999), Bucholtz (1999) and Eckert (2000) where one has to be a members and participate in all other activities, even the non-linguistic ones in order move to the core of the group. The communities of practice, according to Ettiene Wenger, one of its pioneer, is defined as 'a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'. He lists the three components that define a community of practice as:

1. *What it is about*— its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members.

2. *How it functions* — the relationships of *mutual engagements* that bind members together into a social entity.

3. *What capability it has produced*— the *shared repertoire* of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, style, etc.) that members have developed over time.

With regards to the *bazes*, we have seen that the baze-specific variation in Sheng results from the different shades of reality that pervade the narratives of the *baze* members. These narratives are laced with linguistic artifacts manifested by their lexical innovation that results from their shared enterprise as members negotiate meaning. Living together, going to school together, working together, suffering together, looking for jobs, smoking and drinking are just some of the mutual engagements that bind the members of the *baze* together. Their linguistic artifacts cannot be retricted to the issue of synonymy, but also include the words that are used in different discourse types. This is important because the different bazes conduct their discourse in different times and spaces. Consequently, shifting of identities by baze members through the use of lexical material associated with

other *bazes*, as a result of contextual variation, signals participation in other communities of practice at one time in their lives.

Still, it is important to emphasize that although mastery of linguistic code is important, sharing communication code is only one part of the identity project. There are other non-linguistic identity practices that also need to be taken into account. These will be discussed later in the next Chapter, where I will demonstrate how multiple identities of the members are activated and negotiated in the discourse practices of the baze members. But first, I will look at some other elements that are crucial in the diagram of Sheng's variation.

3.9. Other factors responsible for variation in Sheng

Earlier, I pointed out that the various word formation processes in Sheng are a resource exploited by Sheng speakers in enriching its lexical stock. The majority of the coined words do not just happen; rather, they mostly result from the relexicalization of previous lexical items that constitute the raw materials from which new vocabulary is constructed. This follows from the fact that the previous linguistic habits of the speakers (especially with respect to their respective ethnic languages) have been internalized. These internalized linguistic behaviors influence word coinage and manifest themselves in the kind of lexical items preferred by certain groups of speakers. The factors that drive the peculiarity of lexical items in various *bazes* have their background in social, economic, residential, occupational and ethnic bases.

3.9.1. Socioeconomic factors: The south C *baze*

In Chapter 2, I pointed out the socioeconomic disparity between the Eastlands and Westlands areas. According to Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997), the linguistic code in the Westlands is Engsh while Sheng pervades the Eastlands. However, I point out that these two are just a matter of categorical generalization. Strict demarcation between the Eastlands and the Westlands only applies in the original map of Nairobi before the expansions (see figure 2 in Chapter 2). In the current map, there are slums in the West side of Nairobi such as Kangemi, Kawangware and Uthiru. Likewise, we have plush residences in areas east of the CBD. One such area is the South C estate, one of the bazes visited in this study. I expected their variety to be Engsh, but this was not attested in the structural sense, I did find some terms in this baze that were deeply influenced by English, hoever, consider the following examples:

22.

South C baze	*English*	*commonly used word*
yumbus	father	buda, mbuyu
spleng	girl	manzi, shore, dem
shoot	to go	ishia
frush	bad thing	
sneed	bad thing	
chums	money	doo, ganji, chapa, munde

If we follow the idiosyncratic categorization of Sheng varieties along socio-economic lines, we would expect South C to follow along *Engsh* lines. This study only found out this influence in their word coinage. For instance, in the Swahili-based structure, words are forced to abide by the Swahili word formation rules that follow the CVCV phonological structure. Regarding the morphosyntax, the nouns display a *class marker — nominal root — affix* order while verbs follow the *subject marker — tense — verb root — verbal extensions* order. Consonant clusters are also not very common in the Swahili-

based structure; however in the examples I have given above, we find word-final sibilants such as [š, s], nasal [ŋ] and also coronals [t, d]. That is as far as *Engsh* — the English-based structure goes. In narratives, we find the Swahili morphosyntactic template in operation as in the following exchange at the beginning of a story between FF and MM:

FF: ebu washow vile ilienda.
MM: sa inakuwa niaje Friday tunameet hapa nyuma baze. Tulikuwa maboys watatu.
FF: tulikuwa gomba si ndiyo?

Translated as:

FF: just tell them how it went
MM: Now it was just on Friday we were meeting here at the baze. We were three boys
BB: we were chewing khat isn't it?

In this brief excerpt, we witness the syntactic structure as well as some word formation processes that follow the Swahili template. These include dropping of [h] in *ebu* (just), codewitching from Swahili to English *wa-show* 'tell them', *tu-na-meet* 'we normally meet', *ma-boys* 'guys.' We also witness the phonological reduction in *sa* 'now' from the Swahili word *sasa*. This is a clear demonstration that the Swahili structure is very much alive. To explain the ambivalence of these respondents, we notice that in South C, the residents are from the middle class families with better access to the standard language. The prevalence of English vocabulary in their discourse practices shows that although they adopt the Swahili structure, they still set themselves apart from other children in the slums by using these English-based lexical items. I do not completely dismiss the concept of *Engsh* in South C, but I claim that in the above example it is only manifested in word structure.

Whether these youths represent the general trend is not obvious. We see that they are all unemployed youth. They refer to themselves as *'anti-Mababi'*, the term M*ababi* to them meaning their rich employed counterparts. It is possible that the employed youth in South C use English structure in their sentences, though I have no data. Use of Swahili structure as well as English-based words represents the dilemma facing the South C subjects. On the one hand, they identify with other poor unemployed youth in the ghettoes, but, on the other hand, they are born into a middle class privileged lifestyle. This represents a conflict of identities, which is well represented in their linguistic practices. The uniqueness of terms used in South C and other affluent residential areas is evidence that socioeconomic factors are crucial in lexical coinage. I have attributed this to the advantage these residents have in being able to afford quality instruction in English as opposed to the residents of lower class neighborhoods.

3.9.2. Residential factors

Most respondents in the lower class residential areas claim that Sheng from all the ghettoes is similar, and that they can easily adopt features of Sheng used in other *bazes.* Still, they agree that there are some words that they use which are unique to their respective groups. The Kariobangi *baze* for instance, is a run-down residential area whose inhabitants belong to lower social economic class. The subjects (girls) have different words, which are peculiar to their *baze.* If we look at the words they use for 'girl', they are very different from those used in everyday Sheng. The words below were not attested in other *bazes*, even among the other females interviewed in this study.

23.	*Kariobangi (f) baze*	*English*	*common Sheng*
	msupa/chakachaka	girl	manzi, shore dem,
	mafinishing/madusko	butt	rasa
	kizee	boyfriend	chali
	jiweka	eat	dema, dish, manga
	matinye/machungwa	boobs	dashboard, matuzo
	mbaru/maflai	police	gava

In addition, the words *githeri mboga* and *waitherero* are also used by the group to refer to a 'girl'. *Chakachaka* is a South African songbird who is very popular in Kenya, and a role model to lots of girls. This label is consciously selected to point to a very positive image of themselves that the girls would like to project. *Mafinishings* for 'butt' might be an idiom of beauty as in 'finishing' — something that finishes a piece of work as in artwork or handcraft, and to which great attention is paid. It could also be that 'finishing' just refers to the rear part that one can see as a person passes by. Compare this to the Shauri Moyo *baze* (all males), who use the term *chombo cha kazi* 'tool of work', a rather derogatory term for the same reference. The term *machungwa* 'oranges' for breast was not attested in any other estates. I will juxtapose these uses of referential terms when dealing with the construction of gendered selves in the next Chapter. Still, I need to add that the fact that there are some terms that are peculiar in certain neighborhoods does not preclude the use of other terms used in other neighborhoods. However, it is the peculiarity of these terms that shows how neighborhoods can be important factors in lexical coinage as well as discourse practices.

3.9.3. Relevance of occupation in Shengs variation

The lexical items employed by the Shauri Moyo car washers are the clearest manifestation of occupational influence in lexical variation. One example is the word

weng for 'wheel' mentioned earlier, which can be attributed to their daily occupation that deals with vehicles. No other *baze* would require the use of such specialized vocabulary. Other words that display the relationship between lexical items and occupation among Shauri Moyo respondents are *mawamba* 'water' and *mapapa* 'undercarriage of a car'. From this, we can conclude that their discourse revolves around their daily activities such as whether they will get a car to wash, the kind of water to use on a car, places to wash and so on. The lexical items below are a selection of occupation-related terms to demonstrate how economic activity influences the linguistic practices of Shauri Moyo car washers.

24.	ma-papa	undercarriage of a car
	ma-weng	car wheels
	ku-duwacha	work
	ku-funga kazi	close work
	ku-pamba	do a shoddy job

The coined words among the Shauri Moyo guys help communicate meaning in the course of their work. Take *ku-funga kazi* for instance, the literal meaning of the term is 'to close work'. However, in their interaction, it does not mean closing work in the transparent sense, it usually mean getting a lot of money from a certain job as payment compensation, which is enough to take care of the whole day; worth a normal day's earnings. Consider also the word *ku-pamba*; if we get rid of the infinitive marker *ku-*, it means to 'cover' or 'adorn' in Swahili, but in Shauri Moyo *baze*, its meaning is accessed at the metaphorical level. It exploits the metaphor of covering to mean doing work for show only while actually doing a shoddy job hence 'metaphorically covering' the eyes of the person who gave them the job.

3.9.4. Ethnicity as a factor

The dominant ethnic group influences local varieties. According to Eckert (2000:22), if a specific ethnic group dominates the local marketplace, local forms will derive from the ethnic repertoire. This has also been pointed out by Githiora (2002), who noted the heavy influence of Gikuyu on Sheng varieties in Githurai and Uthiru areas. If an ethnic group is dominant in a certain neighborhood, the influence of its language on the Sheng variety spoken there is enormous. Since ethnicity is not subject to negotiation, it constrains the kind of identity practices that go on. In Kibera *baze* for instance, there is heavy use of Swahili in their Sheng coinage, which can be attributed to its ethnic composition. My subjects in Kibera were all from the Nubian ethnic group, the majority of whom are Muslims. I have already pointed out the affinity between Kiswahili and Islam, such that to accept Islam is to accept Kiswahili, as argued by Habwe (2000). Kibera, being a Muslim enclave[32], is likely to exhibit this trend. Interestingly, the construction of ethnic identity among the subjects in the Kibera *baze* is not conducted using an ethnic language like Nubian as expected, but through Kiswahili, the national language, due to its religious importance. The following words will serve as examples:

25.

Kibera baze	*English*	*common Sheng*
jaza gauge/zuia	eat	manga, dema
sheikh	father	buda, mbuyu
zama/ruka	to go	ishia
manga	steal/eat	manga
msumbiji, maangola	thieves	dingo/gondi

[32] Other examples of Muslim enclaves in Nairobi include Kawangware and Majengo. In these Muslim enclaves a coastal version of standard Swahili is spoken. Indeed some of the Shauri Moyo respondents, while saying that their Sheng is the best in 'the whole of the world', claimed that they admired the Majengo version of Sheng.

In Standard Swahili, *jaza* means fill, hence they use the word *jaza gauge* for 'eating', or filling the stomach. On the other hand we notice *zama* 'drown' and *ruka* 'jump' are used for 'go'. Although the 'eat' reading of *manga* is widespread in all *bazes*, its 'stealing' reading was only specific to Kibera. Notice also that Ma-Angola 'the Angolans' and Msumbiji 'Mozambique,' are names commonly used to denote people who are always fighting. Msumbiji recalls the *Frelimo* movement in Mozambique's war of independence and has been appropriated in Kenya to denote a dissident group that was fighting to overthrow the government especially in the late 1980s[33]. The metaphorical use of these terms to denote anti-social activities is quite striking, and in my study only attested in Kibera. This semantic shift from Standard Swahili shows that although subjects in Kibera *baze* also use lexical items widely used in Nairobi, it is possible to stylize others who do not use the Sheng terms that they use or with a meaning different from theirs. Ambiguity in Sheng and its place in identity will be revisited in the next Chapter.

To sum up this section on factors that drive lexical variation in this study, we bear in mind that identity practices in different *bazes* are manifested in the nature of discourse types, which is in turn dependent on the social reality of the members of these *bazes*. Social and economic influences surface in the lexical coinage by subjects in the South C *baze* as a result of their privileged status, which endows them with the linguistic capital

[33] This is what the president said in a public gathering, but according to Danson Esese (personal communication) the Msumbiji issue was a very complex one. Basically, it was a gang of well-organized robbers with very sophisticated weapons. The group mostly operated from Luanda in Western Kenya and was composed of unemployed people and former police and military officers who had been dismissed from the service. The group terrorized the area residents in the middle of the night and the police seemed to be helpless when it came to dealing with them. It is possible that when the Kibera respondents used this term, they used it in the sense of thives and not the political connotation associated with it.

of the authoritative language — English. Residential areas also come into play because different residential areas have their own different realities. If we take language as a social construct, then it is not surprising that lexical coinage is subject to the dictates of the social environment. In addition, occupation as a part of the people's daily reality provides a background that results in different lexical terms. Finally, we find that Sheng borrows from different languages, and is highly accommodative to new lexical items. In a multilingual environment, it cannot avoid the infiltration of words borrowed from the ethnic languages of the speakers. All these factors do not act in isolation and are characterized by various instances of overlap. For instance, the coinage of novel vocabulary by subjects of a certain residential area might be as much the result of ethnic composition as by the occupation or socio-economic orientation of the members.

In this Chapter, I have attempted to present the diagram of Sheng's variation. I began by discussing the templates in which Sheng as a linguistic code is based. I also discussed variation in Sheng by showing how lexical items are created. From selected lexical items, variation that bred synonymy was attributed to the linguistic word formation processes available to the speakers of Sheng. Synonymy was also attributed to the fact that there are convergence points, such as schools and some *bazes,* where the different lexical variables are used. Although there were dominant variables for every lexical item, the existence of other variables, though not very widely used, was regarded as a pointer to the use of these words among different group of speakers. Finally, other factors that promote lexical variation in different bazes were examined. These factors were tied to the word formation processes discussed in earlier section of this Chapter.

In the next Chapter, I will return to the theme of identity construction by discussing both discourse and non-discourse activities that are involved in the identity projects. I will argue that the multifaceted identity of Sheng speakers in Nairobi, and in different bazes in particular, is a combination of their social practices, some of which are non-linguistic, and that linguistic features are overt manifestations of how these practices are negotiated and preformed.

Chapter 4

Lexical choices, discourse and other discursive practices in the Construction of identity

4. Introduction

In the previous Chapter, I outlined variation in Sheng. I traced the variation in terms of structure, demonstrated specific lexical variation, and explained how such variation comes about. I then focused on the speakers and argued that the reason variation arises is due to the fact that the speakers come from different areas of Nairobi and belong to different social categories. In this Chapter, I demonstrate how lexical items function as 'identity cards' (Macaulay 1997) of members of a given *baze*. Taking *bazes* as the reference points, I will discuss how individuals, both insiders and outsiders, negotiate their place, either at the core or the periphery of the group, through conscious or non-conscious choice of certain lexical items. I will discuss the concept of negotiation and positioning within Bell's audience design framework (1984, 1991, and 1999) that looks at how speakers modify their speech to approximate that of the audience with whom they wish to identify.

I begin by looking at words as linguistic signs and discuss the relevance of semantic and lexical variation in identity in Section 1. This Section will look at variation in lexical usage according to age, gender and other different categories and how different lexical items are given the signification that draws the 'us' vs. 'them' distinction. In Section 2, I will discuss how certain labels are used in different bazes with different senses, and how an out-group term can be used positively within an in-group. Section 3 will discuss the performance of multiple identities in spontaneous discourse and how and why speakers of certain *baze*-specific varieties of Sheng accommodate to other varieties.

In Section 4, I will discuss how different identities are performed through the use of vernacular discourse. I will argue that vernacular discourse is an in-group activity because it involves shared background that may not make sense to an outsider. Section five will examine other non-linguistic ways of constructing identity, which act in combination with linguistic varieties to complete the identities of Sheng speakers. In Section 6, I will discuss other discourse sites such as the internet, popular culture, and mass media, and how Sheng is used in these alternative discourse sites to construct certain identities. Section seven will conclude the Chapter by discussing the relationship between people's attitudes towards other varieties of Sheng and their identity. I summarize the Chapter in Section 8.

4.1. Lexical items as linguistic signs and symbols

Saussure (1959: 16) conceived of language as a system of signs in a semiological system. He conceived of the linguistic sign as the union of a concept and a sound image (65-67). Rather than looking at the sound image in phonetic terms, he saw it as a psychological imprint of the sound or the impression it makes on our senses. Put differently, the sound image is the *signifier* while the concept is the *signified.* Saussure also pointed out that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Just as one signified can be represented by more that one signifier (synonymy), a single signifier can be associated with more than one signified (ambiguity) as will be discussed below. In fact, this discussion of ambiguity will serve as my verification of Hypothesis 2.

4.1.1. Ambiguity, *bazes* and identity

Like synonymy — semantic relations where different wirds have the same meaning which I discuseed in Chapter 3, semantic relations in which a single word bears different meanings (ambiguity) are importants marker of identity also. If a *baze* can construct its identity by using different structural elements, it can also construct its identity by using different semantic elements. In this section, I will examine how a similar form is interpreted differently in different bazes. I begin with Samper's (2002) examples of *magong'o*, *shore* and *sanganga*. According to Samper, the meaning of these words varied according to estates;

26.	magong'o	a stupid person, male or female, in Kayole
		a lazy person in Umoja,
		a stupid girl in Mbotela
	shore	a cute girl in Kayole,
		an illiterate girl in Jericho,
		derogatory for stupid girl in Majengo
	sanganga	buttocks in Majengo,
		gold in Umoja

[Umoja, Mbotela, Kayole, Jericho and Majengo are residential estates in Nairobi's Eastlands (some of these estates are not shown in figure 3)

Out of Samper's three words, the only word that I obtained was *shore*, and it failes to display the semantic variation that he noted. Instead, the Ngara respondents claimed that *shore* was a term used in Ubabini. However, I got other ambiguous words such as;

27.	mubatari	policeman as used by manamba,
		manamba as used by Sinai girls
	manyake	women (South C) women and/or butt as used in Ngara
		butt and/or female genitalia as used in Sinai
	manga	eat and /or sexual intercourse, especially as used in Sinai
		steal as used in in Kibera
	kizee	boyfriend as used in Kariobangi and Sinai
		father as used in Shauri Moyo and Kibera
	ghetto	slums as used in the majority of bazes
		house as used in Kabete

According to Mbugua (2004), policemen are referred to as *a-batari* (the needy people) by the matatu crew because of their persistent habit of extorting bribes from them. Ironically, the same matatu men who are regular clients of the prostitutes in Sinai are referred to as the needy. *Nyake* (meat in Sheng) is derived from the Swahili word *nyama* with similar meaning. With the addition of the pluralizing prefix *ma-*, its semantics has changed over time, initially referring to big butts before the meaning extended to women with big butts. The popularity of the song *'Juala'* by Circuite and Jo-el extended its meaning further to female genitals. *Manga*, a Romance borrowing, is a widely used term for 'eating', but the Sinai women used it to refer to having sex. The sense 'stealing' by the Kibera respondents was new to me and to the best of my knowledge only unique to Kibera baze. *Ki-zee*[34] is a modification of *m-zee*, a Swahili word for 'elder' or 'old man'. In Kenyan upcountry Swahili, *m-zee* is used by women to refer to their husbands, and by the children to refer to their fathers. It seems that in the course of the innovation of this term, its extended semantics were transferred such that the use of *kizee* for boyfriend mirrors the use of *m-zee* for husband. While *ghetto* generally refers to the 'slums', its 'dwelling place' sense in the Kabete baze is hardly surprising, considering that Kabete is an informal settlement where most of the houses are in all respect ghettos. We also note that *m-dosi* and *dongera*, the two terms that normally refer to 'boss' or a 'rich person', are also used to mean 'father' in South C. This can be understond in the context that most of the fathers in South C are indeed rich, literally.

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[34] *Ki* is a class 7 nominal prefix (see footnote 4 on nominal prefixes). While this nominal class is generally referred to as the class of 'things' it also includes all the Swahili diminutives formely in nominal class 13. In this case, *mzee*, a class 1 animate, goes to class 7 as a diminuitive. Sometimes, diminutives are used to indicate the primitive state of something; but they are also be used in an affective sense.

The cases I have cited might not all be considered as typical cases of ambiguity. This is because a lexical item might not be ambiguous in one specific *baze*; however, this still presents a problem to an outsider who wishes to gain admission in a baze and might use the term with a completely different signification. In fact, ambiguity is a very useful devise, because where different senses for a word exist in the same *baze*, outsiders will easily be cut off from a discourse when ambiguous terms are used to signify something other that what outsiders expected. For the *baze* members themselves, however, familiar discourse and shared meaning disambiguate polysemous words. Since meaning making is a common engagement tied to the group's identity, ambiguity will reflect different hierarchies depending on how group members decode ambiguous words.

4.1.2 Age determined interaction

Since Sheng is extensively associated with young persons, I begin the investigation by discussing the relationship between variation and age. The two important issues are whether the use of Sheng exhibits an age dependent pattern, and whether there are lexical varieties associated with different age groups. Previous studies (e.g., Samper 2002, Kangethe 2004:64) have pointed out that Sheng is used as a language of youth identity, but they also add that its age domain is always expanding (Githiora 2002:160, Kangethe 2004:64). In this study Shiro, a respondent from Kariobangi, claimed that her parents understood and spoke Sheng. Likewise, Kui, a respondent from Sinai, claimed that her grandmother was very competent in Sheng. This calls for an investigation of the categorical differences in the use of Sheng according to age.

In order to know who the students normally spoke Sheng with, I asked them to underline all that applied from the following list: friends, brothers and sisters, parents, teachers, policemen, anybody (see Q 8 appendix). Below is the summary.

Friends	189 out of 212 or 89.1%
Brothers & sisters	128 out of 212 or 60.3%
Anybody	25 out of 212 or 11.8%

We see that 89% of the students speak Sheng with friends and 60% with their kin, but not with parents, teachers or policemen. Only a small percentage (12%) claimed to speak Sheng with just anybody. These results are exactly what we anticipated. We assume here that the friends and brothers and sisters belong to the same age group. Recall from Chapter 3, that my student respondents' ages range between 11 and 19 years, but we expect parents, teachers and policemen to be much older. When I asked students to underline the people with whom they would not interact in Sheng from the list of parents, teachers, friends, policemen and nobody. I got the following results:

Parents	130 out of 212 or 61.3%
Teachers	133 out of 212 or 62.7%
Policemen	105 out of 212 or 49.5%

Although we can extend the argument above that the majority of the students would not speak Sheng with parents, teachers and policemen due to age difference, I prefer to view these data by what they do not show directly. It is very significant that nearly 40% of the students (N=212) would speak Sheng with their parents or teachers, while approximately 50% would do so with policemen. This might seem to counter my argument above that use of Sheng is restricted to people of similar age groups and that people of different age groups do not interact in Sheng. However things become clearer when we recognize that

speakers exploit Sheng's variation to interact with different categories of people according to the prevailing contexts.

Use of Sheng across age categories can be explained by exploiting Samper's (2002) distinction between *deep* and *basic* Sheng. If basic Sheng only requires bilingual knowledge of English and Swahili, then it is not surprising that parents and teachers speak Sheng, at least the basic version. When the students say that they speak Sheng with these people, they probably refer to the Swahili-English code-mixing that characterizes the everyday speech practices of the Nairobi people rather than the specialized in-group variety that they normally use among close friends. According to Samper, the primary purpose of deep Sheng which contains very little English and is highly coded is to obfuscate and confuse non-group members (p. 8). On the other hand, basic Sheng 'employs lexical and phrasal codeswitching and slang without the complex semantic shifts, relexification and syntactical changes' (p. 8). The examples below from Samper (2002) distinguish deep (a) from basic (b) Sheng:

28. a. Na-taka ku- m- kat- i- a hu- yu vi-pepe
1sg-*want* inf-om-*cut*-appl-fv dem-1sg 8-*butterfly*
I want to flirt with this girl(p. 6)

b. I'll do everything hata ma-sikio ni- ta- ku-ramb-a
I'll do everything *even* 6sm-*ear* 1sg-fut-om-*lick*- fv
I'll do everything; including licking your ears. (p. 7)

It is also probable that the parents generally use a variety that has gone out of fashion, since they have moved out of Sheng networks, which in effect alienates them from the institution of Sheng's innovation. As a result, they are unable to keep up with new

innovations and remain in generational or social 'relic areas'[35]. The concept of *oldskool*, which I discuss below, further clarifies this age-determined variation in Sheng.

4.1.3. Signifiers of identity: frozen in *oldskool*

It is possible in many societies to tell the generation of a person by looking at the kind of slang words that a person uses. This also applies to Sheng, where words fall into disuse as soon as they become widely known (Mbugua 2003). New generations of Sheng speakers coin their own vocabulary to reflect their users' reality. Words of yesteryears are no longer regarded as 'cool' since they have been neutralized through constant use. Just the way it is possible to identify a Sheng speaker's residential area by the lexical items that s/he uses, it is also possible to tell one's generation by paying attention to the lexical items that a person uses. KJ's quote below in Samper (2004) illustrates this fact;

> "[y]ou never realize just how much 'Sheng' changes until you meet that shady guy talking the 'Sheng' of the eighties!" (K.J. 2003) then the shady guy is quoted as saying to a young fellow "*...hiyo moti ya ponyii ilikacha mbio kama dush ikanipita kama na-buy puruu. Ilikuwa inafukuza mgodii ule alikuwa ameiba bano* ['that police car dashed like bird and passed me buying sweet. It was chasing the thief that stole bananas] (p 147, *translations mine*)

In the quote above, *moti* (clipped from motor-car) seems to have gone out of fashion and is replaced by *dinga*, *ndae* or *murenga*. *Ponyi* (policeman) has also gone out of fashion and is replaced by the more popular terms *mabeast*, *karao,* or *magava*. In addition *mgodii* (thief) has other variants like *mdingo*, and *mgosa* (see my list of lexical variations for

[35] Areas excluded from new innovation. Old linguistic features persist in spite of the fact that new forms are used in the surrounding areas (see Downes 1998). The term is used here to refer to the social isolation of older folks who are unable to master the innovative Sheng features being used all around them by the youth.

'car' 'thief' and 'police' in Chapter 3). Such people, who continue to use words that are out of fashion, are considered *oldskool.*

Some lexical items that are considered *oldskool* in one baze can still be in use in a different *baze.* Consider *buda* and *mbuyu*, the two leading terms for 'father'. In Chapter 3, we saw that *mbuyu* was used by 56% of the students compared to its competitor *buda* at 29%. *Buda* then can be considered to be drifting towards *oldskool*, at least as far as its use among school students is concerned. When we come to the *bazes* themselves, we find that some *bazes* have a preference for certain terms. In Makadara *baze* for instance *buda* is the preferred word for 'father', but respondents in Ngara *baze* preferred *mbuyu* instead of *buda,* saying*; ah 'buda' hiyo ilikwisha* 'ah *buda*, that one died out'. When I pointed out that Makadara people were still using *buda*, they said it depended on the place and when they acquired it. The existence of some different lexical items for a single referent can be attributes to the fact that some people remain frozen in *oldskool.*

Coming back to KJ's claim above, we note that the Sheng speakers who know about current Sheng and who have abandoned *oldskool* terms in favor of the trendy ones will easily draw the distinction between themselves and those who retain *oldskool* terms. Using an *oldskool* term in a baze points to the position one occupies in a baze in a particular interactional context. One risks losing face for not being trendy through continued used of the *oldskool* terms, as Mosh, a respondent fron the Ngara baze does when he gives the *oldskool* word *moti* for 'car':

Josh: kuna *ndai*,
PG: kuna lingine? (pause)
Mosh: *moti*
Josh: aa duh! (laughs) hapana *moti* ni ya kitambo
Mosh: lazima... (unclear)

Otish: *moti* ni go
Josh: *moti* ni go, hapana, tunaita tu *ndai*

Translated as

Josh: there is *ndai*
PG: is there another one? (pause)
Mosh: *moti*
Josh: aa duh! (laughs) no, *moti* is an old one
Mosh: it has to... (unclear)
Otish: *moti* is gone
Josh: *moti* is gone, no we only call it *ndai*

I had asked them to give me the names they used for car and although it was Mosh who originally suggested *ndai*, he was later derided by his Mabeshte for suggesting *moti*, a word they no longer use. In this instance then, he can be regarded as having moved to the periphery of the baze and taken the identity of an outsider, most likely an older person. His attempt to explain is blocked by his mates who say that they only use *ndai*. He is able to reclaim his face when I asked for their other terms, and he quickly volunteers a term and is supported by his *Mabeshte*. This episode demonstrates that one can shift from 'new school' to 'oldskool', but such shifts that deviate from a group's interactional norms must be checked because they threaten the prevailing identity of the group. A group that uses *oldskool* terms risks losing their esteem among other Sheng users, as was the case with the Shauri Moyo respondents who regarded the variety of their Makongeni counterparts as 'childish' and 'weak' because ther Sheng variety contained words that they (Shauri Moyo) had already abandoned. It is in this context that we view Josh and Otish's rejection of Mosh's *oldskool* term *moti*.

Oldskool also expresses a very outdated claim as regards Sheng. In the cartoon strip *Head on corrishon* (Oct 3 2004), KJ draws a caricature of an old man standing on the railroad track in front of the on-coming "Sheng express" train shouting frantically

'stop this thing'. An arrow indicates that this *mbuyu* (father, old man) is *oldskool*. The reason *mbuyu* is referred to as *oldskool* is because he has fallen behind the times. Opposing Sheng is an outdated and useless engagement that is associated with old people. Sheng as a reality in Kenya cannot be stopped or wished away. KJ later makes the following statements in *Vile 2naifeel* 'the way we see it'

> Hakuna lugha ***mavijanaa*** wana understand na wanaweza ***ku-communicate*** nayo bila ***pressure*** ya sheng! Hiyo ni ***reality*** [*there is no language the youth can understand and can communicate without pressure apart from Sheng! That is the reality*]
>
> Kwamba hii ni lugha ambayo mizizi yake ishajikita kwa ***hii society*** na hakuna mtu anaweza ***kui-wish away*** [*that this is a language whose roots are deeply fixed in this society and nobody can wish it away*]
>
> ***Lyrical revolution*** inanuka na ***official language*** yake ni Sheng! Itakuwa ni ***poa*** kama hautajiweka mbele ya ***hiyo wave*** isije ***ikaku-sweep away***! [*lyrical revolution can be scented and its official language is Sheng. It is better if you will not put yourself in front of that wave lest it sweeps you away*!]
>
> ***Tume-learn*** hii lugha mtaani. Mtu yeyote angetaka tujue lugha ingine hakuwepo wakati mtaa ukitufundisha hii lugha.[*we have learnt this language in the neighborhood. Anyone who had wanted us to learn a different language wasn't there when the neighborhood was teaching us this language*]

In these cartoon strips, KJ normally identifies himself with *ma-vi-janaa*[36] (the youth). He portrays the reality about Sheng and then shows that Sheng is unstoppable, just like the old man cannot stop a moving train. Pleas to ban Sheng were constantly expressed in the 1980s and 1990s when Sheng was so stigmatized, but such calls have waned. Therefore a

[36] *Vi-janaa* is a Swahili noun which is already pluralized with the class 8 prefix. Futher pluralization with the class 6 prefix renders it a case of double morphology. From Myers-Scottons 4-M model (2002) double morphology in codeswitching occurs because the system morphemes of the donor and receipient language are activated at different levels, some early and others late. This one is a clear illustration that even when the words externally appear as Swahili, the identity of the morphosyntax cannot always be regarded as an indicator that a single system is in operation.

person who still thinks they can stop Sheng is using the reasoning of the 80s and 90s, hence the label *oldskool*.

I have used the frequency of variants for *mbuyu* and *buda* to determine what is *oldskool* or not; however, I must point out that this is not always a good diagnostic test. Current Sheng words that are used in mainstream discourse, though not *oldskool*, are a threat to group identity. Considering that Sheng is valued by its speakers for the transmission of coded messages, we cannot always say that what is trendy in general is also trendy in different *bazes*. I quoted Mbugua's claim that Sheng words fall into disuse as soon as they become widely known. What is trendy at the mainstream level does not imply it is trendy in the in-group circle. Indeed what is trendy at the mainstream level might be *oldskool* for the group. Consider the word for 'to go,' where 133 students out of 212 or 62.7% gave *ishia* as its Sheng equivalent, but most South C respondents claimed that *ishia* was *oldskool*. The fact that the South C *baze* preferred to use *kukaa teke*, *kudondoka*, *kushoot* and *kuinua* not only support the claim that identity is constructed in smaller social units, but also that popular Sheng terminology, though not *oldskool*, cannot function as identity markers of small groups.

The case of Mosh's use of *moti* cited above should serve as a reminder that however innovative a social group is, *oldskool* will always be lurking in the background. When defending himself from the accusation of using *oldskool* terms by his buddies, a South C respondent said "*oldskool haiwezi kosa...yaani huwanga*" 'you can't avoid *oldskool*...it is always there'. The reason for *oldskool* surfacing in speech interactions can be attributed to the fact that people need it to interact with their interlocutors who are still frozen in *oldskool*. These include people such as brothers and sisters or parents who do

not belong to their networks. The surfacing of *oldskool* terms in dynamic groups indicates the fluid nature of the bazes, and also the multiple identities of baze members, who have to interact with people outside their bazes in a variety of contexts. We must also bear in mind that some baze members are themselves former users of those *oldskool* terms when they were in vogue.

4.1.4. Gender signifiers: revisiting variation in gender terms

Like age, sex is one of the more important categories in language choice studies. I noted above that males relish constructing the category of women with many descriptive terms, which are in most cases derogatory; we also find, however, that the women do not allow themselves to be defined by the men all the time. They give themselves more positive labels, which keep them still within the Sheng discourse. The signification that the males attach to their labels is modified when women apply them. We thus note that while there are terms that cut across gender lines, there are others that are more apt to be employed by a certain gender.

One popular view is that women have been at the periphery of Sheng discourse. This would explain why we have had so many terms that refer to women while we have very few that refer to their male counterparts. In this study, I asked primary and secondary school students to give me the names they use for mothers. There were 27 names for mother as compared to 18 for father. Some of these variants are not important since they simply deviate from other terms in a minimal way. This could be due to the fact that the young people who speak Sheng construct parents almost the same way. Were

the parents participants in Sheng discourse, then there could have been variation arising from how men construct women through the labels they use and vise versa.

This changes when we look at the labels for boys as compared to those for girls. There were 45 variants of the term for girls as compared to 23 for boys. This is a clear pointer to who does the labeling in these cases. Interestingly, most variants for 'boy' are derived from generic vocabulary, while those for 'girl' are mostly descriptive, some with very negative connotations. Below are variants' frequencies for 'boy':

Word	Variant's frequencies
Boy	beshte 1, boi 6, boy 1, boyboy 1, boyii 1, bro 1, chali 178, charty 1, dume 1, hommie 1, huyu boy 1, jamaa 8, kaboy 1, kijana 1, licha 1, mdhi 1, mru 1, msee 3, mthi 1, muthee 1, muthii 1, mzee 1, ndaume 1

Table 5. Frequency of variants for the word 'boy'

Since Sheng lacks a standardized grammar, the orthography is usually left to the speakers whims. As as result, we end up having variants which are not variants at all. If we assume that very similar items result from the mismatch between phonology and orthography, then a real picture of the variant will emerge by careful reclassification of these labels by collapsing the phonologically or morphologically related words.

(i)	boy (11)	boi, boy, boyii, boyboy, huyu boy, kaboy
(ii)	muthii (3)	muthii, mthi, mdhi
(iii)	msee (3)	msee, muthee, mzee
(iv)	chali (179)	chali, charty
(v)	dume (2)	dume, ndaume.
(vi)	beshte (1)	
(vii)	bro (1)	
(viii)	jamaa (1)	
(ix)	kijana (1)	
(x)	licha (1)	
(xi)	mru (1)	
(xii)	hommie (1)	

This leaves us with only 12 lexical variants. The term *chali* by 179 respondents is almost unanimous, and there is only a slight attempt at syllabic inversion in *licha*, which could be grouped with it. Apart from *muthii* and *msee*, which in Sheng refer to 'people', and *beshte* 'friend,' all other terms are ordinary borrowings without change in meaning. This can be seen in the Swahili words *dume* 'male' *jamaa* 'person' and *kijana* 'boy'as well as *bro* and *hommie* which are most likely borrowed from the AAVE/hip-hop terms *bro* and *homey*. *Hommie* might as well be from English slang *homie*, disguised by the addition of an extra *m*. There is no information about the origin of the term *mru* (and it might be a misspelling of Swahili *mtu* 'person'). However, we can say that, generally, the terms for 'boy' are positive or neutral and probably come from the boys referring to each other. Otherwise, how would you explain the use of *mzee* 'old man,' a Swahili title of respect? We note that no terms bear any negative connotation. In stark contrast, names for girls are legion, and very diverse, even if we attempt to collapse them. This can be seen in the variant frequencies in Table (6) below;

Word	Frequency
Girl	azguoba 1, bogola 1, buss 1, chibela 3, chik 1, chile 3, cholosa 2, dame 3, **dem 36,** gala 1, gwaru 1, hoe 1, jaba 1, kemfaa 1, kenta 1, kff 1, kichuna 1, kidalipo 1, mama 1, man 1, mandu 1, ma-nyake 2, **manzi 132,** mbas 1, mbus 5, miogar 1, m-losho 1, m-resh 1, m-roro 13, m-she 3, m-shi 5, m-susu 2, m-tasi 1, m-toi 1, m-toto 2, nyambizi 1, nyang'we 1, nzima 1, roro 1, **shore 17**, shwala 1, siste 2, supuu 1, toto 1, wanyina 1

Table 6. Frequency of variants for the word 'girl'

In the terms that refer to girls, we still retain a large number of variables, even after applying the rule of collapsing phonologically close ones. Only 5 can be collapsed; these are:

mbus (7)	mbus, buss, mbas
mtoto (4)	mtoto, mtoi, toto
mroro(14)	mroro, roro
mshe (8)	mshe, mshi
dem (39)	dem, dame

After collapsing these terms, we are still left with 33 variants, with *manzi* being the lexical choice of 132 respondents. *Dem* with 39 tokens comes in a distant second while *shore* with 17 tokens comes in third. In a majority of cases, a variant appears only once, indicating the intensity of coinage or the variation within speakers' codes. If this is the case, then we can say that while there is a variety spoken by the majority, variation that cuts across speakers of different gender categories exists.

4.1.5. Definition by the other: derogatory gender metaphors

Coming back to the lexical construction of gender, we find that even though we might lack the resources to decode the semantics of most of these variables, the fact that they exhibit such diverse variation from the ordinary terms for 'girl' in mainstream languages is telling — that coining of terms for girls is an ongoing process. Unlike the terms for boys, terms for girls are descriptive and are not the general terms. The in vogue label *manyake* for instance, is derived from the former Sheng word *nyake*, itself a derivation from Swahili *nyama* 'meat'. Thanks to the song *manyake* by the local rap duo of Circuite and Jo-el, the term has spread with a variety of meanings. At times it may refer to plump women who have a lot of flesh. However, it is also used to refer to a woman's butt. At the extreme, it refers to the female genitals. Whether *hoe* is 'whore' in disguise or colloquial *hoe* is derogatory because it bands all girls together and comments about their sexual promiscuity is not an issue because it is derogatory no matter how it is construed. It is not

clear whether reference to girls as *mtoto*, 'baby' is affectionate in the diminutive sense or derogatory.

Interesting too is the way girls are metaphorically constructed through the generalization of one aspect of their physique. The butt and the breasts are the two parts of a woman's body that are labeled with a large number of variables. *Manyake* above gives a good illustration. In the Kabete *baze* for instance, *cianda* is a Dholuo borrowing that refers to butt, but its plural counterpart (*macianda)* could refer to women. In the excerpt below, the Kabete respondents tell the researcher that labels for women are descriptive.

1. Karis: ...unajua kwa hawa wasichana utakuta...unajua ile shape yake ndiyo itam-describe
2. PG: enhe
3. Karis: ...hata pengine ako na titi kubwa utasikia watu wakimwita Tuzo.
4. PG: Tuzo?
   (laughter)
5. PG: Tuzo ni yule ana matiti?
6. Karis: mmh
   (laughter)
7. Dau: yaani inatokana na si unajua hii factory ya maziwa hii ya Tuzo?
8. PG: Ooo ooo ooo ooo!
   (laughter)
9. Dau:...ako amebeba the whole factory. (laughs)

Translation:

1. Karis: ...you know for these girls, you will find that their shape is the one that will describe them
2. PG: enhe?
3. Karis: ...like maybe she has large breasts, you will hear people calling her Tuzo
4. PG: Tuzo?
   (laughter)
5. PG: Tuzo refers to the one with breasts?
6. Karis: mmh
   (laughter)
7. Dau: that is, it derives from, you know this milk factory called Tuzo?

8. PG: Ooo ooo ooo ooo!
   (laughter)
9. Dau: she has carried the whole factory (laughs)

Having been out of the country for some time, I was unaware of the existence of *Tuzo* milk factory. My inability to make the obvious connection aroused giggles from the members of this group. The similarity between the term *matuzo* and *KCC* (Kenya Co-operative Creameries), another giant dairy company, as used by the Kariobangi and other respondents in Nairobi, is quite striking. The fact that physical characteristics play a big role in the way women are perceived shows how gender is constructed by the men in the Sheng speaking areas. The Ngara subjects who used the term *matyre* from the English word *tyre* to refer to an undesirable girl validate this argument. The metaphor of the car tyre is used to comment on bulging flesh.

With this wealth of terminology, we can say with certainty that the category 'girl' is in most cases constructed by the males in their discourses rather than by the females themselves. Male dominance in the use of Sheng has also defined how the women who speak Sheng are perceived in society. Commenting on the gender disparity in the use of Sheng, Samper (2003: 154-155) wrote:

> Men derive cultural capital from the use of Sheng (see below), but women lose those benefits. Sheng for men is a source of interpersonal power, and women's avoidance of it reflects women's lack of power in Kenyan society. Friedman and Todd 1994 argue that women in Kenya lack personal power because girls are socialized to be silent, subservient to men, and not to voice their needs. Moreover, the socioeconomic condition in Kenya and the enduring strength of traditional gender roles make it impossible for women to change their current low status of their interpersonal power. Sheng could change this perception, but the patriarchal symbolic order closes this avenue of access to symbolic power by equating women's skillful use of Sheng with prostitution and low moral values. In these terms, Sheng does not carry the same advantage for women as it does men.

This asymmetry explains the reasons behind women's low participation in Sheng, which results in a virtually one way coinage of gender-descriptive terms. But women need not cede their right to define themselves passively. They also try to alter the existing power relations by creating an identity different from the way they are categorized by the men through the coinage and use of labels that portray their identity more favorably. In the next section, I will discuss how women contest these categorized identities by paying attention to some of the lexical terms for different parts of women's bodies.

4.1.6. Rejecting negative identity by contesting derogatory gender labels

Using positive labels for self-reference within an in-group is one way of contesting the negative labels by the out-group. I have shown how women are given many terms by their male counterparts, many of which are derogatory. I will now show how women contest the negative identity given them by men by using labels that are more acceptable. When talking about the peculiarity of lexical terms in certain *bazes,* I pointed at selected labels that focus on certain parts of their anatomy. I will here look at the terms for 'girl,' 'butt' and 'breasts.' In table 5, below, I show the terms used by the women compared to the ones used by the men.

Most of the names for 'butt' are borrowings from the Swahili or local languages, though we have some that are borrowed directly from English. The majority of these names imply massiveness, either the admirable size or a despised one. Also important is that the majority of these terms refer to the female butt while the male butt goes by the widespread term *rasa,* although *rasa* can also refer to female butt. Women generally do not have many names for 'butt'; we note that when they use *ma-tina*, borrowed from

Gikuyu with similar meaning, it lacks the negative connotation inherent in the labels used by men. However, when the Gikuyu slang *ma-thutha* or Swahili slang *ma-nyuma* is used to refer to butt, they become gender circumscribed as well as laden with negative connotations. In Chapter 3, I said that *ma-finishing* could be viewed in an aesthetic sense — delicate and beautiful, as in finishing in furniture or artwork. It might as well be literal, i.e., the rear of the woman's body. However, we note that whichever way we look at it, it does not bear as negative a connotation as the other terms used by males. The pervasiveness of the prefix ma-[37] in these terms is striking

Notice too that the women preferred to use *maduda* and *madusko* for 'butt,' both derived from the Gikuyu slang *mathutha. P*honological modification has yielded one of the variant *maduda*. A root *madu-* is then extracted from *maduda,* which is then suffixed with *-sko* to derive the other variable *madusko*. This seems to strip *ma-thutha* of the negativity it bears when used by the males. Table 7 below presents some of these terms with their source and meaning, as used by different genders.

[37] The ma-prefix — according to Ashton (1969:65), some f the semantics of the ma-prefix are (a) the names of things that occur in quantities but which may be thought of singly, (b) words expressing an amplicative idea and (c) words that express a collective idea. We may assume that the derogatory sense of these terms follows from the augmentative semantics of the ma-prefix. But augmentations may not always be negative. Think of the terms *Mabeshte* for 'best friends' or 'close buddies' where augmentation is actually positive. The semantics of the words must therefore be taken on a case-by-case basis, especially considering that there are other semantics of the class 6 nouns.

Name	Women (self) labels	Male terms (other) labels
Butt	ma-finishings, ma-tina [G butt], ma-duda, madu-sko, [GS ma-thutha, butt]	ma-tyre, ma-nyake [S. meat], ma-cianda [Dh. Butt], carrier, mudguard, nyungu [S. pot], ma-sitting allowance, chombo cha kazi [S work tool], ma-thutha [GS. butt], ma-nyuma [S. behind], manyu [see nyuma], ma-ketho ma-loso [Dh-butt?]
Girl	waitherero [proper name] chakachaka[proper name], msupa [unknown]	ma-nyake[meat Sh], m-toto [baby], first lady, kitu yangu[S my thing], ma-ketho ma-loso [Dh but?] , wifey, ma-cianda [Dh butt], matyre
Breast	ma-chungwa[S oranges], ma-tinyo [S matiti=breasts]	KCC, ma-tuzo[milt factory], number plate, ma-earphones

[Key: Sh = Sheng, S = Swahili, Dh = Dholuo, G = Gikuyu, GS = Gikuyu slang]

Table 7. Names for 'girl', 'breast' and 'butt'

In Table 7, the names for 'girl' by the male respondents show that the names for 'butt' are usually extended to refer to 'girl' or 'women'. Invoking African aesthetics to account for this, we recognize that many Africans considered women with big butts as beautiful. This conception of sexiness has prevailed, although the western concept of sexiness is affecting the Kenyan urban youth. If a woman's sexual appearance is concentrated in one area of their anatomy connected with sexual appeal, then extending this meaning to cover the entire woman reflects the fact that the men, or at least the Sheng speaking males who do the labeling, mostly perceive women in sexual terms. We could expect the female genitals to be used in similar terms, but the taboo on mentioning human sexual organs inhibits the extendibility of these lexical items. The butt, being the most visible part receives this extra attention in terms of negative labels.

While the terms in Table 7 are selected from a wide range of variables, it is obvious that women are usually perceived as people without individuality. Take *kitu yangu* for instance; in Swahili it means 'my thing,' which implies possession. Whenever

it is used by the males it denies them their humanity. *Wifey* from English 'wife' also implies possession by males, i.e, as girlfriends or wives, and not as women. *First lady* may seem to be a positive label, but on a closer look, we realize that the *first lady* is supposed to operate under the shadow of her mighty husband, doing everything for his glory. Looked at in this way, the label is no longer positive. One might argue that *kitu yangu* is a diminutive and is used in an affectionate sense. I have no evidence to dispute this, but if so, then this would be one of the few exceptional cases.

In contrast, women give themselves labels derived from proper names; *Waitherero* from Gikuyu, and *Chakachaka*, a popular South African musician who has inspired many. Use of proper names reclaims personality, by focusing on the entire self rather than one part of their anatomy. I have no explanation for *msupa* at the moment, except the fact that it is very different from what the males use — *supuu* (now *oldskool*).

Finally, we come to the names for breasts. Women seem to have accepted the name *dashboard* just like the men because it does not seem to bear any negative sense. *Number plate* is also likely to go this way once it gains widespread use. However, we find that women do not use *matuzo* (private dairy company) or *KCC* — a government co-oporation) to refer to their breasts. This is probably because they are derogative terms used to refer to large breasts. I mentioned that the men have for a long time emphasized the butt for its sexual appeal, but very large breasts are usually not regarded as sexy, as captured by musicians Nonini and Juacali in the track "Vile Tafanya" that extols the preferred shape of beauty for a girl as... *awe na kifua ndogo, na nyuma mahaga'* 'she should have a small chest, and big butt at the rear'. In a culture where huge breasts are not preferred, augmentation that equates them with giant milk factories is therefore not so

polite. It is thus understandable why women contest these terms by not using them. Instead, we find the women choosing a name like *machungwa* (oranges) — an aesthetically appealing metaphor through reference to color, shape and size. The other variable used by the women to refer to breast is *matinyo* or *matinye*. These variables are derived from the Swahili word for breast *matiti* (singular *titi*). Phonological reduction results in *mati-*, which is then suffixed with *–nye* or *–nyo* for the purpose of obscuring the original meaning. I must also add that since *matinye* or *matinyo* are derived from Swahili standard vocabulary with similar meanings, they also lack the negative connotation that we find in the derived terms coined by males.

The choice of positive terms by the women is not similar to euphemism, but it is a way of contesting the identity that has been thrust upon them by outsiders of the opposite gender. As they contest these terms, they reclaim their individuality and define their identity in more favorable terms.

4.1.7. Positive self-defining signifiers

Amelioration of labels applies to socially organized groups as well. In the introduction of their Sheng-English dictionary, Mbaabu and Nzuga (2004: vi) write that some schools chose good names for themselves, whereas others are given less glorious names by students of other schools. They also noted the generation of proper names, especially in the names of various residential areas. I will only give the cited names of the estates relevant to this study;

29.

Isich	Eastleigh
Jeri	Jericho
Kasa	Kasarani
Kibich	Kibera

In addition, the following names were used in the *bazes* where I collected data; *Bango* and *Bangla* for Kariobangi, *Buru* for Buruburu, *Monte* for Montecarlos. I did not get the names for Kabete and Sinai from the respondents. Very few groups gave themselves a name that was different from the name of their respective estates. The Shauri Moyo car washers called their *baze M.O.W.* At the first mention, the Kibera respondents, rather that using *Kibich*, referred to Kibera as *Motherland*, while Makadara respondents called their baze *Harlem* in addition to the widely used *Mahadu*. In the Shauri Moyo case, M.O.W, which are the initials for Ministry of Works, is quite fitting and identifies the respondents with work, in this case washing cars. In Kibera, derived from *Kibra* (bush or forest) in Nubian, the respondents were all Nubians whose parents or grandparents were settled on the then isolated bushy area at the periphery of Nairobi by the British colonial government. The successive governments have never issued them with the title deeds to guarantee ownership of those plots, which means that their occupancy can be contested at any time. The choice of the tag *motherland* is a way of creating an identity that contests the marginalization of their ethnic community by the mainstream institutions.

4.2. Inter-group categorization: comparative labels

In his distinction between the sign and the symbol, Saussure (1959:68) argues that unlike the sign, the symbol is never wholly arbitrary, since a natural bond exists between the signifier and the signified. While words are usually regarded as arbitrary linguistic signs, negotiated conventional signification may remove this arbitrariness, which makes them function as symbols. I am interested here in the symbolic use of descriptive labels to draw the distinction between the insiders and the outsiders. Since meaning is negotiated at the

local level, the symbolism attached to different labels as far as in-group and out-group dualism is concerned varies from *baze* to *baze*. The out-group labels are negative and derogatory as compared to in-group labels, which are normally favorable and positive. In-group labels might symbolize the exact opposite when applied to an out-group and vice versa. In the following discussion, I will look at symbolic labels such as *Mbabi*, *beshte*, *Wanati* and *fala* and discuss how they are juxtaposed to signify different identities. Evidence from their discourse will be used to reveal more about the identities that different respondents attach to these labels.

4.2.1. Socioeconomic symbolism: The Wanati vs. the mababi dualism

The ghetto people normally refer to themselves as *Wanati* (plural for *nati*) derived from English "natty". Its counterpart *Mababi/Wababi* (plural for *babi* or *Mbabi,* see Chapter 1 definitions) refers to the rich people, soft people or weaklings. These two labels are borrowed from the Rastafarian movement and were transmitted through reggae music that dominated the airwaves before the advent of the hip-hop music. The biblical analogy of the suffering of the children of Israel under the yoke of the Babylonians resonates well with the urban poor. Taken within the context of Kenya's political economy that displays unequal distribution of wealth, the urban poor is the disadvantaged group. In a recent survey titled 'Pulling Apart: Facts and Figures on Inequality in Kenya' by the Society for International Development (2004)[38], Kenya was reported to have one of the biggest gaps

[38] The full report can be accessed online at http://www.sidint.org/Publications/Docs/pulling-apart.pdf

between the haves and the have-nots. It ranks among the top ten most unequal countries in world, and 5th in Africa (p. 7)

The vicious cycle of urban poverty is sustained by this unequal distribution of resources. The children from the ghetto have no access to quality education, which limits their chances in life. The yoke of Babylon can be seen as a metaphor of oppressive living conditions similar to the biblical captivity of the Israelites. In such a harsh environment the *Wanati* survive by their wits, going through great pains to put bread on the table. This explains why the word 'suffering' comes up constantly in their discourse. On the other hand, the affluent *Wababi*, having been used to the life of ease and comfort, know no suffering. This was well-articulated by the Sinai girls when I asked them to describe who was a *Mbabi* according to their definition. Giving the examples of residential areas of Westlands and Kileleshwa, they said;

1. Joy: unajua hao ni mababi...ma...mahomie sasa. Juu unajua watu wa ghetto ni Wanati.
2. PG: mh?
3. Kui: wacha nikupe sasa for example, unajua mtu wa ghetto ni mtu anajitegemea
4. Joy: ee
5. Kui: ...lakini mtu Mbabi. Ni mtu anategemea mamake, kila kitu ni mamake, lakini unaona huyu wa ghetto, wewe hata hushughulikangi na mamako, hukulangi kwa mamako, mamako hajuangi unalalanga wapi...kitu ka hiyo
6. Joy: Wanati ni wale watu wa ghetto wamezoeanga ku-suffer

Translated as;

1. Joy: you know those are the mababi...ma...mahommie now. The ghetto people are Wanati
2. PG: mh?
3. Kui: let me give you an example, you know a person from the ghetto depends on herself
4. Joy: yes
7. Kui: ...but the Mbabi person,... is a person who depends on his/her mother. But

you see this one from the ghetto, you do not bother with your mother, you do not eat at your mother's, your mother doesn't not know where you sleep...something like that

8. Joy: Wanati are the ghetto people who are used to suffering.

Despite the fact they these girls engage in petty prostitution as well as selling illegal alcohol, they take pride in the fact that they are independent of their parents. From their deprived form of existence, any kind of moneymaking activity is valid. With their poor education, very few options are open to them, and selling illicit alcohol as well as engaging in commercial sex offers them an avenue of making a living. They perpetuate the vicious circle of poverty that they have inherited from their mothers, who abdicated their family responsibilities because of lack of means to raise their children in an atmosphere of hope. Unfortunately, this makes them vulnerable to sex predators and criminals, who expose them to hard drugs to ensure that they are eternally dependent on them. After turning them into zombies, these criminals can then inflict all forms of physical abuse on them with impunity. Yet the girls are resigned to their fate and stick with these abusive 'boyfriends' because they are their only means of daily sustenance. Independence from the parents is therefore not independence at all.

Comparing the rough life of the *Wanati* to the comfortable life of the *Mababi* explains why *Wanati* view the *Wababi* as soft or weak in terms of both physical and psychological strength. Hardness or toughness to withstand suffering has covert prestige among the *Wanati* because you can only survive by having the strength to persevere. The symbolism of *Wanati* is consistent across the board; but the label *babi* has various symbolic meanings attached. I will now look at some of the different senses that go with this label.

4.2.1.1. A person from Ubabini

Anyone from *Ubabini* (an affluent neighborhood) qualifies for the label *Babi* or *Mbabi.* For this reason my respondents from South C fit the bill, although their *babi* identity is overshadowed when compared with others from the more prestigious neighborhoods like Muthangari, Lavington, Runda and Spring Valley. This residential ranking should be used with caution because of the presence of domestic workers who live with their families in servant quarters. The role of domestic servants in the spreading of Sheng and Swahili in affluent neigborhoods has been mentioned in Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997). Recall also that in Chapter 3, I mentioned that Muthangari Primary School is located in the affluent Muthangari area, but it serves the children of domestic servants and students from the surrounding slums. Identifying a *Mbabi* on the basis of his or her residential area can sometimes be misleading.

4.2.1.2. People in white-collar employment

The South C respondents rejected the label *Mbabi* and instead referred to themselves as *anti-mababi.* This was rather interesting considering that South C is an affluent residential area. Kids from those areas attend good schools; one of them even claimed to have been in Italy for education. Being unemployed, they considered themselves as the lowest among their peers in the same residential area. Their conception of a *babi* was in reference to their rich employed peers.

4.2.1.3. Mom's boy

In contrast, the girls at Sinai considered the South C respondents *babi* since they lived in an affluent estate. However, they added another dimension in their definition. Their conception of *mababi* as people who relied on their mothers makes it possible to have a *Mbabi* who does not necessarily hail from Ubabini.

4.2.1.4. Just anyone you aspire to be economically

I informed the Shauri Moyo respondent that the South C respondents do not refer to themselves as *mababi*, and instead used the term to refer to the employed people or people from Westlands. Stevo opined that the term *babi* referred to those people better off than you economically. In this conversation, I avoid my back channeling in order to better capture Stevo's argument.

PG: Unajua nimekuwa South C, na hata wao nikaona jamaa wanasema ... wanazungumza juu ya *mababi* wakisema wale watu wa kutoka Westlands ni *mababi*!
Stevo: ...ok its like this, society yetu imekuwa hivi...society yetu always Una-aspire to...to go another level ...so mtu yuko that level una-aspire kwenda kwake ni *babi*...that's why pia hao utasikia wanaita watu wa westlands *babi*...ukienda westlands wanaita watu wa Runda *Babi*...eeee...unaona?
PG: yeah
Stevo: Inaenda hivyo
Pish: lakini sasa kwetu sasa vile sii hujua... because us sisi pia...
Deno: hao wote ni *mababi*,

Tarnslation:

PG: You know I have been to South C, and even them, I saw that they say...they talk about the *mababi*, saying the people from Westlands are *mababi*
Stevo: ...ok it's like this, our society is like this...our society you always aspire to...to go to another level...so the person at the level you aspire to go is *babi*...that is why you also hear them calling people from Westlands *babi*. If you go to Westlands, they call people from Runda *babi*...eee, you see?

PG: Yeah
Stevo: it is like that
Pish: but now to us now the way we see it...because we also...
Deno: all of them are *mababi*

Stevo's argument exploits social stratification and the human endeavor to better oneself. It is similar to claiming that every *babi* has his/her *babi*. However, to the majority of the *Wanati*, the criterion is anyone who is better off than you are, hence Pish and Deno's assertion that all of them are *Mababi*. This stems from the fact that the *Wanati* occupy the lowest rung in the social ladder. That said, we must also recognize that different ghettoes can also be ranked. However, just like the South C respondents contested the label *babi*, the respondents from the better off ghettoes also contested the label *Wababi* even when the contrast is so obvious. Korogocho for instance is an informal settlement of lower standards compared to Kariobangi, still, the female respondents from Kariobangi baze objected to being called *Mababi* by Korogocho people in the exchange below.

PG: Sasa wakati watu wa Koch huko wanasema nyi ni *mababi* mnasikiaje?
Shiro: Ni uduh juu juu wewe ni mtu wa ghetto kaa hao
Edee: Ni wa ghetto unakula tu ile shida wanakula
Shiro: Eee
PG: Sa kwa nyinyi, *Wababi* ni kina nani?
Edee: Tuseme watu wa...
Shiro: Watu wa flato

PG: Now when Korogocho people say you are *mababi*, how do you feel?
Shiro: It's nonsense, because you are a ghetto person just like them
Edee: we are ghetto, you experience the problems they are experiencing
Shiro: Eee
PG: Now to you who are the *Wababi*?
Edee: we have said people from...
Shiro: People living in flats

Shiro and Edee reject the label *Wababi* because they do not live in flats. This affirms Stevo's claim that *babi* is the person you aspire to be socioeconomically. When we

compare the difference in terms of the socioeconomic standards and general lifestyle between Kariobangi and Korogocho, we find minimal differences; however, Kariobangi enjoys better infrastructure because it is a city council estate, which has been run down after years of neglect. Hence the Korogocho people would consider moving to Kariobangi as a step up.

4.2.1.5. One who speaks inferior Sheng

Ngara respondents consider South C respondents as *Mababi* because they are rich kids and speak an inferior version of Sheng, which they dubbed *Ntiology* due to the prevalence of the /nt/ sound sequence in their speech[39]. This can be attributed to the stereotype of the prevalence of English in the upmarket estates. The perceived English competence of the *Wababi* can be attributed to their economic status that enables them to attend good schools where they acquire quality English instruction. Their parents also provide any relevant material that can promote their proficiency in English — the language that denotes status. This fact is responsible for the English influence in their variety of Sheng — Engsh, which is recognized by other Sheng speakers. Pragmatic reasons prevent the *Wababi* from acquiring ghetto Sheng. Not only are their houses spread out, but they also do not make efforts to learn Sheng due to its stigmatization. Since their families take care of all their needs, their survival does not depend on solidarity; hence there is no pressure to maintain networks with friends.

These different senses of *babi* illustrate how a term can either affirm or contest an identity. The South C respondents, while rejecting the *babi* label, would certainly not

[39] This was not attested in my interview with the South C respondents.

refer to themselves as *Wanati*[40], and they understand that there is a clear difference between them and the ghetto people. However, while they do admire the cool linguistic habits of the ghetto people as well as their 'freedom' (e.g., no overprotective parents), they would still not like to be associated with the other side of Sheng speakers, epitomized by poverty, disease, promiscuity and urban crime.

The label *babi* is also juxtaposed with *beshte* to express the difference in lifestyle. While *beshte* should be a close friend whether from Ubabini or the ghetto, ghetto people have used this label to express the lack of interaction in Ubabini. The residential patterns of these two places that inspired my hypothesis 5 illustrate this fact. In the pictures below, I show an example of a typical slum, as well as a typical suburban residence in Nairobi.

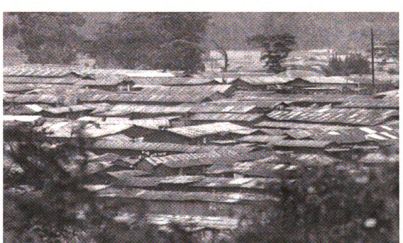
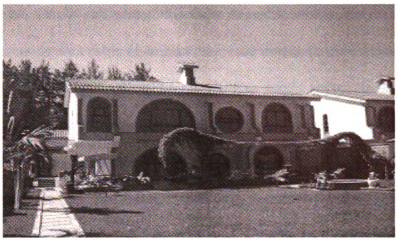


Figure 4. Kibera slum (*source*: www.tripgallery.com)

[40] Although in his track *Bamba* the late E-Sir, an artiste from South C, refers to himself as *Mnati* in the album *Maisha Vol. 1*. However, it is not easy to establish the extent this term is applied by middle class people outside of popular culture.



source: **http://www.homes2000kenya.com/Properties/HC66.htm**

Figure 5. A house at Riverside drive in Westlands

Comparing Figure 4 and Figure 5, we expect the rate of interaction in the ghettoes to be much higher, due to residential dynamics. While living close together in the slums promotes intense interaction and at the same time solidifies the bonds of solidarity, the same is not the case in the isolated neighborhoods of *Ubabini*. It is therefore easier to build and maintain dense interaction networks in Kibera than in Riverside. Consequently, *Wababi* are not able to become competent in Sheng — the *deep Sheng* because they lack resources to learn it and/or to build proficiency due to lack of inter-neighbor interaction. If *Mabeshte* are the people who usually hang out together and perform their activities together, then the residential dynamics explain why they are found in the ghettoes but not in *Ubabini*. As such, the *Mabeshte/mababi* distinction has a socioeconomic angle.

These residential dynamics can be explained within the network theory (e.g., Milroy 1980). Of interest here are the concepts of dense multiplex networks and weak uniplex networks. The closeness of the houses in the Kibera slum, for instance, promote the dense multiplex networks where Sheng speakers establish multiple ties in areas such as next door neighbor, fellow local drinker, fellow smoker, *jua kali* colleague, and so on.

In effect, they are able to cultivate and enforce linguistic norms. On the other hand the residents of Riverside are unable to enforce linguistic norms because they share very few ties with other local residents. From the outside, this might appear as though there is a conflict with the core argument of the network theory, where the expectation is the opposite of what I have just described. Middle class speakers are normally regarded as having weak network ties and hence more receptive to innovation, while the strong networks of the slum dwellers are supposed to serve as norm enforcement mechanisms thus ensuring the retention of conservative norms. What needs to be taken into account is the fact that there is very minimal interaction between these two socio-economic classes, which block the diffusion of new innovations and their consequent adoption by the middle class. In any case, these invations are deliberately created to draw group boundaries. As such, the middle class only accesses the lexical items that have become widespread. Seen in this light, the ghetto varieties of Sheng exhibit intense variation as compared to those of the middle class neigbourhoods.

The relationship between the *Wanati* and the *Wababi* is symbiotic rather than acrimonious. When we look at the current hip-hop music, the so-called *Wababi* musicians (there are hardly any from the ghetto) have become the ghetto people's advocates. The themes their songs tackle sometimes highlight the issues in ghetto life. While this might be seen as the extension of the exploitation of the ghetto people by the well off people through commercialization of their culture and language for financial gains,[41] we must

[41] Such a claim has been made against Eminem, a white American rapper who was accused by Ray Benzino, an African American rap rival and co-founder of *The Source* magazine, of stealing black people's culture for commercial gains (*The New York Sun*, Nov 25/2003); see also *JoeUser.com*, Nov 21/3003, *Detroit Free Press*, January 12/2004 and *Garvin's Blog.com* April 4/2004.

not stereotype musicians as unscrupulous people who romanticize the ghetto for economic mileage; instead, they call for revitalization of the ghettoes so that the ghetto people can lead a more humane existence (see Samper 2004). A good example is Nazizi and Wyre of the group 'Necessary Noize' and their tracks '*Jah children'* and '*Bless ma room,'* where the plight of the ghetto youth is highlighted. The late E-Sir, a hip-hop artist from South C constantly made reference to *Wanati* and *Wababi* in his songs where he identifies with the *Wanati.*

The symbolic label *beshte* bears different references to the ghetto people. It can refer to a casual acquaintance, a close buddy, or *anti-babi.* The label *babi* also bears different senses depending on the socioeconomic scale of the people using the term. All these categorizations are mediated by the form of Sheng that is used by the people who use the term. Although *babi,* in most cases, is tied to the residential area a person comes from, *mom's boys* for instance, whether from Ubabini or not are poor speakers of Sheng. They are thought to be under the protective care of the mother, and they might not want to offend their moms, considering that Sheng bears negative connotations, especially among women. The white-collar workers are too tied to the mainstream languages of power and status to bother about mastering Sheng.

It is important to bear in mind that being a *babi* is only one aspect of someone's identity, and depends on the context of the interaction. If the context changes, a *babi* might be transformed to a *beshte* when interacting with a fellow *Mbabi.* It is also possible that a *Mbabi* who has interacted with ghetto people for so long that s/he has become accepted might be referred to as a *beshte.* Moving away from *babi,* I will now focus on another distinction, that between *beshte* and *fala.*

4.2.2. The cosmopolitan symbolism: Beshte vs. fala distinction

I have already defined *beshte* as a very good friend. The respondents gave various qualities of a *beshte*, all of which emphasize shared engagement in various activities in their daily lives, and all of which fit the definition of the 'communities of practice' as explained in Chapter 2. These activities included playing together, joking together, going to school together, watching videos together, chewing khat together, drinking together, working together, and living together. Another name that stands in opposition to *beshte* is *fala*, which in standard Swahili, means 'a fool.' In the Sheng discourse, *fala* also means a stupid, rural person, as in the label *fala kutoka ushago* 'stupid person from the country' (Samper 2002:161). Generally, these are the people who are considered to be outside the Sheng speakers' communities of practice. Informal settlements that border the countryside are not spared in this *fala* reference. The Sinai respondents, for instance, called the residents of Uthiru and Kawangware *mafala* (plural) for sharing a border with the countryside, although these areas are normally regarded as part of the wider Nairobi (see Figure 3).

I had originally assumed that the poor youth from the ghetto would identify more with the simple rural people instead of the rich kids from Ubabini. Instead, my findings confirmed Samper's (2002) claim of Nairobi cosmopolitan identity, which is inconsistent with the country life. To an urbanite, the rural evokes images of dullness, traditionalism and ignorance, which are contrary to the enlightened trends of modernity. The stereotype of a rural monoglot as opposed to an urban polyglot becomes the basis for discrimination against rural people. Rural folks are believed to speak their mother tongue *only*, while the urbanites are either regarded as multilingual or poor speakers of their native tongues.

(Notice here that mastery of a native tongue is not held in high esteem by such urbanites). This perceived urban bilingualism, which as I said earlier forms the basis for Sheng, together with other discursive practices, constitutes the shared urban norms. These shared norms distinguist the two groups as a community of practice as defined in section (2.8.2.7) that blurrs the boundaries between the rich and the poor urbanites resulting in a shared cosmopolitan identity.

With this information, we can conclude that rural people lack the linguistic resources necessary to negotiate their positions in urban social groups. This confines them to the periphery of the *Mabeshte's* discourse practices. Samper (2002:161) gives an example of an upcountry guy who visits relatives in Nairobi and has to keep his mouth shut lest he reveals his incompetence in urban lingo and earns the label of *fala.* This perpetuates his/her continued exclusion from the urban communities of practice.

In reality, the stereotype of a rural monoglot is an exaggeration, because a majority of the Kenyans speak the national language, Kiswahili. On a different note, the ghetto speakers claimed that they understood *Mababi* and modified their speech (mixed English and Swahili) in order to accommodate *Mababi's* linguistic norms. It is not clear why they did not extend a similar gesture to the rural folk, who might even be more competent in English and Swahili than they are. This is an indication that the major reason behind looking down upon the rural people has nothing to do with languages; rather, the disadvantaged rural guy who is trying to gain his/her footing upon encounter with modernity is detested because he personifies a contested identity. The ghetto people would rather identify with the affluent because theirs is the kind of life they aspire to

lead, but they cannot. In the conversation below for instance, although Shiro would not like her children to grow up in Kariobangi, her aspirations are in *Ubabini* and not *ushago*:

PG: Mnatosheka na hapa Bangla?
Fio: Mimi natosheka
Shiro: Mimi sijatosheka. Mimi as in my life,
PG: mm-hm
Shiro: ...like ka watoi wangu siwezi (unclear) nataka wa-change
PG: mm-hm
Shiro: walelewe place ingine different na hii ya hapa. Siwezi taka wa-experience...
PG: Kule ushago ama?
Shiro: Eee si ushago,
Edee: Ubabini
Shiro: ...yaani place poa tu ubabini...awe na life different...ee...asi-lack,
PG: enh..
Shiro: bado days zake zisiwe ka venye mi nilipitia hardships. Yeye asipitie hardships...everything iko

Translation:

PG: Are you satisfied with Kariobangi?
Fio: I am satisfied
Shiro: I am not satisfied. Me as in my life,
PG: mm-hm
Shiro: ...like my children I would not like (unclear) I want them to change
PG: mm-hm
Shiro: They be raised in another place different from this here. I would not like them to experience...
PG: in the countryside isn't it?
Shiro: Eee...not in the countryside
Edee: Ubabini
Shiro: ... I mean a nice place in Ubabini, to have a different life...ee...not to lack anything
PG: enhe
Shiro: then his/her life should not be like the way I passed through hardships. S/he should not pass through hardships...to have everything.

Shiro, like most other ghetto dwellers, aspires for a different way of life. Recall that in Chapter 2, I discussed the way many people come into the city with big dreams of making it in life. The urban dream that lured people into the city is still very much alive.

This dream cannot be realized in the ghetto, but in *Ubabini*. A *Mbabi* therefore is not someone to be despised, but someone to aspire to be. Notice that when I try to suggest the countryside as an alternative, there is a quick objection by both Shiro and Edee. The ghetto person understands that the rural areas are not his/her solution; indeed, the countryside suffers from a similar depravity, if not worse. Going back to the countryside will be like drifting back to the kind of life the urbanites have already turned their back on. This explains why the ghetto person is unsympathetic to his/her fellow poor guy from the countryside, who evokes images of a past they would rather keep buried.

Even the label *fala* does not always bear a negative connotation. Sometimes the in-group may use the label in an affective way. When used by the in-group such as the *Mabeshte* in a *baze*, *fala* bears the opposite meaning — *beshte*. According to Kabete respondents, a friend who treats his buddies to drinks until they are completely wasted is a real *beshte*. When a person who enjoyed such a *beshte's* generosity is narrating about the incident to his fellow buddies, he might say something like *'huyu fala alituroga jana'* 'this fool poisoned us yesterday'. Use of *fala* in this sense can be compared to the English insults 'son of a bitch ', or 'dumb ass ' or even 'nigger' among African Americans that can be used affectively among close friends, but with serious consequences when used by an out-group. The ability to use insults without tension is a diagnostic test of how much a person has moved up the the in-group hierarchy. An outsider who does not understand the polysemy of *fala* might misinterpret the intention and hence threaten the stability of the group. The symbolism associated with *fala* can be seen in the rightward or leftward movement along the linear scale as in the diagram below.

Out-group ←*fala*→in-group
(negative) (positive)

This *fala* example shows that use of insults is an in-group/out-group thing. Whether the insult is used affectionately or disparagingly depends on who uses it in terms of ingroup or outgroup. Smitherman (1977:71) illustrates this very well with a 1974 cartoon from G.B.Trudeau. In the cartoon, a white boy (Bobby) who has an overprotective mother has been warned to keep away from black kids. But on the bus to school, he usually sits beside a black boy (Rufus). He näively asks Rufus what 'honky' means and how he was expected to respond if someone called him honky. Rufus, aware that it was a disparaging term for whites used by the blacks is evasive and tells Bobby that he will pick it up (know it somehow). Unfotunately, Rufus uses the term on a black boy, gets beaten up badly and has to be admitted to the hospital.

Insults therefore bear different meanings depending on whether they are being used by the out-group or the ingroup. Their semantics change according to the contexts and speakers who are using them. At one extreme, *fala* is negative, while at the other extreme, it is positive. An outsider negotiates his/her position within a group depending on the symbolism s/he attaches to *fala* along the linear scale. A country person who adjusts to urban life gradually moves up the scale from *fala* to a *beshte*, but we must bear in mind that since identity is negotiated at a local level, a *fala* may gain acceptance by some but not all, thus giving him/her multiple identities within the same *baze*. This juxtaposition of *fala* and *beshte*, show us how symbolism associated with an identity can change depending on context and users. This meaning-making is extended to other discourse practices that might constitute face-threatening acts.

4.3. Performance and negotiation of multiple identities

After looking at how various Sheng lexical items are manipulated to symbolize different identities, I now move to identity performance and negotiation. I will analyze speakers' discourses and discuss how Sheng speakers from different *bazes* perform multiple identities in ordinary conversation. I will show how identities are affirmed and contested at both the conscious and subconscious levels. I first discuss the non-conscious performance of multiple identities in spontaneous discourse and then discuss how Sheng speakers from different bazes shift between various Sheng varieties and in the process shift between the identities associated with those varieties.

4.3.1. Non-conscious activation of layered identities

Individual identity is a complex of layered sub-identities. Some of these can be activated consciously while others, which have been internalized through constant enactment and re-enactment, may surface non-consciously. The term *salience* has been used in social identity theory to refer to the activation of an identity relevant to a given situation (Stets and Burke 2000: 229). I am not interested in the whole definition of salience and activation as explained by Stets and Burke, but my interest here is in the non-conscious activation of identities that surface in spontaneous discourse. I focus on how these deeply lodged identities are performed in naturally occurring conversations, and in the process confirm or contradict various aspects of the identities that speakers claim they possess. I pay attention to what speakers say about themselves, and then analyze their discourse for confirmation of what they claim they are. When we pay close attention to discourse, we

realize that what respondents say about their identity might not necessarily be congruent with how they perform those identities in discourse.

In personal experience narratives, we can see how narrators perform multiple identities at different parts of their narration through interjecting different lexical items in their discourse. In the following short except, the narrator alternates between English, Gikuyu (note Gikuyu orthographes of the front mid high vowel [e] as /ĩ/), Sheng and Swahili. The story is about an old man who was trying to sell stolen shoes to the narrator and his friends. Unknown to the seller, someone from the group who had recognized the stolen shoes had informed the owner. The story opens with the narrator (Tash) and his friend bargaining, just as the owner of the shoes arrives and a fight ensues.

> ....sasa sisi bado....*niaje* (Sheng) we **deal** (English) we (Sheng) chukua *rwa...rwabe* (Sheng). Analia aa eee. Jamaa hĩĩ nĩmwahinyĩrĩria... he (Gikuyu). (laughs) wakati ana*bongabonga* (slang).....hĩĩ (Gikuyu), mbo...bo...(ideophone) enyewe mimi nimeona ni kama nimeona **movie** (English), ndiyo yule mwenye hii *jumu* (Sheng) aka*kamu*, haku*bonga*, ali*kamu* tu na *washa* (Sheng). Alichapa yule mzee *washa* za kichwa,(laughs). Mzee ile ku**stagger stagger**, ...

Translation:

> ...now we were still ...come on man, let's deal, take two hundred. He cries aa eee, men oooh, you are exploiting me...eh! (laughs). While he was talking, man mbo...bo it was like I had seen a movie. Then the owner of the shoes came, and he did not speak, he just came with a club. He struck this old man on the head with the club (laughs). The old man started to stagger...

My account for the above follows Bucholtz (1999: 209) that individuals engage in multiple identity practices simultaneously and that they are able to move from one identity to another. In this story, which is told in Sheng, the narrator uses Swahili structure, which affirms his ghetto identity. Moreover he identifies with his group through the use of its Sheng vocabulary. Support for this comes from the words *rwabe*

'two hundred shillings' and *jumu* 'shoes'. In some bazes, *soo mbili* for 'two hundred' or *chuja* for 'shoes' might have been used. English insertion in non-English discourses is a characteristic of a majority of Nairobi discourses. It is the unmarked code that indexes education and status. Even when one is not well educated, or has lower socioeconomic status, people still use it to claim these identities (see Myers-Scotton 1993a). Writing on codeswitching in Kenya, Meyers-Scotton argued that people use Swahili to project a pan-African identity, while still using English to project the status that English is associated with. The use of Gikuyu in the above discourse might indicate two things: either the narrator was affirming his Gikuyu identity[42], or he was alluding to the common stereotype of the Gikuyu tribe being the tribe of thieves. It could as well be that he was only imitating what the man said verbatim as a stylistic device. Even so we can take this as a case of commentary about the ethnicity of the thief, which in itself constitutes an identity exercise. From this short excerpt, we see that the narrator projects different aspects of his layered identities as well as the identity of others. We can however not tell whether this was deliberate or was an unconscious act.

A similar case was observed during the interview with Sinai girls. In one instance, one respondent was commenting on the closeness of the slum dwellers as a result of the

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[42] It is possible for somebody from another tribe to use Gikuyu vocabulary since Sheng borrows from different ethnic languages. However, the construction *nĩmwahinyĩrĩria* is not just the insertion of Gikuyu lexical items, but also a display of mastery of Gikuyu morphosyntax, as we can see below;

Ni-mwa-hiny-ĩr-ĩr-i-a
Cop-1sm-*press*-AP-AP-CAUS-FV
You have exploited me.

Although we can argue that the two applicative morphemes have been gramaticalized such that *hiny-* as a root might not make sense by itself, the use of the copula and covert tense inflection shows that the speaker is well versed with the Gikuyu grammar.

nature of their shacks. With one house separated by corrugated iron sheet walls, there is no secrecy, and people can talk across walls, as Kui claims;

> Kui: kila mtu ni sistako juu ndiye anakusaidia na mnasaidiana. Mna-cooperate vizuri, unajua ni hii mabati na hii ingine kusema *"haiya wa kamau rehe maguta"* (laughs) sasa wakamau akiwa hapo si maguta si unajua lete hiyo ***matagu***, hata hakurushii mbali tu pale tu kwa mbao na unashika...

Translation:

> Kui: Everyone is your sister since she is the one who assists you and you assist each other. You cooperate well, you see between these corrugated iron sheet walls you can say " Hey! Wakamau (either Kamau's mother or Kamau's wife) pass the fat/oil" (laughs) now if Wakamau is there, she will not have to pass it over from afar, she passes it over by the wallboard...

Kui affirms her group identity by highlighting their solidarity. She is also affirming her identity as a ghetto girl by narrating about the poor living conditions in the ghettoes as portrayed by the poor houses (houses separated by corrugated iron). Like Tash above, Kui introduces a Gikuyu expression *haiya wa kamau rehe maguta* 'hey! Wa Kamau, pass the oil', while she was well aware that one of the respondents was not a Gikuyu. I regard this as a 'negative identity practice'— those practices that are inconsistent with the group identity (Bucholtz 1999) — because she may not be deliberately trying to show her Gikuyu identity, but by deviating from the common linguistic code she projects her ethnic identity. Evidence of Kui's Sheng performance of group identity comes from the use *matagu*, derived from *maguta* ('oil' or 'fat' in Gikuyu) through syllabic inversion mentioned in Chapter 3. I noticed that syllabic inversion was an important characteristic in the Sinai girls' version of Sheng.

Compared to the other two girls in the Sinai *baze*, Kui was the most talkative. She was also very fluent in Swahili. This is very relevant because she claimed that she was born in Kibera and that she had Nubian parentage. Recall that in Chapter 3, I mentioned

that the Nubians in Kibera have appropriated the Swahili culture to project their identity. Kui performs this part of her identity by using her mastery of Swahili. She also said that she went to Kibera often to see her boyfriend. In a different interview session, her friend Joy called her *Mũnũbi ũyũ* 'you Nubian' (Gikuyu orthography), which shows that her Nubian heritage was a matter of common knowledge.

In my next illustration, Joe, a respondent from Makadara, tells about his encounter with criminals on his way home from town. He and his girlfriend had alighted from a *matatu* and were headed to his house when a gang of criminals who had a gun accosted them. He had initially thought they were policemen, but when they beat him up, stole his mobile phone, money, cap, and bags of cheap liquor, he realized they were thugs. His claim that he initially thought that they were police made Bill question his courage. Joe defends himself by saying that he was overpowered because he was alone.

Joe: ...unacheki unaona ni usiku. Halafu kitu ya pili wasee wamekuja...kirende ya mtu tano. Hata wewe kirende ya mtu tano wewe utatoboaje wewe u... man solo?
Bill: Si ndiyo nakwambia wewe *uliingia upepo*...mapema tu.
Jim: ni noma
Joe: haki ni vile unacheki unaona maze *hasapa*, hauna otherwise. Nikacheki hii unajua nilionanga tumeanzilia na mama, nimekuta yaani ile *chuja* nilikuwa nayo, matope ilikuwa imefika huku juu. Trouser yaani ungecheki hivi ungedhani ni ya juzi...

Translation:

Joe: ...you look and realize it is at night, then the second thing the guys have come...a group of five people. Even if it was you, a group of five people, how could you prevail when you are alone?
Bill: That is why I am telling you that you got scared...too early.
Jim: it's hard
Joe: really, it is the way you can look and realize, man, here you have no alternative. I saw now you know I saw the way we had started with the girl. I found the shoes that I had were full of mud. If you looked at the trouser, you could think it was an old one...

In a place like Makadara where the rate of crime is high, one has to display a lot of courage to repulse the petty criminals. When fellow *Mabeshte* challenge you on account of your lack of courage, it is a real face threatening act, hence the spirited attempt by Joe to justify why he was unable to fight back. It is important that the person who makes the challenge is Bill, a military trainee, who spends his weekends with fellow *Mabeshte* in the *baze*. From his military orientation, he would have expected Joe to make a quick assessment of the situation and fight back. This is how we get Bill's identity as a military man. Joe succeeds in convincing Jim, who now accepts that it was hard for Joe to fight back. This allows Joe to regain his face and hence salvage his self-esteem among his buddies.

Equally interesting is Joe's use of *chuja* for shoes. During the interview, he had said that they used *jumu* in their *baze*. At the beginning of his narration, he had referred to his girlfriend as *mbevo*, a name he had attributed to the Dandora estate. He also used *kavu moja* for one thousand shillings, while in the interview he had said that they used *tenga moja*. This mismatch between what was said and what actually happened in discourse is a pointer to the fluidity of the *bazes*. Use of lexical materials that are not generally thought as belonging to the speaker or the group can be viewed as a case of language crossing (Rampton 1995, 1997:1) and can be attributed to interaction with other friends from outside the *baze*. "Crossing" here is taken in its narrow sense to refer to the *baze*-specific varieties of Sheng instead of Rampton's ethnic languages. During linguistic crossing, identities may be consciously activated to suit situational characteristics, but I am interested here with the non-conscious surfacing of lexical features that speakers produce in their discourse, which affirms their multiple identities. When Joe inserts

items, which he claims are used in other places, it shows how deeply ingrained these identities have become, so much so that he does not even realize it when he is performing them. If what he says, that these lexical items are used in different bazes, is true, then we can conclude that by using them he is displaying a mosaic of identities that reflect the different bazes he has interacted with.

These pieces of conversation show how the participants move across different identities, even when they are engaged in a single utterance because they have become imprinted into their personalities. I explain this in terms of Bourdieu's (1990:53) concept of *habitus*, a disposition to doing something which he defines as;

> ...systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience of rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

While this statement does not downplay the importance of agency among the Sheng speakers, we see that they do not have to consciously attempt to perform the identities; it has become ingrained through constant performance. When these out-group identity practices are being enacted, the speaker is not trying to adopt the identity of outsiders, but such usage demonstrates how the outside influences form an important part of their own identity.

In summary, we have seen that identities are not just asserted but also performed by the speakers in their discourse. I discussed how people confirm and contradict their identities through non-conscious identity practices in spontaneous discourse. I have concluded by claiming that this is so because their interaction, characterized by shifting

speech behavior, is ingrained in their habitus. In the next section I will be discussing how speakers perform identities through conscious choice of linguistic features.

4.3.2. Negotiating multiple identities through accomodation

Shifting of identities does not always follow from a set of dispositions that drive agents to subconciously generate practices as the the concept *habitus* (see above definition). Speakers sometimes act deliberately when they want to achieve specific communicative goals, as proposed in speech accomodation theory (e.g., Giles, Taylor and Bourhis 1973, Giles and Powersland 1975, 1997, Giles et.al, 1979). Speech accommodation theory deals with the adaptive strategies that speakers adopt with respect to their interlocutors. Key concepts in the literature on accommodation theory have been speech *divergence* and speech *convergence.* In speech divergence, speakers increase perceived dissimilarities when they intend to distance themselves from undesirable others while in speech convergence, speakers increase perceived similarities with their interlocutors with whom the wish to identify.

The central logic advanced in accomodation theory also features in Bell's (1984: 158-164, 1991: 105) 'audience design' framework, in which the argument that speakers linguistic productions are a reflection of their audience' speech norms, is advanced. In other words, speakers are seen as styling their speech habits to approximate to those of their listeners. This model works well in radio broadcasts, where the maistream language is propagated as the preferred broadcasting language. The opposite scenario, where speakers allocate themselves the role of setting linguistic standards is argued in the 'referee design' model (Bell 1984). The major claim of the referee design model is that

when speakers regard themselves as the reference point, they modify their speech in order to be unlike the out-group. Broadcasters who believe they are using the model speech will maintain their speech habits for their audience adopt. If the reference group shifts to the out-group, speakers may either modify their speech to be similar or different from the out-group depending on what they wish to achive. Take Meyerhoff's (1998) analysis of the use of pronouns *yumi* (inclusive), *mifala*, (exclusive) and *yu* (generic) in Bislama as an example. One of her female subjects used *yumi* to emphasize their shared gender identity (*affiliative*[43]), but Meyerhoff deliberately used the generic *yu*, to dissociate herself from her interlocutor's perceived shared identity. Her subject finally adjusted her use of pronouns to reflect their non-local identities (*dissociative*[44]). Describing a similar phenomenon, Bucholtz (1999), talks of positive and negative identity practices. Negative identity practices define who the speakers are not, while positive identity practices define who the speakers are. Negative identity practices are dissociative while positive identity practices are affiliative.

Analysis of Sheng discourse reveals instances of affiliation as well as dissociation as *baze* members negotiate identities. When Sheng speakers from a *baze* wish to affiliate themselves with speakers from a different *baze*, they consciously model their speech by adopting the salient lexical features of that *baze*. My respondents claimed in the oral interviews that they could easily adopt the kind of Sheng spoken in other *bazes*. In Makadara for instance, when I asked the respondents why they spoke Sheng associated with other estates, they responded with a Swahili saying: *Ukienda kwenye chongo lazima*

[43] I borrow these terms from Vermeij (2004:4) who talks about affiliative and dissociative crossing.
[44] See 5 above.

ufunge jicho lako 'if you go to people with monocular vision, you have to shut one eye'. They were unanimous that they do so in order to adapt to the situation demands when they visit other *bazes*. As outsiders, the onus is usually upon them to speak the variety spoken in the *bazes* that they visit. This was confirmed by the Kariobangi female respondents in response to the question whether they ever spoke the Sheng spoken by the *Wababi* in the following conversation.

1. PG: Na kuna wakati nyi mnazungumza Sheng ya *Wababi*?
2. unaimous: ...labda tukiwa nao
3. Shiro: Labda ukienda na yeye akuongeleshe hiyo kizungu yao mnaenda juu kidogo umuonyeshe ume-*educat*-iwa. Unajua Sheng yao inakuwanga English-Kiswahili
4. PG: enhe?
5. Shiro: ka ume-educatiwa unaweza *mix* hizo vitu mbili.

...

6. PG: kwa mfano tuseme una chali huko...huko...ubabini
7. Shiro: ubabini eh?
8. PG: (laughs) wakati mnazungumza mnatumia nini?
9. Sera: tunatumia zote
10. Pame: hiyo yao
11. PG: yao, siyo yako
12. Pame: Sheng yao
13. Sera: juu yako ukiongea...
14. Pame: hataelewa
15. Shiro: hatashika, na wewe utashika yake juu wewe umesoma ata ka wewe ni wa ghetto.

Translation:

1. PG: ...and is there a time when you speak the Sheng of the *Wababi*?
2. unanimous: maybe when we are with them
3. Shiro: maybe if you go with her and she talks to you in their English you go up a little bit in order to show her that you are educated. You know their Sheng is usually English-Swahili?
4. PG: enhe?
5. Shiro: if you are educated you can mix those two things

...

6. PG: for example let's say you have a boyfriend there in Ubabini
7. Sera: Ubabini?
8. PG: (laughs) when you are speaking, what do you use?
9. Sera: we use all

10. Pame: theirs
11. PG: theirs, not yours?
12. Pame: their Sheng
13. Sera: because if you use yours
14. Pame: he will not understand
15. Shiro: He will not understand and you will understand his because you are educated even though you are from the ghetto

We note that the identities of these female respondents are not just affirmed through speech, but also performed. In line 2 all the respondents claim that they do speak the Sheng of the *Wababi* when they visit *Ubabini.* Lines 10, 12–15 restate this besides providing the reason why they cannot speak the Sheng of the ghetto — the *Wababi* cannot simply understand the ghetto variety. In 3, Shiro displays her attitude towards the *Ubabini* Sheng by saying *hiyo kizungu yao*[45] 'their English'. The codemixing in the word *ume-educat-iwa* 'you are educated' and 'mix' in lines 3 &5 performs a dual task: 1) It transmits the intended message, and 2) since English is associated with the speaker's education, use of English words may also be seen as performing the identity of an educated person. Therefore, the ghetto girls accommodate to the speech of the *Wababi* because they want to show that they are educated, not because they admire the *Wababis'* kind of Sheng. This is a way of identifying with the status associated with the English language exemplified by the *Wababi.*

Earlier we saw Shiro's desire to move to *Ubabini* because she would like a better life for her children. She associates *Ubabini* with the good life, and speaking Sheng laced with English is a way of symbolically claiming that life, which she cannot get in the ghetto. The claim that the girls from the ghetto are the ones who accommodate to the

[45] Non-proximate demonstrative *hiyo* is used here to signify distance and lack of attachment to the subject by the speaker.

style of the *Wababi* was supported by the South C respondents. Not only don't the *Wababi* understand ghetto Sheng, but to them there is nothing much to be gained from competence in that kind of Sheng. Therefore there is no motivation to perform the identity of the ghetto people, although below I will discuss just such an attractiveness of ghetto Sheng. The girls' speech habits when they are interacting with the *Wababi* are responsive in the sense of the Bell's (1984) audience design model mentioned above. They engage in 'positive identity practices' (Bucholtz 1999), in order to identify with the individuals they wish to affiliate themselves with. *Ubabini*, in the sence of Bell's referee design model, may be regarded as Shiro's out-group reference because she claims that she modifies her linguistic habits to affiliate herself with her interests in *Ubabini*.

Contradicting the Kariobangi females are the Shauri Moyo respondents, who claimed that the *Wababi* are the ones who normally accommodate to their form of speech. Although they echo Kariobangi females' sentiments that English is the language spoken in *Ubabini*, they explain that the closed lifestyle in *Ubabini* makes it hard for the *Wababi* to develop a 'cool' language. In the conversation below, Stevo, Pish and Joe claim that *Wababi* copy their language because it appeals:

1. Stevo:	...lugha inaongelewa *kwao ni kizungu*. Sasa unapata mtu anatoka huko, labda unapata **kapesa kidogo** ukahamia huko,
2. PG:	mm-hm
3. stevo:	...wale wakiona vile unaishi,
4. PG:	mm-hm
5. Stevo:	...vile unaongea, *ina-appeal* kwao, sasa pia wanataka kujihusisha ndani...
6. Joe:	Alafu unajua watu ka wa Westlands wale...unajua si tuko hapa wengi wetu kuna *ma-baze*.
7. PG:	eee
8. Joe:	Westlands...hapa kuna baze pahali **chali** tunapatana tunakaa...huko ni ngumu. Huko hakuna baze. Huko kila mtu anajishughulikisha mambo yake.

9. PG: sawa
10. Joe: **Sa** *ku-form* hiyo *language* ni ngumu sana.
11. pish: so unaonanga hao wakikujanga huku wanadhani *hii lifestyle* tunaishi...
12. stevo: ...ina-*appeal*,

Translation:

1. Stevo: ...the language spoken at their place is English. Now you find a person from there, probably you get some little money you move in there...
2. PG: mm-hm
3. Stevo: When they see how you live,
4. PG: mm-hm
5. Stevo: ...the way you speak appeals to them, now they too want in...
6. Joe: Then you know people like from Westlands that...you know here for most of us there are bazes
7. PG: eee
8. Joe: Westlands...here there are bazes where us guys meet and relax...there it's hard. There, there are no bazes. There everyone minds their own stuff.
9. PG ok
10: Joe: Now to form that language is very hard.
11. Pish: so you see when they come here they think this lifestyle we lead...
12. Stevo: appeals....

Like Shiro in the preceding dialogue, Stevo in line 1 affirms that in *Ubabini* people speak English. Regarding who accommodates to the other, the claims of the female respondent are now reversed. However, note that I had given the females a scenario of having an *Ubabini* boyfriend. They said they would use his variety because he couldn't understand theirs, though they could understand his. A similar answer would probably have come up if I had given the Shauri Moyo males a scenario of having an *Ubabini* girlfriend. Joe in line 6 attributes *Ubabini* Sheng's lack of appeal to isolated homesteads[46], individualistic tendencies of the residents, and lack of hang-out joints (line 8), which makes it difficult to form Sheng (line10). Following network theory, we can argue that the isolation in *Ubabini* prevents formation of dense networks where innovation can spread. Since close-

[46] Refer to the two earlier pictures of Kibera slums and a house at Riverside.

knit networks act as norm enforcement mechanisms (Milroy 1980), the lack of the *bazes* in *Ubabini* checks the formation and spread of Sheng. It is very interesting that this naïve respondent pinpoints one of the major features of network theory so accurately and concisely.

The social status of the *Wababi* and the implicit requirement to conform to social convention prescribes their lifestyles. On the other hand, the ghetto people, to an extent live outside the boundaries of social conventions. They lack the material means necessary to fulfill all the requirements prescribed by the conventional standards of social status. They have little or nothing to lose by transgressing the social boundaries, but what they lack in status, they compensate with their high sense of solidarity. It is this freedom from the yoke of conventions and their deep sense of solidarity that inspires inventions, both in terms of languages and popular cultural forms. This freedom to transgress the social norms with impunity, and the appeal of popular cultural forms, appeals to *Ubabini* youth, who in spite of the lavish lifestyle and the external aura of contentment, nurse a void in their social lives. We can draw a parallel with white youth in America, who appropriates the images of African America popular culture. A good illustration comes from Cutler's (1999:2) description of Mike, a white teen in New York. Mike employed linguistic features associated with African Americans and engaged in practices like wearing baggy jeans, reversing his baseball cap, and developing a taste for rap music, all associated with African American culture.

These examples from Kariobangi and South C *bazes* show that accommodation goes both ways, though for totally different motivations. The Kariobangi females did not claim to accommodate to the variety of the *Wababi* because of its appeal. The do so

because they yearned for status associated with *Ubabini* lifestyle in general. However, as Stevo (5) puts it, the *Wababi* are attracted by cool lifestyle in the ghetto, but whether they are accepted or not is another issue altogether. In the above-mentioned case, Cutler (1999: 8) wrote about Mike's subsequent resentment towards African American peers, who 'always hang together' and 'separate themselves'. This followed their failure to admit him into their subculture, thus shattering the dream of an exotic identity he was trying to construct. Although Mike's language crossing was successful, his crossing in other cultural aspects was a failure. Similarly, the *Wababi* cannot construct for themselves an accurate image of the ghetto people due to lack of assimilation into the ghetto culture. By itself, the speaker's linguistic accommodation is not sufficient to complete the construction of identity. Equally important is the degree to which one is willing to get engaged in the general lifestyle, a criterion that would not be so easy for the *Wababi* who also enjoy the perks that go with their social status. As such they only engage in short term accommodation, which restricts them to the periphery of the *baze.*

Lack of total acceptance finally leads to frustration and reappraisal of the failed conscious identity practices. The lifestyle ceases to appeal and the original boundaries are redrawn. This may be explained in the referee design model (Bell 1984) as the shift in reference point. When the reference shifts from out-group back to the in-group, it is accompanied by modification of linguistic practices that prompt the shifter to magnify the differences with the out-group. Alternatively, a composite identity with aspects of both may be created — such as South C respondents, who called themselves *anti-mababi*, but still claimed that they could not understand the ghetto people.

One question that comes to mind is what happens when the language crossing involves two ghetto varieties spoken by people from different *bazes*. In view of my discussion of the *Mabeshte/mababi* contrast above, I asked the Shauri Moyo respondents whether there were times that they desired to be members of another *baze* on account of their Sheng. The following conversation captures some highlights of the discussion.

PG: Kuna wakati unajisikia kuwa member wa Mabeshte wengine kwa sababu ya Sheng yao?
Unanimous: Sa hapo twasema eee.
Stevo: Kuna saa zingine wapata unaongea Sheng na watu, kama wabonga Sheng tamu. Watu kama hawa Kijey waskia wabonga Sheng tamu.
PG: yeah
Stevo: Sheng yao yaani, unasikia kuna words wanaongezeaongezea hapo unasikia yaani ladha yake ni tamu
PG: Enhe
Stevo: Eee, ingawa pia si tunajua Sheng yetu ni tamu lakini tunasikia yao kwanza unakaa karibu nao unasikia enyewe ...ni kitu new... ni kitu tofauti. unasikia utamu yake ata ukiingia, hata wewe mwenyewe ukiwa unajua Sheng, lakini unanyamaza unaanza kusikia

Translation:

PG: Is there a time when you feel you would like to be a member of another group of Mabeshte because of their Sheng?
Unanimous: Now there we say yes
Stevo: There are times when you are speaking Sheng with some other people, their Sheng is sweet. Like these people from *kijey* (Majengo) you hear them speaking very sweet Sheng
PG: Yeah
Stevo: Their Sheng, you hear, there are words they add... you find their flavor is sweet.
PG Enhe
Stevo: Yes, although we know our Sheng is sweet, but (when) we hear theirs we first stay close, you feel like...it is something new, it's different. You feel its sweetness getting to you, even if you join them and you know Sheng, you pause and begin listening.

The issue here is why Shauri Moyo respondents who later claim that their Sheng is 'the best in the whole world' would find any other form of Sheng attractive and sweet. One

possible explanation is that, as mentioned earlier, Majengo is one of the Muslim enclaves where Swahili culture is so much in evidence. Majengo estate borders Pumwani — another Muslim dominated estate (Burja 1974). According to Burja, Pumwani's Swahili had a very distinctive coastal flavor, and the same applies in Majengo. The Shauri Moyo respondents in this case are therefore not making a comment about Sheng per se, but are projecting another aspect of their identity; the Kenyan national culture transmitted through Swahili language and culture, and whose standards are set by the coastal version. What is interesting is that Stevo does not talk about speaking *Kijey* Sheng; instead, he just likes listening when people from *Kijey* speak. This is evidence of his in-group loyalty, which prevents him from engaging in negative identity practices such as denying his group the prestige they claim for themselves as speakers of the best Sheng.

Unlike the *Wababi*, the Shauri Moyo respondents are not trying to appropriate the perceived 'coolness' of the *Kijey* ghetto since they are also ghetto. However, they are able to portray an aspect of their Kenyan national identity by affiliating themselves with a variety of Sheng that approximates to the language that propagate national identity. This case might be regarded as a counter argument to the accommodation theory discussed above. These respondents do not claim to modify their speech to either converge or diverge from the speech habits of desirable others. Hence, the possible explanation would be that they have such deep loyalty to their in-group that they would not modify their linguistic norms to suit those of outsiders.

Majengo's case is also interesting when approached from a very different angle. I mentioned in Chapter 3 that a large part of Sheng involves codeswitching with Swahili as the matrix language in the sense of Myers-Scotton's (1993b) Matrix Language Frame

(MLF) model. This is especially so with the kind of Sheng spoken in Majengo, which like that of Kibera, is heavily influenced by Swahili. As a result, the Majengo people exhibit a triple identity, at least where the ethnic Swahilis are involved. These include national identity indexed by using Swahili that approximates to the Standard version, ethnic identity, also indexed by Swahili as their ethnic language, and being Nairobians, they get the cosmopolitan identity expressed through Sheng by default. We must also not forget that Majengo is a residential estate, and as such, we expect there to be different *bazes* in the estate with their own distinct variations.

The above illustrations have dwelt on the motivation behind the conscious shifting of identities. I will tie the construction of these identities to the efforts and commitments that the people seeking to gain admission in a group invest in the enterprise. Reitzes and Burke (1991: 243) argued that greater commitments result in shared meanings that affirm, and are consistent, with an identity. Commitment to out-group ideals leads to activation of the identities that are consistent with the norms of the desired group. Commitment to the in-group retains the status quo. Equating commitment to a cybernetic control system, Reitzes and Burke (1991:243) wrote;

> People can learn which behaviors are effective in maintaining congruence between their identity setting and the reflected appraisals. In addition, they can learn how to stabilize lines of action to maintain congruity, provided that the meanings and objects and behaviors do not shift or change while they are engaged in that learning — that is, provided that they are in a stable semantic relationship.

Commitment leads people to behave in ways that are consistent with the groups they seek to be affiliated with. While not taking the group as a collection of static entities, I recognize that there must be some sort of stability that defines the hierarchy of all the members of the group. This hierarchy maps down the boundaries and norms within which

the members operate. Whether expressed overtly or covertly, these norms are well understood by each member of the group and are responsible for the maintenance of order and identity of that group. Existence of these boundaries determines the criteria for the admission of outsiders and the requirements they must fulfill before they become acceptable. Commitment therefore must be matched by the group's willingness to accept those who seek admission and who are perceived as 'safe'— those who will not endanger, or lead to the disintegration of the group. A group of marijuana smokers will for instance not knowingly admit a policeman, no matter how committed that policeman is. Indeed we find that the reverse is true as evidenced by the many terms for the policemen listed in Chapter 3. The rejection of Mike by the African American sub-groups in Cutler (1999) can be interpreted in the same way.

The discussions above verify Hypothesis 4, that identities are shifted both consciously and unconsciously. Non-conscious shifting of identities shows that not all choices are consciously made as the RC model in its strict sense would predict. However, its applicability cannot be ignored as can be seen in speakers' uses of associative and dissociative strategies to negotiate a desired identity.

Although Shifting of identities and the identity hierarchy has been linked to the commitment to be congruent with the desired out-group, it should be understood that commitment is not in itself sufficient to guarantee automatic admission to desired groups. It must be consistent with other factors bordering on shared realities such as socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, and age and so on, all which enhance shared meanings in which identity is negotiated and constructed. In the following two sections, I examine

some discourse practices that show that participants construct their identities by using their shared meanings that revolve around the realities of their daily lives.

4.4.1. Vernacular discourse: A different perspective on local reality

Many sociolinguists use the Labovian definition of vernacular as the style in which minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech (Labov 1972a:208). Labov's definition has been applied extensively in the study of linguistic structure, especially phonological features. However, unmonitored speech is not restricted to the study of linguistic structures alone, but also covers other discourse styles, including those that transgress the boundaries of social norms of civil language. Unmonitored speech is usually frowned upon when taboo themes such as sex are discussed. In this Section, I analyze the discourse of two young women from Sinai baze, who dabble in petty prostitution. It will be demonstrate that what is taboo in the mainstream society is not necessarily considered taboo in the subculture. I use De Meis (2002: 15) metaphor of the 'whore' and 'the sex worker', where the 'whore' is defined as one who accepts the definition that the society has accorded her as just a bad woman, who sells her body for money. The 'sex worker', on the other hand, goes beyond seeing herself as a person who enmeshed in the flesh peddling vice, but also as a worker whose profession guarantees liberty, independence and self reliance. The use of vernacular in the narratives by these two petty prostitutes in performing their heterosexual, 'whore' and 'sex worker' identities will be discussed. It will also be argued that using vernacular allows these girls to claim modesty as prescribed by mainstream norms.

Sinai is the only place where I went back after the initial visit. The two young women, Kui and Joy, had impressed me with their forthrightness during my first interview, and when they invited me back, I immediately took the chance. Since we had already broken the ice in our first encounter, they were more comfortable with me during our second meeting, and they could say anything with little or no embarrassment. I recorded their conversation as they talked about various issues in their lives. Most of their themes revolved around prostitution, consumption and sale of *keroro* (illicit alcohol), illegal abortions, poverty, and violent deaths.

In a number of episodes, Kui and Joy expressed disgust at each other's gross behavior, but the accused simply shrugged it off with *ni pesa ndiyo hufanya* 'it is because of money'. Throughout the exchange, the issue of peddling their flesh for money comes up constantly, and they say it casually with no embarrassment, which may surprise one used to politically correct terms in the discussion on sexual topics. My analysis of their discourse rests on the assumption that only insiders, whose daily interactions are conducted in such a vulgar language would feel free to engage in vulgar discourse in the presence of a stranger. In my first illustration, Joy had accused Kui of setting her up to the police, and Kui had justified her action by claiming that she had to do it because Joy was attracting more men than her. The conversation opens with Joy's promise to revenge:

1. Joy: ...hiyo lembe unataka twende, tutaenda. Na mimi magava si tisho kwangu unaona?
2. Kui: tutaenda. Hakuna noma... sawa hata wanakamu ninawapatia *nyake* hiyo... na hiyo inaisha.
3. Joy: hiyo ni umbwau eee.
4. Kui: si ndiyo eee.
5. Joy: hiyo ni ushoga
6. Kui: eee, ee nai...(laughs)

Translation

1. Joy: ...if you want us to go to the authorities, we shall go. And police do not scare me, you understand?
2. Kui: we shall go. no problem...its ok even if they come, I will give them the vagina and that will be the end of it.
3. Joy: That is being bitchy
4. Kui: It sure is, yes,
5. Joy: that is homosexuality
6. Kui: yeees, yees and it... (laughs)

Joy is telling Kui that the policemen do not worry her, and that she can also set her up. Kui casually says that if the policemen come for her, she was going to buy her freedom by sleeping with them. Every prostitute is aware that they can buy their freedom with sex, when they do not have money to bribe policemen. Even when they have the money, sleeping with policemen is a better option than giving away their 'hard earned money,' a fact Joy should know too in spite of her accusations. One important thing to note here is that Sheng has removed the taboo associated with the female genitals through use of words like *nyake*. It should also be recognized that in mainstream discourse, this kind of exchange would not take place. We would also expect Kui to defend herself against such insults from Joy. Instead, she opts to keep mum, and actually laughs. This can be attributed to the prevalence of such vulgarities in their everyday speech, to an extent that they do not carry the insult as they do in mainstream discourse. This is borne by the fact that Joy accuses Kui of homosexuality, while there is no evidence of that considering that the majority of police are males. Hence, it is not possible that Joy is referring to them as homosexuals, unless there exists a social meaning that views policemen as feminine. The more likely explanation is that 'bitchy' and 'homosexuality' are socially descriptive labels for 'promiscuity' and 'whoredom' among Sinai females.

A noticeable characteristic of these girls' discourse is their heavy use of syllabic inversion. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Swahili words, previous or current Sheng words have a chance of having their syllables inverted. Examples of such words in the above exchange are:

30. Tu-ta-enda lembe — from *tu-ta-enda mbele*
1sg-fut-go *ahead*
'we shall go to the authorities'

u-mbwau — from Swahili *u-mbwa* (obsolescent 'dogness')
15-*dog*
'bitchy'

Considering the nature of their activities, where they survive by their wit, syllabic inversion allows quick communication of messages among themselves in the presence of their clients. It allows them to use words known to the clients but in a twisted form under their very noses. Notice too that Kui uses *nyake* — a contested name among females, for 'vagina', instead of the widely used word *senye*. This means that taboo words and other vulgarities do not bother these women. Indeed, we can say that society expects them to be "whorish", and they are just affirming what the society expects of them. If such terms constitute part of their vernacular, then this should be a good illustration of their whore identity.

In the next conversation, I we see how the differences between the whore and the sex worker are played out. Kui had told Joy that she flies everywhere like a Nairobi fly,[47] in reference to her whoring activities. Joy justifies that she does so in search of money.

[47] *paederus crebinpunctatis* or *paederus sabaeus* — an orange black and white beetle that does not sting, but releases pederin toxins that sting the victims and leave an ugly rash. The bug was attributed to the *El Niño* weather phenomenon that devastated Kenya in 1997.

Having an upper hand, Kui proceeds to describe those kinds of Nairobi flies, and Joy decides to turn the heat on her by shifting the topic to Kui's mother.

1. Joy: ...eh mathako ni poko... mathako ni poko
2. Kui: ...hata wewe mathako ni poko. Mathako ni poko. Si ndiyo?
3. Joy: matha yangu si poko. Mathako ni poko, mathangu huenda upoko akinitafutia unga. Hiyo ni job. Hiyo ni...hiyo ni janta...hiyo ni janta....
4. Kui: eee. Aaa si ndiyo? Hata mi matha yangu anafanyanga job akinitafutia unga si ndiyo?

Translation:

1. Joy: ...your mom is a whore...your mom is a whore.
2. Kui: ...Even you your mom is a whore. Your mom is a whore. Isn't she?
3. Joy: My mom is not a whore. My mom is not a whore, my mom goes whoring in order to feed me. That is a job...that is work....that is work.
4. Kui: yees, ah, isn't it? Even me my mother, work to fend for me, isn't it?

The metaphor of the Nairobi fly is a good example of a dozen (more in the following section). This, according to Labov's (1972b) distinction between ritual sounding and personal insult is a personal insult because it comments on reality. However, this reality is accepted by both prostitutes, since the only way to earn money, is to be on the move looking for 'victims'. Therefore, Joy does not have to defend herself, instead she starts to diss Kui's mother for her whoring activities. In (1) she repeats 'your mom is a whore'. The reason for repetition is to cut off Kui who was still elaborating on the Nairobi fly. Since Kui had put Joy at a disadvantage, she was not ready to cede the floor to Joy. When claiming the floor, Joy had to repeat her statement to signal that she was now changing the topic. This repetition works, and Kui, who was unprepared, had no good answer, so all she could say was that Joy's mom was a whore too. Her tag question 'isn't she?' (2) is evidence that that fact was known to both of them. This can be seen as a strategy through which Joy draws the distinction between being a whore and a sex worker in (3).

Joy first contests that her mom is a whore, but she also knows that Kui is well aware of her mom's activities, so she decides to mitigate that by saying that her mom does so in order to feed her. To her, her mom's activities are justified because she is engaging in a form of economic activity that sustains the family (line 3). In an environment where poverty and deprivation stare you in the face, it is not possible to be bound by the mainstream discourse of moral logic when it comes to matters of life and death. The moral question becomes whether one can be able to put food on the table, and any means towards this end is acceptable. In this regard, Joy's mother is not just a whore, but also a worker like any other. In line 4, Kui is still not impressed, and she says that her mother also works to take care of her, but not in prostitution. Kui does not question the legitimacy of prostitution as an economic activity, but she questions their mothers' involvement. Elsewhere, she challenges her friend, *si uko na senye kama mimi?* 'don't you have a vagina just like me?' to imply that they can prostitute themselves instead of letting their mothers do it for them.

Throughout the interview, Joy constantly rebukes Kui for not taking her 'job' seriously. She cannot understand why Kui would sleep with men who pay her nothing, or give her very little money. Although to Joy everything goes so long as she is getting money for it *(ni pesa ndiyo hufanya* 'it is because of money'), there is a limit to what she can do. She for instance displays her heterosexual preference and challenges Kui for sleeping with a 'boyfriend' who engages in homosexuality. Note that she does not accept Kui's defense of money, because to Joy, what he gives Kui is too little to justify her sleeping with a man with 'abhorrent' sexual behavior.

1. Joy: aaaaa kwenda huko! Ndio nakuulizaje? Doo gani hiyo hukupea?
2. Kui: ...hanipeangi doo lakini...
3. Joy: hiyo finje... finje, finje ndiyo unai..unaita ganji?
4. Kui: hiyo ni ya chai na si na tunakunywanga na wewe? Senye wewe!
5. Joy: ...finje ndiyo una..unaita ganji?
6. Kui: si ndiyo? Hiyo ni pesa.

Translation

1. Joy: aaaaa forget it! I am asking you...how much money does he give you?
2. Kui: ...he does not give me money, but...
3. Joy: 50 bucks... 50 bucks, 50 bucks you are...you call that money?
4. Kui: that is for the tea, and don't we drink it with you? You vagina!
5. Joy: ...50 shillings! You are...you call that money?
6. Kui: that's right...that is money.

Compared to an American dollar, fifty shillings is about sixty cents. In line 1, Joy is just expressing her disgust that Kui would sleep with someone who has gay tendencies. Kui in line 2 is at first reluctant to admit that she is paid, because that would mean that she does not get value for her money. But when Joy in line 3 tauts her that she gets only 50 shillings, Kui tries to save her face by telling Joy that it is just a token and reminds her that they normally spend it together (line 4). Joy maintains that fifty shillings is negligible, and Kui holds on to her position that it is still money (better little than nothing). Such accusations continues to the very end of the interview, and ends with Joy telling Kui that her so-called boyfriend cannot buy her a 20-shilling panties (about quarter of a dollar), to which Kui replies that she does not really care.

This exchange shows Kui moving from the realm of commercial sex to intimate friendship. After all, prostitutes or not, they have personal feelings like other people, and money does not count in relationships; however, these relationships are not stable because they are not good for business for a sex worker. Hence, they should be taken within the context of Kui's whore aspect. To Joy, the whole activity is looked at in economic terms. We can even interpret her disgust for homosexual males from an

ecomonic perspective. A gay male is useless to a female prostitute, because there is no money to be made from him.

Returning to Kui's defense of her mom, we can argue that she is still bound by some laws of mainstream morality when it comes to the social perception of prostitution. She has not yet been emancipated from the stigmatization of her profession by the mainstream society. She knows that prostitution dehumanizes the prostitutes, and that it is better to use legitimate ways of making a living. The woman still remains a mother figure who should be respected, something impossible if one is engaging in prostitution. On her part, Joy, sees nothing wrong. Later, she chides Kui that the only reason that her mom quit prostitution was because she became ill and ugly and could no longer attract men. On the other hand, Joy has been liberated from the mainstream logic, which has denied their lot a chance to get into legitimate money making activities. She does not seek to excuse her mom's prostitution, but justifies it as a profession.

Joy and Kui's exchanges display their mastery of Sheng, which debunks the common assumption that women are not good users of vernaculars. Because their clients are Sheng speaking males, these women have to be up to date with their Sheng so that they do not become disadvantaged in their exchange encounters. In addition, Sheng affords them with a communication medium to mask the taboos associated with their occupation. The sentences below are just a small sample amongst many that appeared in their one-hour exchange. They show how Sheng is used in negotiation of 'fees' (1&5), explaining the nature of their work (2&4), and mitigating their lifestyle (3).

1. kama unaweza mpatia **thao mbili** na **soo punch**, sawa...lakini ati **ummange sare**
   if you can give her two thousand and five hundred, ok...but not that you screw her for nothing... (Kui to a man who wanted to talk to Joy)

2. **wenye mi** huenda nao, **mi** huwanga **biarasha** nao
   the ones I sleep with, it is usually on business terms (what Joy tells her potential clients)
3. mimi ni malaya nimezoea kujitafutia na **senye ya mine**...
   I am a prostitute who is used to earning my living with my vagina (What Kui told a man who wanted to take her by force)
4. unaenda una**dozi** na yeye anakupatia **ganji**...
   you go and sleep with him and he gives you money (Kui telling Joy how she likes it with her clients)
5. asubuhi ananiachia **rwabe** au **soo punch**
   in the morning he leaves me 200 shillings or 500 shillings (Joy talking about how much she charges)

In 2, syllabic inversion comes up once more. This persistent strategy serves a double advantage; it not only makes their variety unique, but it also allows them to conspire against their clients by manipulating a familiar medium. The word *mũbatari* [mofatari] — 'the needy' (Gikuyu orthography), for example, comes to mind. I said earlier that the *matatu* men use it to refer to the police, but the prostitutes use it to refer to the *matatu* men. Moreover its ambiguity is very appropriate because everyone is needy in one way or another (Mbugua 2003). Even so, these Sinai females reconstitute it to *mtafari,* which completely masks a familiar term that empowers them to speak about their stigmatized profession and still save face. They are not the one in need, they only satisfy a need.

A look at the different senses of the name *poko* justifies the use of De Meis' metaphors of the 'whore' and the 'sex worker'. When Kui is informed that her 'boyfriend' sleeps around with other women and gives them money while he gives her nothing she responds *yeye ni fala na ni poko* 'He is a fool and a whore'. In her anger she says she was going to call it quits with her boyfriend and was going to tell him *wewe upige upoko yako na mimi nipige yangu* 'you whore yourself and I whore myself'. Referring to Frankie, a friend who passed away, Joy asks '*umeshawahi sikia tu poko*

alikuwa amezaliwangwa na upoko 'ever heard of a whore who was born a whore?' And finally, when Kui says she would prefer to remain with girl children if she leaves her "husband", Joy ask her *mapoko?* 'whores?' referring to the girl children. From these uses, we see that a whore does not necessarily engage in the vice for money. Even males with multiple sexual partners are regarded as whores, and girl children who grow up in the ghetto are whores because that is the most likely opening for them. This contrast with the *upoko* 'prostitution' as a commercial enterprise when these prostitutes make statements like ...*animange lakini anipe ganji* 'he can screw me but he must give me money'

From these prostitutes' vulgar discourse, we see that we can isolate different forms of identities that surface in their exchange. These identities range from poor ghetto dwellers, whores, sex workers, as well as females, with emotional needs like any other female who lives under mainstream norms. These identities come up in their vernacular discourse that derives from their social realities, which is distinct from the mainstream reality. Downes (1998:195) remarks regarding vernacular use amongst a group of speakers is very relevant in this case;

> ...the positive social significance of vernacular speech resides in the community and culture of its speakers. This will often diverge from superposed norms. Although overtly 'stigmatized', its actual 'social meaning' may be positive from the point of view of those to whom it is the vernacular, and deeply tied up with their identity.

Following this logic, we can conclude that the vernacular of the Sinai girls characterized by the overt use of vulgar vocabulary accords them a unique identity. Although we might assume that they are performing the expected identity by talking 'dirty', we notice that they negotiate their place in the mainstream by softening taboo words in Standard

Swahili by masking the vulgar words in Sheng. I will briefly touch on other aspects of their vernacular in the course of my arguments in the next Section.

4.4.2. Michongoano: performance of identity in verbal contest

Interpersonal interaction between close friends is not always characterized by concerns about political correctness. Discourse practices that in ordinary discourse would arouse tension and confrontation if conducted with strangers, can pass without fuss. The rules of interactions are usually codified into discourse norms, and are well understood by the participants. Consider the exchange between Joy and Kui below:

1. Kui: Kwenda! wacha hii sura yako inakaa ya Mjaka, Mkamba, Mnubi, kwenda 'mũnũbi ũyũ!' ([monofi ojo] — Gikuyu orthography)
2. Joy: ...na vile unakuwa na mapua kubwa kubwa kama za Mlude.
3. Kui: kwenda! na wewe hizi zako zinakaa ka filimbi ya Jakubu.
4. Joy: si uangalie tu poa; zimekaa kama filimbi ya Jakubu?
5. Kui: wacha hizi rasa yako inakaa kama pikipiki.
6. Joy: unaudhika juu ya chali yangu anaipendanga tu mbaya sana.
7. Kui: Eee, wacha waipende.
8. Joy: hata chali yangu akinipiga ananipiganga juu ya rasa zangu....

Translation:

1. Kui: leave me alone, your face looks like that of a Luo, Kamba, and Nubian, go away, you Nubian!
2. Joy: ...and the way you have a big nose like that of a Luhya.
3. Kui: stop it! And you, yours looks like Jakubu's whistle.
4. Joy: just look at them carefully; do they look like Jakubu's whistle?
5. Kui: and your butt looks like a motorcycle.
6. Joy: it pains you because my boyfriend loves it very much.
7. Kui: ok, let them like it.
8. Joy: when my boyfriend beats me up, it is because of my butt (i.e. he can't bear to see anyone else touching it)...

(Luo, Kamba, and Luhya are large ethnic groups in Kenya while the Nubians are a minority ethnic group)

Kui's remark in (1) implies that Joy's mum is a prostitute. That is why her (Joy) facial features resemble people from different tribes that her mother has slept with. Joy in (2) pursues this line of prostitution and claims that Kui's big nose resembles that of a Luhya. In addition to tribal references, Kui uses a local reference in (3) 'Jakubu's whistle' whose meaning was lost to me. The only association between Jacob and whistle that comes to mind is the Biblical passage on Zechariah 10:2-12,[48] though I am not sure whether this is what the girls had in mind. However, judging from Joy's reaction in (4) there is no doubt that it is something quite gross. Finally, Kui changes the topic of the diss to Joy's large butt, and Joy turns tables and makes the diss work to her advantage in (6&8). Both use Sheng in their interaction and they are very comfortable with each other's linguistic use.

The meaning of this exchange can be contextualized only in consideration of their shared meaning. Joy does not react to the reference to her Nubian parentage because she

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[48] "The diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd. My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the Lord of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle. From him comes the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together. They shall be like mighty men, who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle. They shall fight because the Lord is with them, and the riders on horses shall be put to shame. I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of 'Joseph'. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the Lord their God, and I will hear them. Those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord. I will **whistle** for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased. I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember me in far countries; they shall live, together with their children, and they shall return. I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them. He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: All the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. So I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name, says the Lord."

has already come to terms with it. (She actually claims Nubian parentage.) To retaliate, she also hit at Kui's Luhya parentage. Later on in the exchange, Kui admits that her father was a Luhya, a pointer to the fact that they share mutual knowledge of each other's parentage. This is a reminder that mastery of interactive norms and the shared reality enable the decoding of the intended message especially when making the distinction between the literal and the idiomatic senses. Jakubu's whistle, Kui and Joy's prostitution as well as their parentage are background knowledge that they draw from in their interactions. This logic can be extended to all forms of interaction within the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975) whose central claim is that any discourse is a joint effort where the speaker and addressee obey certain rules in order to communicate effectively. Shared background knowledge (BGK) is the key to understanding the interpretation of discourse as aptly articulated by Fairclough (1995: 44):

> The concept of BGK reduces diverse aspects of the 'backgrounded material', which is drawn upon in interaction — beliefs, values, ideologies as well as knowledge properly so called — to 'knowledge'. 'Knowledge' implies facts to be known, facts coded in propositions, which are straightforwardly and transparently related to them.

The centrality of BGK will become evident in the following Section in my discussion of a discourse genre where some tenets of the cooperative principle are flouted without resulting in a breakdown in communication. This discourse genre comes in the form of verbal contest known as *mchongoano,* and it will be discussed in the context of Goffman's facework theory (1967), and Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness strategy. Its relevance to identity will then be discussed.

4.4.2.1. Mchongoano within the general discourse of verbal art

The study of verbal art focuses on both cultural and linguistic skills of the speakers. As a result, it has attracted the attention of both folklorists and linguists, who have studied it under different titles such as 'signifying,' 'playing the dozens,' 'sounding' and 'toasting' among others. Labov (1972b), discusses the rules of ritual insults and their grammatical properties such as clause embedding amongst the African American adolescents in the New York ghettoes. On the folklore side, we have examples such as Dundes et al., (1972: 130-160) who looked at rhyming among the Turkish boys' verbal dueling. Other studies include Kochman (1972: 241-264), Mitchell-Kernan (1972: 161-179[49]), and Abrahams (1964) among others. Most recently Marcyliena Morgan (2002: 84-110) has written about conversational signifying, and a ritualized routine in face-saving discourse among African American girls. Morgan's and Mitchel-Kernan's works are especially crucial because they pursue the discourse beyond the focus on male. Their work shows that women are also competent and do participate in these kinds of interactions, sometimes coming up with their own kind of word play with a distinct structure. These earlier studies inform my discussion in the rest of this Section.

A precursor to the discourse of *michongoano* in Sheng is to be found in the rich African oral traditions. A good illustration is the Gikuyu circumcision activities and Swahili poetry. Mbugua (2003) writes that amongst the Gikuyu, there was a three-week period prior to the initiation ceremony when the Gikuyu world was turned upside down. During this period, young men were expected to behave contrary to the expected social norms, both before and afer the initiation. Mbugua discusses how during that period, the

[49] See also in Kochman (1972: 315-335)

boys were allowed to address women with vulgar language and to engage in both physical and verbal contests as the girls cheered from a safe distance. Girls chose as their dancing partners, boys who won both the verbal and physical contests for demonstrating their manhood and they shunned the boys who lost. It was thus important for the would-be initiates to win such contests in order to earn respect among their peers.

In Swahili traditional poetry, two poets could give each other verbal challenges. Such poetic verbal challenges were very similar to the rhyming among the Turkish boys, but they differed in topics. Although Swahili poetry avoided the use of vulgar rhymes, it is striking that both talked about emasculation of their opponents. The verbal duels among the Turkish boys revolved around topics with sexual themes, but the Swahili poetry revolved around the self-pride as illustrated by the poem *simba mwenda pweke* 'a lone lion' by Ahmad Nassir (Ustadh Bhalo) in *Malenga wa Mvita* (1971):

Simba mwenda pweke
Ndimi simba ndume ndimi, ndimi mwelevu wa nyina
Niwazingae wasemi, kwa huja wakadangana
Ndimi mkingama ndimi, zisipate la kunena
Mungautambika mwina, na kunena jifunzeni

Its me the mighty bull, I am the expert of traps
When I surround the talkers, they gather in awe
I am the tongue binder, so that they can't talk
If you were to set a trap, teach yourself to speak.

Ustadh Bhalo artistically throws down the gauntlet to his fellow poets by claiming to be the first among equals. By comparing himself to the lion, regarded as the undisputed king of the jungle in the oral traditions, he is symbolically claiming a high status while implying that other poets should pay homage to him. There is the implication that since the other poets are not his match, they were worthless. In order to salvage their honor, his

contemporaries had no recourse but to rise to the challenge, composing their rejoinders with an equal show of verbal display. Failure to rise to the occasion meant that you had averred to what your opponent has claimed.

We can look at *michongoano* within this context, though artistic composition is not very elaborate. Instead, quick-witted one-liners are the goals of these verbal insults, which should be viewed within the context of Sheng's promotion of cognitive efficiency (Kang'ethe 2004). A good illustration is in order:

> Buda-ko hu- hep-a job ku-swing na gate
> *9father-poss hab evade-fv job inf-swing with gate*
> Your father skips work to swing on a gate

In just one short sentence, a host of implications have been communicated. The mental condition of an opponent's father is put into question by reference to his immaturity. Adults are not supposed to swing on gates, and to think that he had run away from work to do it makes it even more belittling. Here, Sheng serves the purpose of shortening communication while transmitting deeper sociocultural meaning. Notice the use of the coined word *Buda*, from Hindi Buddha (Kang'ethe 2004, Githiora 2002) and the code mixing in *ku-swing*. In just one instance we observe words coinage, Swahili structure, and inserted English material. Following Myers-Scotton's (1993a) social motivations for codeswitching, we can view the instances of codeswitching as strategies that allow contestants to claim local identity through the use of Swahili, while negotiating status through the use of English. A different example is when Kui disses Joy with *mathako anaendanga kila bayesa* 'you mother visits every bar', where in very few words, she signifies that Joy's mother is a prostitute who moves from one bar to another in search of clients, a shared meaning retrievable through BGK.

Lots of parallels can be drawn between *michongoano* and the African American playing of dozens. In my internet search, I discovered that some of the *michongoano* are in fact 'Shenginized' versions of 'yo *mama'* jokes made popular by African Americans in the United States. However, it would be wrong to imagine that they are directly copied without any input by the Sheng speakers. In most cases, *yo mama* is truncated and replaced with *you*, or given the beginning *ati we...* 'that you are...' as in examples below. The Sheng joke is glossed literally, and then compared with its '*yo mama*' joke counterpart (in italics).

(a) wewe ni m-jinga mpaka u- li- fail blood test
You cop 1sm-*fool until* 2sg-past-fail blood test
You are foolish such that you failed blood test
Yo mama's so dumb, she couldn't pass a blood test.

(b) wewe m-fat mpaka u- ki- va- a raincoat ya yellow people shout taxi!
You 1sm-fat *until* 2sg-cond-*wear*-fv raincoat *of* yellow people shout taxi!
You are so fat that if you wear a yellow raincoat people shout "taxi"
Yo mama's so fat, when she wears a yellow raincoat, people call her "Taxi"

(c) ati wee m- so u- ki- jump kwa air u-na get stuck!
That you 1sm-*big* 2sg-cond-jump *in the* air 2sg-pres get stuck
You are so big that if you jump in the air you get stuck!
Yo mama's so fat, she jumped up in the air and got stuck

We can attribute this cultural borrowing to the Kenyan diaspora in the United States, and the discourse practices in the internet that make '*yo mama*' jokes accessible to Kenya's virtual community. Once they are used in the internet forums, they easily infiltrate the normal daily discourse of Sheng speaker in Nairobi and elsewhere. As we can see above, Sheng speakers modify these jokes to fit the structure of their discourse through pervasive codeswitching. We also note that some realities are not local but international. In (b) for instance, reference to yellow taxis indicate that the joke's origin is foreign, most probably the United States since in Kenya, taxis are not yellow. It is also

noteworthy that the borrowed dozens directly confront the target instead of being directed to someone's mother, though in these internet forums, they are usually not directed at anybody in particular. This means that no one is likely to lose face, and, even if that happened, the virtual distance prevents the danger that could ensue in face-to-face interactions. Before I discuss the relevance of *michongoano* in the identity project, I will briefly compare the structure of *michongoano* with the template adopted by Labov (1972b) in his analysis of the African American ritual sounding.

4.4.2.2 Structure of michongoano

As a discourse practice, Labov (1972b) proposed that ritual sounding followed a general syntactic pattern characterized by clause embedding or deletion. He proposed the following structure;

> T (B) is X that P
> Where T is the target of the sound, X the attribute of T, which is focused on, and P is a proposition that is coupled with a quantifier "so...that" to express the degree to which T has X. B refers to the person the sound is directed at.

A similar attribute/comment structure is manifested in *michongoano*, where the first part defines the attribute(s) of the opponent, members of his/her family or anything else associated with him/her, while the second parts makes a comment on that attribute, as illustrated in the following examples.

(1) buda-ko ni m- chafu mpaka umbu hu-tumi-a straw
9father-your cop 1sm-dirty until mosquito hab-use-fv straw
ku-m- nyony-a damu.
inf-3sgom-suck 9damu.
your father is so dirty such that mosquitoes use a straw to suck blood from him

(2) ati wewe ni m-chafu mosquito i- ki- ku- um- a kwanza
that you cop 1sm-dirty mosquito 9sm-cond-2sg bite-fv first
i-na-end-a ku-brush meno.
9-pres-go-fv inf-brush 6teeth
you are so dirty that if the mosquito bites you, it goes to brush its teeth

(3) hao yenu soo u- ki- tok- a back door u- ko ocha
9house your huge 2sg-cond-come from-fv back door 2sg-loc 17 countryside.
your house is big that if you exit the back door you are in the rural area

In (1), the target attribute is the opponent's father's untidiness, with the comment being the joke that a disease-causing insect has superior health standards. The same theme can be seen in (2), with a slight variation; however, the target switches to the opponent himself. In (3), the opponent's house becomes the attribute, while the comment just adds value-laden information. *Ocha* is a Sheng word borrowed from Gikuyu *gicagi* for 'village'. In Sheng, *ocha* or its other variants *oshago* and *shaggs* refer to the remote rural areas. We can make the obvious deduction that the participants live in urban areas, presumably Nairobi. The imagery of a house with the front door in Nairobi and the back door in the rural area is left to the reader's imagination.

Labov also claims that in cases where the overt structure fails to display the 'T (B) is X that P' sequence, a rule of deletion similar to the syntactic rules of ellipsis has taken place. In his example "your mother the abominable snowman", what is lacking, apart from the copula, is the attribute and the quantifier, but the comparative metaphor is still there. Participants familiar with such discourse will know right away that the attribute has to do with the opponent mother's massive figure. In light of this, we can say that discourse norms make the meaning accessible to the participants due to the intersubjective reality of the participants. The shared background knowledge makes it possible to recover the truncated materials. A similar argument can be extended to

michongoano, especially in the jokes that begin with 'asubuhi asubuhi' 'morning morning' as in these examples:

(i) asubuhi asubuhi gazeti na harufu ya socks
9morning 9morning 5newspaper and 9smell of socks
You guys eat newspapers and stench of socks for breakfast

(ii) asubuhi asubuhi kokoto na kumikumi
9morning 9morning 9gravel and 9kumikumi
You guys eat gravel and kumikumi for breakfast

(iii) asubuhi asubuhi goodygoody[50] na makojo ya ngamia
9morning 9morning goodygoody and 6urine of 9camel
You guys eat goody goody and camel urine for braekfast

(iv) asubuhi asubuhi kokoto moto na glasi ya usaa
9morning 9morning 9gravel hot and 9glass of 11 pus
You guys eat hot concrete and a glass of pus for breakfast

Although these kinds of *michongoano* are not laden with deep metaphors, they are rather problematic because their meaning cannot be accessed through overt syntax. However for those familiar with these kinds of jokes, they are able to follow the pattern in the recovery of the missing material. Background knowledge allow speakers to relate the surface structures with the similar untruncated structure they might have encountered elsewhere, such as *kwenyu nyinyi huamkia maembe na maziwa mala, au glue na kokoto* " in your home you start the day with mangoes and fermented milk or glue and gravel". Using such a cue, we can gloss (i) above as "in the morning, you start the day by eating newspaper and the stench from socks" This pattern can be applied to the rest of this kind of truncated jokes. Still we realize that we are not done yet. We have only reconstructed the comment while the attribute is lacking. Appropriate attributes can either be poverty or foolishness. The reconstructed structure should go like 'You are so poor (foolish, gross) that in the morning, you begin the day by eating newspapers and the stench from socks', The same

[50] A kind of bubble gum popular with boys and girls

can be said of metaphorical jokes such as *sura kama dogi ya Bush* 'face like Bush's dog', or *sura kama bakuli ya jela* 'face like a prison bowl' as comments about someone's ugly face. This then is a confirmation of Labov's claim that these jokes follow from the same underlying structure.

4.4.2.3. The mastery of verbal art: playing by the shared rules

Having discussed the structure of *michongoano* along the lines of African American playing of dozens, we now proceed to draw other parallels in the way this discourse activity is conducted. Again, I adopt some of Labov's rules governing ritual insults as I develop my discussion of their relevance in the identity project. Three of these rules are 1) the reply of a sound is a sound, 2) the proposition in sound must not be true, and 3) sound are never denied. To understand rule 1, 'the reply to a sound is another sound', let us consider the "Boondocks" cartoon by Aaron Gruder below:

Source: www.livejournal.com/community/boondocks_comic 03/25/2005

Figure 6. The reply of a sound is a sound

In the above cartoon, Caesar, the dreadlocked character has the option of opting out, or changing the discourse activity; however, he gives a rejoinder that retains the theme of

bad breath. In these cartoon strips, Riley, his opponent is usually portrayed, as a social deviant who glorifies what is abhorred by the society. Terrorists are his heroes, which is the reason he accuses Caesar of doing political humor. It is obvious that he does not want to continue with the discourse that demonizes his heroes, so he says that he does not do political humor. In a way, he is looking for a way out, or changing the topic, but he wants to do it without losing face or flouting the rule.

Likewise, a *michongoano* contest is a dual activity where a person taunted must reply in another *mchongoano*. One does not opt out of the conversation, for doing so can diminish one's status among his/her peers, especially if there was an audience at the time of exchange. Failure to respond could either mean that you lacked the necessary verbal skill to match your challenger or that what was said was true. A participant has no choice between responding and going away because either case would lead to loss of face. To resolve this dilemma and save face, the responder must deal with rule 2; 'the proposition in the sound must not be true'. Accepting the hyperbolical nature of *michongoano* enables an equally exaggerated retort.

Operation of rule 3, 'sounds are never denied' in Sheng can be seen in the exchanges between Ejaab and Hater, and Chokoraa and Baba_ndogo both taken from *kenyaniyetu.com* website:

> Hater: Ejaab, asubuhi asubuhi close up na ngozi ya ngamia
> *9morning 9morning closeup and 9skin of 9camel*
> You guys eat close up and skin of a camel for breakfast
>
> Ejaab: Hater, asubuhi asubuhi, magoti ya mende, sawdust na gazeti ya nation
> *9morning 9morning, 6-knees of 9roach, sawdust and paper of nation*
> You guys eat roach joints, sawdust and Nation newspaper[51] for breakfast.

[51] The *Nation* is one of the leading Newspapers in the East and Central African region.

Hater: Ejaab, asubuhi asubuhi kokoto moto na glasi ya usaa
9morning 9morning 9gravel hot and 9glass of 11pus
You guys eat hot gravel and a glass of pus for breakfast

Ejaab: Hater, asubuhi asubuhi jasho ya murungaru na soks za mwiraria
9morning 9morning 5sweat of murungaru and 9socks of mwiraria
You guys eat Murungaru's[52] sweat, and Mwiraria's[53] socks for breakfast.

Hater tries to portray the kind of disgusting food that Ejaab and his family eat for breakfast. Ejaab's retort is equally effective when he counters that what they eat at their home is nothing compared to what Hater's family eats. Fearing the loss of face, Hater gives a more devastating retort by showing the disgust at Ejaab's morning dish. Ejaab effectively counters Hater's move, while keeping within the breakfast topic, but introduces political characters that majority of Kenyans detest.

Note that I have used the concept of 'losing face' because of the internet's interactive features that enable the audience to participate. When one has been bested, other internet users comments on it by quoting the diss and then adding accompanying smileys (e.g., ☹, ☺,) or comments such as *hapo umewezwa* 'there he got you' or *hiyo ni kali* 'that is a tough one'. These internet strategies work similar to laughs, sighs and clapping among the real audience in face-to-face interactions. The internet, however, has its disadvantage because we cannot say whether participants have opted out, or differences in time zone has led to the termination of a *michongoano* exchange. Still, we see that a sound is responded to with another sound, mostly on the same topic. On the same internet thread, the exchange between Chokoraa and Baba_ndogo represents

[52] Murungaru: an unpopular cabinet minister known for his sweating and always associated with high level official corruption.
[53] Mwiraria: Minister of Finance, also unpopular with Kenyans

another type of *michongoano* genre. The dyad below is in the 'challenge and retort' adjacency pair format.

Baba_ndogo: Chokora, weeee ni m- zeee mpaka vile Noah a- li- jeng-a
Chokora you cop 1sm old until when Noah 1sg-past-make-fv
ark weee ndio u- li- lip- ish- a bu fare
ark you cop (emp) 2sg-past pay-caus-fv bus fare
'Chokora, you are so old that when Noah built the ark, you were the one who charged the fare'

Chokoraa: Baba_ndogo, wewe m- zee hadi passport yako
Baba_ndogo, you 1sm-old until passport your
i- me- andik-w- a kwa scroll
9sm-perf- write- pass-fv with scroll
'You are old such that your passport is written on a scroll'

Baba_ndogo: Chokora, weee ni m-kondee ati m-vua i- ki- nyesh-a yii
Chokora, you cop 1sm-thin that 2-rain -9sm-cond-fall-fv it-
u- kuu- hat-a
2sg-you om sweep-fv
You are so thin that when rain falls, it sweeps you off

Chokoraa: Baba_ndogo, wewe m- fat mpaka u- ki- va- a raincoat ya
Baba_Ndogo, you 1sm-fat until 2sg-cond-wear-fv raincoar of
yellow people shout taxi!
yellow people shout taxi!
You are so fat that when you wear a yellow raincoat people shout taxi!

The first adjacency pair connects the distant past and modernity in commenting about someone's age. Baba_ndogo draws the biblical analogy of Noah and the ark to comment on Chokoraa's age. Chokoraa cleverly sticks to the biblical analogy of scrolls. A person who is conversant with Biblical stories understands that stories of the Noah's ark were first written on scrolls. Therefore, if Baba_ndogo's passport was written on a scroll, then he has no right to comment on Chokoraa's age since they both belong to the era of scrolls. The second adjacency pair juxtaposes the idiom of skinniness with that of fatness.

Who is better, a very skinny person or a very fat person? This is left to the audience to judge.

4.4.2.4. Michongoano as face threatening acts

The kinds of topics that pervade *michongoano* jokes are highly volatile. They constitute what (Goffman 1967, Brown and Levinson 1987) call face-threatening acts due to their overt commentaries of absurd attributes of the interlocutors or members of their close family. Goffman's facework theory and Brown and Levinson politeness theory provides good analytical tools for this kind of discourse. The key issue here is that people want to be positively perceived by others, which requires the participants to be considerate so that they do not make each other to be perceived negatively. This leads to self censorship as a politeness strategy, where participants bow to the dictates of certain norms. Since engaging in discourse that can lead to loss of face may threaten the group's cohesion, especially if a member ends up getting hurt, certain discourse types are normally avoided. Aternatively, only the people who share background knowledge to undertand the rules involved engage in them.

In *michongoano* discourse, a communicative dilemma has to be resolved. While on the one hand they are geared towards humiliating an opponent by putting him/her down, they are on the other hand intended to entertain and not to hurt, but there have been cases where they degenerate into physical confrontations. In an internet forum *mashada.com*, Chizzy recounts an experience in primary school, when a fellow pupil told him; *ati nyanyako ana laini ya red kwa kunyi* 'that your grandmother has a red line on her butt'. Unable to bear the insult, Chizzy pounced on the hapless pupil. In this case, his

anger cannot be attributed to the fact that the instigator commented about the age of his grandmother since grandmothers are supposed to be old. It is because he implies she is abnormal (a red line on her butt), as understood within the traditional context of taboo concerning female nudity — an abnormality on someone's butt can be noticed only when that person is naked. '*Ati*' here indicates that the instigator is reporting a circulating rumor. Chizzy's report shows the lurking danger when playing *michongoano* in face-to-face interaction, especially if they touch a raw nerve. To avoid such ugly scenes, *michongoano* are normally played among close friends who understand the established norms governing this discourse activity.

4.4.2.5. Affirming identity: Michongoano as an in-group activity

People who are outside the subculture might not be aware that verbal dueling is in session because it is often spontaneous. In the Boondocks cartoon below, Riley sounds on his friend Caesar in the presence of his mixed-race neighbor girl, Jazmine. With a father who shuns black culture and white mother who doesn't know it, Jazmine lacks the ethnic heritage and hence BGK necessary for comprehending the rules governing the dozens discourse. She is bewildered by the 'insult' Riley hurls at Caesar. Note that Caesar is not bothered and does not defend himself because he understands the rules and interprets it as a sound. He knows that sounds are never denied because they are not supposed to be true. When Riley pretends to apologize, he throws another barb at Caesar leaving Jazmine more dumfounded as seen in Figure 7:

(source: **www.**livejournal**.com/community/boondocks_comic,** 03/25/2005)

Figure 7: Outsiders neither know the safe topics nor the rules in ritual insults

This cartoon shows that even though these three youth constitute a group of friends, they have different identities. Jazmine's identity is salient as an outsider both in terms of her gender as well as her mixed race background.

Relating this to group identity, we find that among strangers, it is hard to know a safe or unsafe sound (Labov 1972b). Consider my example above of Chizzy fighting with a boy who said that his grandma had a red line on her butt. If Labov's three rules had been have been satisfied, then we can attribute the physical confrontation to the fact that Chizzy and the boy were not close buddies, or that the context was not appropriate.

Furthermore, Labov also distinguishes between a personal insult and a ritual insult. Personal insults, are truthful commentaries while ritual insults are hyperbolical jokes. Unlike ritual insults, therefore, personal insults are characterized by denial, excuse or mitigation. An outsider from a different *baze* does not have all the facts to know when he is operating within the felicity or infelicity frameworks. Failure to make this crucial distinction may lead to personal insult when none was intended. We can interpret the altercation between Chizzy and the boy in this context, since in normal circumstances Chizzy could easily have reciprocated with his own retort. This leads us to conclude that

michongoano discourse is an in-group activity. Only the insiders have the necessary background knowledge to know the topics safe for *michongoano,* and the taboo topics that should be avoided at all costs. In a close-knit group of *Mabeshte,* such as the two Sinai female respondents, each understands the temperament of her fellow colleague. They know when to stop when they touch a raw nerve. In the same breath, a *beshte* is usually tolerant of the verbal transgression of a fellow *beshte* so that s/he does not threaten the solidarity of the group. A *beshte* who interprets a *mchongoano* as an insult where none was intended cannot be a true *beshte*, and risks losing face. This would be a clear indication that his/her hierarchy is at the group's periphery.

Earlier, I defined *Mabeshte* as close buddies who hang out together, mostly in a *baze*. Parents and other older people are usually excluded from these bazes. As outsiders they cannot participate in *michongoano*, though they often constitute the subjects of *michongoano*. In any case, they would only play *michongoano* with their fellow age mates, but not their kids or grandchildren. Again let us look at a Boondocks cartoon:

Source: www.livejournal.com/community/boondocks_comic 03/26/2005

Figure 8: Verbal duels are an in-group thing

Riley gets a whacking for engaging in an age-graded activity with his granddad. He thinks his granddad does not understand the joke, but the reality is that these two people,

though relatives, belong to different in-groups and therefore interpret reality differently. The family identity is not salient as the in-group identity in these kinds of discourse.

4.4.2.6. The language of delivery

The mode of delivery of *michongoano* is a key ingredient to this discourse activity. Since Swahili is a mainstream language, delivering *michongoano* in Standard Swahili or Standard English, for instance, signals a shift from the joking mode to a serious mode. Delivery in Sheng, on the other hand, signals that a non-serious friendly discourse is in session. Following Hymes, (1974:58-60), I propose that Sheng is the *instrument,* or form of speech that makes the *michongoano* interesting and unique. Because a lot of *michongoano* are borrowed from English, translation into English will not greatly affect the joke; however, translation into Standard Swahili often affects the quality of the joke. As an illustration, let us compare a *mchongoano* in Sheng with its equivalent in Standard Swahili. This comparison might not make sense to non-Swahili speakers.

Kui: We kw-enda u- na-flaiflai-ngi everywhere kama Nairobi fly
You inf-go 2sg-pres-fly- hab everywhere like Nairobi fly
Wewe nenda, unapaapaa kila mahali kama inzi/mdudu wa Nairobi
go away, you fly everywhere like Nairobi fly.

To a Sheng or Swahili speaker, the bold italic (Standard Swahili translation) has implicitly been shed of the humor that characterizes this type of verbal exchange. We also find that lexical equivalents might be so hard to translate, as in Nairobi fly[54], but this is easily handled in Sheng through codeswitching, which salvages the joke. Similarly, we note that *'yo mama'* jokes are delivered in vernacular; a lot of humor would be lost if

[54] *Inzi/mdudu wa Nairobi* is ambiguous. It might mean a certain fly, or any kind of fly in Nairobi.

they were delivered in Standard English. From this, we say that delivery of jokes in non-standard idioms seems to be a cross linguistic phenomenon.

In this Section, I have argued that if *michongoano* is an in-group verbal discourse delivered in Sheng, then the non-Sheng speakers will always constitute the out-group every time this verbal discourse is in progress, as a result of their limited verbal skills. In addition, mastery of lexical features in itself is not sufficient when engaging in these kinds of discourse. One has to be a regular participant in other baze activities in order to know the topics that are safe to discuss and those that are not. The *michongoano* that do not reflect the local reality are inaccessible to the insiders, but those that reflect the local reality are inaccessible to the outsiders. However, the *michongoano* that border on the national reality are accessible to all people who are conversant with this type of discourse. Furthermore, we note that the international reality has been incorporated into the local reality through adoption of African American ritual insults (sounds or dozens). All these factors have a very big impact in the shifting of identities among the Sheng speakers in Kenya.

4.5. Other ways of constructing identities

Although my major focus has been on linguistic variation and the discourse practices in the construction of identity, I have claimed that linguistic practices alone are not enough to complete the identity project. They combine with other discursive practices in creating meanings of any category or group. Dere, a Kabete respondent, talked of groups of marijuana smokers whose Sheng was incomprehensible because it was highly coded. Admission into such a group means mastering their Sheng; however, knowing Sheng

may not enough; you must also be a marijuana smoker in order to gain membership. Mbugua's (2003) account of the meaning created by the matatu crew through their trendy dressing styles as a way of creating group visibility can be evaluated along the opposite end of the spectrum with respect to these marijuana smokers. When certain norms and practices become the distinctive features of a peoples' patterned life, they come to be regarded as marker of the people's identity. In this respect, football, baseball and basketball are connected with the American identity more than any other country's identity due to the role they play in the American national culture. In the same context, eating vegemite can identify one as an Australian (Rozin and Seagal 2003). In the next Section, I will discuss some of the non-linguistic practices that are important in the construction of identity. I will examine identity practices such as dietary and dining habits, way of dressing, and style and choice of music.

4.5.1 Diet and dining habits

Both the Sinai and Kariobangi female respondents claimed that they could differentiate between a *Mbabi* and a ghetto person by looking at the kind of food that they eat as well as the dining manners. While the ghetto people would eat anything, the *Wababi* will first assess the hygienic condition of the place where they are eating, order an expensive dish of a particular taste, then 'proudly nimble' on the food, and throw away the rest. The ghetto people would consider this wasteful. To them the most important thing is to have something in their stomachs, as Edee and Shiro, two female respondents from Kariobangi, state in the following conversation:

1. Shiro: watu wa ghetto most of them [*most of the ghetto people*]
2. Edee: tumezoea kila kitu mchanganyiko [*we are used to a mixture of everything*]
3. Shiro: eee mchanganyiko isipokuwa mawe. [*yes, mixture except stones*]
4. Edee: mawe tu ndiyo hatuwezi kula. [*it is only stones we cannot eat*]

For these females, choosing and being picky are luxuries they cannot afford. Unlike the *Wababi*, they are not concerned about the hygienic environment, in which the food is cooked or sold:

1. Edee: unaona venye sa chakula...zile machips za kobole kobole vitu ka hiyo
2. PG: aha
3. Shiro: chips ni chips.
4. Sera: kuna sewage inapita hapa, na zinapikiwa hapa. Sasa mtu wa babi hataweza kula
5. PG: hawezi.
6. Pame: lakini mi hukula
7: Edee: hujali, umekula germs nyingi...
8. PG: aha
9. Shiro: yeye hawezi kula na sewage inapita.

Translation:

1. Edee: you see like those chips sold for 5 shillings...things like that ...
2. PG: yes
3. Shiro: chips are chips.
4. Sera: ... there is a sewage flowing here and they are being cooked here, now for a *babi* fellow, s/he will not eat.
5. PG: s/he can't.
6. Pame: ...but I do eat
7: Edee: you don't care, you have eaten a lot of germs
8. PG: aha
9. Shiro: s/he can't eat and the sewage is flowing close by.

Ghetto people are sustained by *Jua kali* (informal businesses) that exploit every open space available to conduct business — whether by the side of a sewage trench (4) or garbage dumps. The ghetto people are used to this lifestyle and consider it normal, 'chips are chips' (3, 6, 7), no matter where they are made. For the hygiene-conscious residents of *Ubabini*, where sanitary malfunction is reported and repaired immediately, such

unhygienic conditions are health hazards to be avoided at all costs (4). Notice too the price of chips in the ghetto, five shillings (0.07 USD). Higher hygiene standards will call for higher prices, which the ghetto people cannot afford. This distinction between the *Wababi* and the ghetto in terms of diet and dining practices is an extension of the socio-economic discourse mentioned earlier.

4.5.2. Dressing

Dress style is another way of constructing an identity. At the beginning of this Section, I mentioned Mbugua's claim that the matatu crews use trendy dressing style as one way of constructing their identity. Both Mbugua (2004) and Samper (2002) assert that the *matatu* crews are the trendsetters when it comes to dressing styles. Apart from *matatu* crew, it is common in Kenya to see the reggae fans from the ghetto sporting the colors associated with Rastafarianism. The Rasta colors and dreadlocks are visible marks of the Rastafarian identity — although not every dreadlocked person subscribes to the Rastafarian ideals. We can also look at the prostitutes dressing in revealing attire as an affirmation of their identity as flesh peddlers, though this is not always the case.

When drawing the contrast between the *mababi* and *maghetto*, I mentioned that the *Wababi* have been heavily influenced by western tastes, unlike the ghetto people. This contrast is very noticeable and is normally overplayed as a feature that can distinguish a *Mbabi* from a ghetto person as stated by the Sinai respondents below:

1. PG: utajuaje *Mbabi* pale?
2. Liz: ee *babi* namjua
3. Kui: unajua *babi* huvaanga vitu ya fleya fleya hivi hivi tu zinafagia chini chini lakini mnati...
4. Joy: nikwambie kitu moja, mtu wa ghetto, hata ukiwa wewe ni wa ubabini, unamwelewa tu. Juu kung'ara yake,

5. Liz: staili yake ...iko, unamwelewa tu
6. Kui: ..., na yeye huyu wa ghetto huvaa nguo za wapi?... za Gikomba.
7. PG: aha

...

8. Kui: Nguo anavaa inakaa unaona wife yake anavaa imemshika.
9. Liz: (unclear) sisi tunavaa za Gikomba
10. PG: Si lakini wajua sasa kuna mtumba, hata wewe ukienda kule Gikomba...
11. Joy: eh?
12. PG: Unaweza kupata nguo ambayo inakaa kama ya *Mbabi* siyo?
13. Joy: Ndiyo lakini ni..ngumu, ni ngumu
14. Kui: siwezi buy kwa sabau najua hii ni ya *babi.*

Translation:

1. PG: How will you know a *Mbabi*?
2. Liz: ehh, I know a *babi.*
3. Kui: A *babi* wears things that are flair and they sweep the ground, but a mnati....
4. Joy: Let me tell you one thing, a ghetto person, even if you are from ubabini, you will understand her. Because of the way she dresses.
5. Liz: Her style...will, you will understand her.
6. Kui: ..., and the person from the ghetto wears the clothes from where? ...from Gikomba[55].
7. PG: aha

...

8. Kui: the clothes he wears, you will see his wife wears a tight one
9. Liz: (unclear) For us we wear from Gikomba
10. PG: but you know that now we have mtumba, even you if you go to Gikomba...
11. Joy: eh?
12. PG: You can get a dress that looks like that of a *Mbabi*, isn't it?
13. Joy: Yes, but it is...hard, it is hard
14. Kui: I cannot buy it because I know it is for a *Mbabi.*

A *Mbabi* is constructed by the others, not just as a rich person, but also as a person deeply immersed in modernity as represented by dressing style — flair pants for men and tight clothes for the ladies (3). It would be wrong to assume that the ghetto people reject these clothes because they cannot afford them. Unlike food, they can buy *mitumba* (second hand clothes) sold cheaply in Gikomba, as I pointed out in (10). They simply reject doing

[55] Gikomba is an informal open-air market that specializes in the sale of second hand clothes commonly known as mitumba.

that because they associate these clothes with *Ubabini* (14), and they would make them look like people that they are not. Just like the lifestyle of the *Wababi* will prevent them from completely acquiring the ghetto identity (Section 4.3.2), economic reasons prevent the ghetto people from engaging in other practices that complete the *Mbabi* identity.

In view of what I discussed in Section (4.2.2), where we saw the ghetto people aspiring to be like *Wababi*, this seems to present a paradox. But it is resolved when we take into account that we were then dealing with a different baze (Kariobangi) that interpret reality differently from the Sinai baze. In addition, identities are influenced by different factors, one of which is context. A group might construct a certain identity in one context, but construct a completely different one in another context.

4.5.3. Style of music

Ubabini and ghetto people have different tastes of music. The ghetto people have been known to prefer reggae music while the *Ubabini* people have always moved with the current American musical trends. A Makadara respondent remarked that they listened to reggae while the *Wababi* listen to the slow jam only, which they called '*ma-yo! yo! pekee yake'* [yo yo only]. Sera, a female respondent from Kariobangi, also expressed similar sentiments: *sisi ni wasee wa reggae* 'we are reggae guys'. This bias may also be attributed to their socioeconomic differences, which influence their lifestyles. American popular culture has mostly been transmitted to the Kenyan youth through movies and music videos. Yet owning a TV, let alone a VCR, is beyond the reach of the majority of ghetto youths. Those who can afford a TV have no money to buy their own music videos or pay the subscription fees for entertainment channels. This cuts off from the popular

music programs through which they could access these popular American music. Furthermore, the kind of lifestyle portrayed in American music is alien to the ghetto people due to its unafordability. In contrast, reggae music strikes a familiar chord within the deprived lives of the majority of ghetto residents, and this makes them identify with the sufferings and the aspiration of the African diaspora as espoused in the lyrics of various reggae artists.

4.6. Construction of identity in other discourse sites

In the greater part of this Chapter, I have located the construction of identity as taking place in the *bazes.* I finished by discussing other non-linguistic ways of constructing identity in various *bazes.* In the next three Sections, I will briefly discuss the other sites where identities are constructed such as hip-hop, mass media, and the internet. Although these can also be regarded as other ways of constructing identity, they will be treated as sites where Sheng discourse takes place. I begin with hip-hop within the context of the popular culture.

4.6.1. Popular culture: Sheng hip-hop

Popular culture can be considered as a discourse site, which incorporates both the input and output of identity practices as two parts of dialectic. I mentioned in Chapter 2, that the radio stations have strategically placed themselves to respond to the market forces. This is similar to Bell's (1984, 1991) account of how the newspapers in the UK, or radio stations in New Zealand, adopted the language of their target audience. When radio stations play the music that is popular with the young people, or relax their language

policy so that they accept and employ Sheng in their broadcast, they not only identify with what is hip, but also participate in creating and enforcing certain identities of the Sheng users. This makes the media to become important channels for the codification of certain mainstream identities, which are then re-modified by the listeners to suit their different needs. The media also participate in word coinage, which then infiltrates into the daily discourses of Sheng speakers. However, unless such media lexical items are taken as the norm of an in-group within a given media house, they cannot be used in local construction of identity since they are too mainstream to serve in-group purposes.

Hip-hop music itself draws from the Sheng that is in vogue, but the musicians are very conscious of the kind of language that they can use. They want to appeal to a larger audience and would not like to alienate their potential audience by adopting the variety of Sheng that is too vulgar or too hard for the audience. Nevertheless, hip-hop musicians assume different identities as far as Sheng is concerned. In their music, they use the most basic Sheng, while in live performances, they may use deep and vulgar Sheng (Samper (2004) — although such usage may not have been premeditated. In different contexts, these musicians are also members of estates and *bazes* where they also hang out with their friends and catch up with what is trendy. Due to their celebrity status, they attract a huge fan base that crosses categorical borderlines. This requires them to align themselves differently in order to interact with different fans in different situations.

To appreciate the role that Sheng hip-hop plays in the lives of the Kenyan youth, one needs to see how much it surfaces in their ordinary discourse. During my interview with the Kariobangi female respondents, Pame and Koki, poked fun at me by quoting lines of a popular song and then pretended that that it was their authentic talk:

Pame: Mbuyu alinileta juu
(pause)
Koki: Ishia...usiletewe noma za budako (laughs)
Pame: Saa hii anajua tu nimeenda laibo na niko baze.
[laughs]

Translation:

Pame: My father was very mad at me
(pause)
Koki: you should leave so that you do not run foul with your father (laughs)
Pame: Right now he thinks I have gone to the library and I am out at the baze.

Most of these words are borrowed from a popular song by Nonini called 'Wee Kamu' which has the following lines;

usiseme umeenda wapi	*do not say where you are going*
sitaki noma na mathako,	*I don't want trouble with your mom*
sema umeenda laibo	*say you are going to the library*
sitaki noma na budako	*I don't want trouble with your dad*

In this song the artist encourages his girlfriend to lie to her parents that she has gone to the library so that she can come to his place. These young women in Kariobangi knew how to appropriate the song's message in their discourse. Apparently, the song's message urging youth to lie to their parents when they want to go out for fun seem popular with the youth. Quoting of popular lines from a local musician came up once more during my interview with the Ngara respondents. In the conversation below, Josh narrates about his encounter with a beautiful girl at a bus stop. The bus had been delayed and got chatting while waiting. Finally they decided to walk to their destination, and after a while, Josh had nothing else to tell her,

Josh: stori zinakatika. Nakaa mimi ninamwambia, 'unacheki hiyo ndae? Ni poa' (laughs) ananishow, 'ee ni poa'. Tuna-kamkam namuuliza, 'unapenda reggae?'
PG: mh
Josh: akanishow, 'ndiyo'. Si nikajua sa nitakuwa nazo?

PG: mh?
Josh: Nikamwambia, 'ee nina collection nyumbani sa niaje si uzikamie?'
PG: mh
Josh: akanishtua, duuuuh, yeye ana mingi kuniliko.
(Jim laughs)
Josh: anaweza nifunza reggae kwanza.

Translation:

Josh: the stories ended. I paused, and I asked her, 'do you see that car? Its cool' (laughs) she told me, 'yes, it is cool'. We proceeded I asked her, 'do you like Reggae?'
PG: mm-hm
Josh: she told me, 'yes', then I knew that I have them (reggae music) ok?
PG: mm-hm?
Josh: I told her yeah, 'I have a collection at home, would you like to come for them?'
PG: mm-hm
Josh: she surprised me duuuh, she has more than I do
(Jim laughs)
Josh: she could even teach me reggae.

Throughout the narration, Josh was smirking while his buddies constantly exploded into fits of laughter. Unknown to me then, Josh was structuring his story around the rap group 'Necessary Noize's' popular hit *Kenyan Boy Kenyan Girl,* but he was making most of his story up while maintaining the plot and some words used in the song. It was not until I had heard the song that I was able to draw the parallel. In Josh' narration, waiting for a bus, mutual attraction by both parties, the expensive looking girl, the love of reggae, asking some silly questions and taking a stroll are all borrowed from Necessary Noize's song (though in the song the girl is the seducer). The words *unapenda reggae*, and *nina collection nyumbani* above are actual lines in the song. The joke aside, we can see how the music has come to have a huge impact on the lives of young people in Nairobi. What the popular local artists say quickly filters into the mainstream discourse. As culture brokers who feel that they have a role to play in the young people's lives (Samper 2002,

2004), musicians present the world for the youth's consumption. When the youth employ some words from popular music tracks in their discourse, it means that they have accepted the values that the musicians stand for. Together they participate in the identity of hipness, and the modern lifestyles and consumption the musician propagates.

4.6.2. The media

"My radio doesn't *shika* anything else" screams the flashing message on 98.4 Capital FM website. Capital FM is one of the many commercial FM stations in Kenya. The language mixing in this flashing message reflects the general pattern in the radio's language use. Indeed many of the FM stations have taken to using Sheng words as a way or responding to their audience' needs. This situation also obtains in print media. Readers of Kenyan newspapers who are not conversant with Sheng are at a loss when they encounter Sheng words that have been thrown in by writers in their columns such as the ones below;

1. As I was struggling to fish it out, half of the shirt ***chomokad***... *Pulse,* a Friday magazine from the *Eastafrican Standard*
2. Be yourself and avoid ***ma-fiction mob...*** interview with a Flex, a local hip-hop artist appearing on *Buzz,* a Sunday entertainment magazine from *Nation Media.*
3. Definitely! ***Tunawakwachu na lyrics zetu***...Flex again
4. For some reasons they still think they are ***unbwogable***...Mutahi Ngunyi, a columnist with *Sunday Nation*, a leading weekly from *Nation Media.*

These are just a few examples of Sheng lexical items one encounters daily in Kenya's leading newspapers. While media houses have no official policy that promotes the use of Sheng, we can say the writers' indulgences are condoned because they are responding to the language of their target market. The East African Standard's Friday magazine *Pulse* is full of such Sheng words. In the readers' column 'The so called life', readers narrate their

most embarrassing moments. Contributors normally lace their pieces with Sheng word to the extent that a piece that lacks at least a Sheng word is an exception. Smitta Smitten's weekly column in the same magazine is usually full of Sheng words, which would make it inaccessible to a person with no knowledge of Sheng. As an illustration, I have adapted one of the articles by Smitta Smitten's with some sections removed. The highlighted Shng words (in bold) are glossed at the end of the article.

Thursday March 24, 2005

Pulse

Underground chit chat

with Smitta Smitten

Last Friday, I went underground to Java Coffee House's basement. Down in the underground, I ran into Bamboo II – the new, **redeemed version**. Dude still **operates** a black cap and shades that look like he borrowed them from the estate of the late Ray Charles. The shades I can understand - Bamboo II has seen the light, and it's blinding. But the cap? That's for shady characters like Smitten on the prowl. I recommend a white starch shirt and black cotton tie for Bamboo II, if he's saved. Plus he was with this hot, **jungu chickie**.

Later, I rolled into **Carni** for the **Chaguo La Teeniez** Nominees' bash with Kitten... If you grew up in the 1990s, New Jack Swing makes sense. If you're below 25, please forget it. Just read Pulse and tune in to rock **ziski** (music) with Italia Masiero.

... Speaking of which, Nazizi and her **bro** Feroze seem to have dropped off the face of the earth. Hey, **niaje brathe**, **niaje siste**? When the shit hits the fan, the answer isn't to pull a 'Muite' (remember Pattni's Sh20M accusation?) and go underground. What you do is pull a 'Debra Sanapei', i.e. news on Friday is that you owe everyone in town **chinky** (money) - on Saturday, you show up, in style, at the latest 'Trendy Bar' launch in town.

...**Prezzo** rolled in, in all his glory - half of which was Sheila **Mwanyigz** looking resplendent in red. That **nigga's** got style. Only wish he'd swing me real **bling** (my 'gold' chain is already turning a suspicious coppery colour). Bamboo II and his **jungu** spent their time sheltered in the shadows...

... where the Pulse crew was waiting to do our EATV-spot for 'Word Up' on **Satoz** at 7.30pm (catch the show **kesho**, for once). In the background, I almost swear I could hear Maina Kageni's humongous voice.

...Encouraged, **Mdomo Baggy** decided to take me on in **'Mchongwano'**. Very 1980s. I told Baggy diesel like he grew up in such a rough-ass neighbourhood that someone even mugged the rainbow.

... **Keroro** shouldn't be sold to **tois**...

Some of the Sheng words used in the article are;

redeemed version	born again
jungu chickie	white girl
carni	carnivore
chaguo la teeniez	teenager's choice
niaje brathe	what's up, brother
niaje siste	what's up, sister
prezzo	stage name of a local hip-hop artist, also Sheng name for president
mwanyigz	Mwanyiga, name of Prezzo's girlfriend
nigga	borrowing from African American English; Nigga is used as an affectionate in-group term in this context
bling	another African American borrowing, showy jewelry
jungu	white woman, from Swahili Mzungu
satoz	Saturdays
kesho	tomorrow, a Swahili borrowing
mdomo Baggy	baggy mouth, probably a Sheng nickname
mchongwano	verbal duels similar to African American playing of dozens (see Section on Mchongoano in this Chapter
keroro	alcohol
tois	children, underage

The reporters' styling of their language to approximate to that of their audience is the motivation behind Bell's audience design model (1984, 1992:110). In his analysis of language style of the UK's newspapers, Bell found out that the rate of determiner deletion in a media outlet varied according to the social stratus of that paper's readers. The mainstream papers such as *The Times*, *The Independent*, and *Financial Times*, were popular with the upper class and had fewer cases of determiner deletion, while the tabloid papers such as the *Sun*, and the *Daily Mirror*, which were popular with the lower class,

had a very high rate of determiner deletion. Presence of determiners was associated with the standard features of Received Pronunciation (RP), while lack of determiners was associated with non-standard features attributed to the popular culture that looked up to the United States.

Coming back to Smitta Smitten's style, his use of Sheng's lexical items is a deliberate way of styling his speech to reflect the language styles of his readers. Majority of his readers are the young people whose life has been greatly influenced by the norms of popular culture. Smitten's column, and indeed the whole *pulse* magazine, borrows heavily from the English tabloid press in terms of themes, rumors and language. Smitta Smitten is a typical paparazzo who stalks artists, updating his readers on the most recent rumor. Somebody who does not keep abreast with the Kenya's entertainment scene may be unable to understand his column due to use of Sheng lexical items. In the above story for instance, one needs to know that Bamboo claims to be a born again Christian and has a white girlfriend, that Mwanyiga is Prezzo's girlfriend, that Prezzo is a very rich artist and that Nazizi had an embarrassing moment on account of her brother. His extravagant use of Sheng words means that he has conceptualized an idea of an in-group following that constitutes his fan base with whom he communicates. This overly used of English laced with Sheng items here and there seems to be a good example of the *Engsh* version discussed in Chapter 3. Although we may assume that there is a limit to which his editors might have allowed him to use his Sheng, it should not be lost that his object, and his audience largely comprise of middle class youth, who form the majority of the artists, as well as the audience that attend their shows.

Smitta Smitten's column in the *Pulse* magazine compares well with KJ's cartoon *head on corrishon* in *Buzz* — an entertainment magazine from *Sunday Nation,* both in terms of themes and the use of language. Like *Pulse*, *Buzz* reports what is happening in the local entertainment scene. The audience is the youth, who as we have said elsewhere, are the most avid users of Sheng. KJ actually creates a distinction between the *Mavijanaa* 'youth' and the *Wabuyu* 'the adults' and he puts himself into the group of *Mavijanaa.* When he is giving an opinion from the youth perspective, he writes *sisi Mavijanaa* 'we young people'. These two illustrations show that both *Pulse* and *Buzz* target a certain audience, and they adjust their language to conform to the language styles of their readers. They draw their vocabulary from the Sheng that is in vogue, but they sometimes coin their own words. As a result, they become vehicles through which some of these Sheng features filter into the wider populace.

4.6.3. The internet

The internet has become a very dynamic discourse site where identity has been played out. Stephanie Nilsson (http://www.eng.umu.se/stephanie/web/LanguageBlogs.pdf) has carried out a recent study on 'the function of language to facilitate and maintain social networks in research weblogs.' From this work we can see that the form of interaction by the virtual community can be studied using the same models that we use in daily interactions. By tracing the internet links, a clear diagram of the network clusters to which bloggers belong can be traced. It is with this in mind that I look at the relevance of the internet in Sheng's variation and identity construction.

Many kinds of discourse take place in the internet, such as general discussions and even *michongoano*. The internet's ability to connect Kenyans at home and those in the diaspora is the best arena where Sheng, in Samper (2002) words, 'localizes the global and globalizes the local'. The internet can be looked at in terms of discourse output and discourse input as we saw in our discussion of *michongoano* earlier on. The internet users can be viewed as virtual members of a speech community with their own kind of identity. Those who constantly log into the internet and actively participate in Sheng threads — those threads that either talk about Sheng, or those that use Sheng as their medium, can be regarded as members of a certain interaction group. Furthermore, the internet users can, and do, form their small groups in chat rooms where discourse is conducted in Sheng. These little discussion groups become so tightly bound as real communities of people who know each other well. For a discussion group that has been interacting for a long while, they cultivate their own interaction norms that only people who interact constantly are aware of. A good example is in the orthographic aspect of words such as *u* 'you' and *r* for 'are,' as used in this joke: *ati u r so fat mpaka u r taller while lying down* 'that you are so fat that you are taller lying down'. Such cases show that norms governing what can be initialized and what cannot, can be one way that participants in virtual communities construct and maintain their identity, structurally.

Just as one can move from one group to another in real life, internet users can move from one group to another in various chartroom. Moreover, the internet provides resources for members to reject undesirable members by blocking them from their buddy lists, or generally ignoring their posts, which eventually isolate intruders from the regular loggers. This becomes another manifestation of the use of Sheng in the construction of

identity in cyberspace among different groups of virtual communities. We can envision the existence of 'virtual *bazes*' when a group of internet chatters communicate in private chat rooms regularly. This can be an interesting and challenging line of research but is beyond the scope of this study. I will now turn to the psychological aspects that tie people's attitudes to their identities. This relationship will be discussed in the next Section as the final discussion of my dissertation.

4.7. Attitudes and value judgments

A group's identity cannot be divorced from the attitudes that they hold towards others and their practices. To complete this Chapter, I will discuss subjective judgments of the Sheng speakers from different *bazes* towards other Sheng varieties and relate these judgments to identity. Although I have already rejected the estate as a viable unit for the analysis of linguistic practices, it does not mean that the speakers themselves do not make use of this abstraction. My use of the term 'estate' should therefore not be regarded as conflicting with *baze*.

4.7.1. Respondent's subjective judgments: relative comparisons and identity

Earlier on, I rejected the perspective of looking at identity as frozen in static categories in favor of the perspective that views identities as fluid and in a constant process of modification. In this section, I adopt the perspective propagated in social identity theory' (e.g. Turner 1982, Tajfel and Turner 1986) that identities become apparent through juxtaposition of contrasts. Individuals categorize groups in terms of opposites, and they use those categories to identify and define themselves. Once they perceive themselves as members of groups, these individuals see everyone in their group as similar. In their

effort to cultivate a 'positive self-concept' they compare themselves with other social groups in order to enhance individual and collective self esteem (Niens and Cairns (2003). This arouses a sense of intergroup competition where the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups becomes a sufficient reason for discrimination against the out-group.

More insight will be drawn from relative deprivation theory (RDT) that proposes that individuals can feel personally deprived when comparing themselves with better off individuals (Smith and Leach 2004:2). Similarly, people feel group deprived when comparing themselves as group members with members of a better off outside groups. If people compare themselves with those they consider inferior, their positive attributes are confirmed, which raises their self worth (Tajfel and Turner 1986, Smith and Leach 2004: 2). With respect to Sheng, we expect that when speakers in a given *baze* compare themselves with other speakers that they consider to be like them, they should identify with them by rating them positively. On the other hand when they compare themselves with those they regard as inferior to them, they should magnify the contrast in order to consolidate their distinctiveness.

To investigate how respondents identified themselves with Sheng speakers from different estates, I asked the subjects from the 12 *bazes*[56] to rate how Sheng speakers from Jericho, Kawangware, Kibera, Makongeni, and Westlands estates spoke compared to themselves. I gave them the following subjective response options (see appendix II

[56] Shauri Moyo, Buruburu, and Makadara, are part of the original Eastlands, though Sinai is also regarded as Eastlands. Kariobangi and Eastleigh can be considered as North, while Ngara, and Kabete are in the Westlands. South C and Kibera are in the South. Monte Carlos is in the City center. In my generalization of Westlands and Eastlands, Kibera, South C, Eastleigh and Kariobangi are considered as Eastlands.

Q10): 'exactly like me' [**ex**], 'a little like me'[**li**], 'very different from me'[**di**], and 'I do not understand them'[**do**]. The data below are by no means conclusive and might not reflect the view of all the members of the baze[57]. These findings are summarized in Table 8 below;

	S'moyo n=4				M'carlos n=4				Buruburu n=6				Eastleigh n=4			
	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do
jericho	1	3	0	0	2	2	0	0	5	1	0	0	3	1	0	0
k'ngware	1	1	2	0	1	3	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	2	2	0
kibera	1	0	2	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	4	1	1	2	1	0
m'ngeni	1	1	2	0	1	3	0	0	4	2	0	0	3	0	1	0
w'lands	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	4	0	1	2	1

	Kabete n=4				Sinai n=3				Kibera n=5				K'bangi (m)n=4			
	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do
jericho	1	1	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	1	2	1	0
k'ngware	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	2	1
kibera	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	0	1	0	2	1	0	1
m'ngeni	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	2	2	0
w'lands	3	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	2	2

	South C n=8				Makadara n=4				Ngara n=3				K'bangi (f) n=5			
	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do	ex	li	di	do
jericho	0	3	4	1	4	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	2	0	0
k'ngware	1	2	4	1	3	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	3	0	0
kibera	4	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	0
m'ngeni	4	2	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	0	1
w'lands	1	2	5	0	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	1

Table 8. Different *bazes'* comparison of their Sheng with that of other estates N=54

From table (8), I assign index [F] indicating full identity if at least half of the raters rated the estates as 'exactly like me' and [P] indicating partial identity if at least half of the

[57] While the size of the sample might raise questions about statistic validity, careful interpretation can overcome this handicap by regarding the speakers as exemplar members of a *baze*, but not as representative sample. *Bazes* have more that four members, but I only chose a small sample per *baze* because it was going to be hard to carry out a coherent interview with more that five people.

raters rated as 'little like me'. This makes it possible to summarize how different bazes identify themselves with regard to the kind of Sheng spoken in other estates.

Baze	*Nature of identity — full [F] or partial[P]*
Shauri Moyo:	Jericho [P]
Monte Carlos:	Jericho, Kibera [F], Kawangware and Makongeni [P]
Buruburu:	Jericho, Makongeni [F], Kawangware [P]
Eastleigh:	Jericho, Makongeni [F], Kawangware, Kibera [P]
Kabete:	Kawangware, Westlands [F], Kibera, Makongeni [P]
Sinai:	Jericho, Makongeni [F]
Kibera:	Kawangware, Langata, Makongeni [F]
Kariobangi males:	Kibera [F], Jericho, Makongeni [P]
South C:	Kibera, Makongeni [F]
Makadara:	Jericho, Kawangware, Kibera, Makongeni, Westlands [F]
Ngara:	Jericho [F], Kawangware, Kibera, Makongeni [P]
Kariobangi females:	Jericho [F] Kawangware, Makongeni [P]

From these data, we can see that the majority identifies with the variety of Sheng spoken in Jericho, followed by that of Makongeni, but very few identify with the Westlands variety. Indeed only the members of the Kabete *baze* thought that they spoke a Sheng similar to that of Westlands speakers. I explain this by invoking the political connection that binds Kabete and Westlands. Since Kabete is considered part of the Westlands constituency, the socioeconomic boundary that sets them apart is deferred and the Westlands political identity is made more salient. The Makadara *baze* identifies their Sheng with all the other varieties spoken in Nairobi. Recall that although Joe in his narration claimed that some words were spoken in different estates, he nevertheless used them in his discourse (see section on performing multiple identities). Interestingly, Shauri Moyo raters did not think there were people who spoke Sheng that was exactly like theirs. During the interview, the Shauri Moyo raters claimed their Sheng was the best in the 'whole of the world'. Recall too, that they claimed that Kijey Sheng is sweet, but only

to listen to. This is an indication that they are bound by deep in-group loyalty, that even their innovation is geared toward making them more distinct as a group.

We note that only the Kibera baze rated Langata (a neighboring middle income estate). Since Kibera was one of the estates being rated, I reasoned that they could not possibly compare themselves with themselves. Like the case of Kabete and Westlands, Kibera is in Langata constituency; therefore they share a form of political identity with their Langata middle class neighbors.

A better generalization comes from Table 9 below. The middle column combines both full and partial identity as a pointer to people's orientation towards a variety of Sheng. From here, we can see that the most favored Sheng variety is that from Makongeni, followed by that of Jericho, then Kawangware and finally Kibera. Consequently, we can say that these are the varieties they identify with. On the other hand, less that half of the respondents identified with the Westlands variety, with the majority rating it as 'different from me' or 'don't understand them.'

	exactly	a little	total	different	don't
Jericho	25	18	43	10	1
Kawangware	19	20	39	13	2
Kibera	19	13	32	14	4
Makongeni	21	23	44	2	2
Westlands	10	10	20	24	10

Table 9. Respondents comparisons of their Sheng with that of other estates (N=54)

These data in Table 9 shows that people still identify with the Sheng of the Eastlands. It is also possible that since majority of the raters were from the Eastlands, they were rating their local varieties more favorably. Furthermore, we can conclude that the general stereotype of Sheng being the language of the ghettoes persists since most of these *bazes*

are located in the poor residential areas; therefore, there exists a possibility that they compare themselves favorably with their counterparts in other deprived estates with whom they share an identity.

Some comparisons yield unexpected results. For instance the South C raters, who could be expected to identify with the Westlands variety on account of their shared socio-economic status, do not do so. Likewise, it is not always true to conclude that the ghetto people identify themselves with other ghetto people just because they rate other ghetto people favorably. They also have their own comparisons, and sometimes, they rate other ghetto people harshly. The Kariobangi females, for instance, regarded Korogocho, their neighbors as speaking the worst Sheng. In the conversation below, the Kariobangi females were discussing about a girl who was murdered by another girl for 'stealing' her boyfriend.

Sera: saa...na huyo manzi alimarikanga alikuwa amemaliza chuo? alikuwa anasomea wapi hiyo shule?
Koki: our lady,
Sera: our lady,
Koki: ali-drop ka ako form...form three
Shiro: eee, ni dropper, ee obvious mtu amesomea karibu na Koch una-expect awe...?
Koki: yeah, hiyo ni kawa..

Translation:

Sera: Now... and that girl who died, had she finished school? She was going to which school?
Koki: Our lady,
Sera: Our lady,
Koki: She dropped out when she was in form three
Shiro: yes, she is a dropper, yeah, it's obvious, what do you expect a person who studies close to Korogocho to be?
Koki: yeah, that is norm...

Kariobangi females hold very negative opinions of their Korogocho neighbors. In the sense of relative deprivation theory discussed earlier, it seems that when Kariobangi female raters compare themselves with those they consider lower than them, they erect boundaries that portray them as distinct. I will revisit this issue shortly. Meanwhile, I first compare these data with the value judgments on how the same *bazes* regarded the way speakers of different estates spoke Sheng (see Appendix II Q 11). Respondents from the 12 *bazes* were asked to give qualitative judgments of how people from Mathare, Kileleshwa, Kangemi, Muthurwa and Dandora spoke Sheng. They were asked to rate speakers according to the following qualitative terms: 'very well'[**w**], 'not so bad'[**nb**], 'not well'[**n**], and 'bad'[**b**]. A summary of the general results is in Table 10 below.

	Shaurimoyo n=4				Montecarlos n=4				Buruburu n=6				Eastleigh n=4			
	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b
mathare	1	2	0	1	3	1	0	0	5	0	1	0	1	3	0	0
K'shwa	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	0	1	3	0
kangemi	0	4	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	0
muthuru	1	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	4	1	1	0	0	1	2	0
dandora	3	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	4	1	0	1	2	0	0	1

	Kabete n=4				Sinai n=3				Kibera n=5				K'bangi (m) n=4			
	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b
mathare	1	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	2	1	1
K'shwa	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	3	4	0	1	0	0	2	2	0
kangemi	3	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	2
muthuru	3	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	3
dandora	1	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	2	1	0

	South c n=8				Makadara n=4				Ngara n=3				K'bangi (f) n=5			
	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b	w	nb	n	b
mathare	3	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	5	0	0	0
K'shwa	0	2	5	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	3	1	1
kangemi	1	4	1	2	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	4	0	0
muthuru	2	3	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	3	0
dandora	8	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	0

Table 10. Respondents judgment of the variety of Sheng in different estates, N=54

In Table 10, the relevant data are regarded as those qualitative terms chosen by more than half of the respondents in a *baze*. A further summary of the above table according to different *bazes* is given below;

Baze	*qualitative judgment*
Shaurimoyo	Dandora [w], Mathare, Muthurwa Kangemi, [nb]
MonteCarlos:	Dandora, Mathare, Kangemi, [w]
Buruburu	Dandora, Mathare, Muthurwa [w] Kangemi [nb]
Eastleigh	Dandora [w] Mathare [nb]
Kabete	Muthurwa, Kangemi, [w] Dandora, Kileleshwa, [nb]
Sinai	Dandora, Mathare, Muthurwa [w] Kangemi [nb]
Kibera	Dandora, Mathare, Muthurwa, Kangemi, Kileleshwa[w]
Kariobangi (m)	Dandora, Mathare, Kileleshwa, [nb]
South C	Dandora [w], Mathare, Kangemi [nb]
Makadara	Dandora, Muthurwa, [w]
Ngara	Dandora, Mathare, Muthurwa [w]
Kariobangi	Dandora, Mathare [w], Kangemi, Kileleshwa [nb]

This analysis shows that the most favored variety of Sheng is that spoken in Dandora. Out of a possible 54 times, Dandora is rated 37 times as 'very well' and 5 times as 'not bad'. It is followed by Mathare 29 'very well,' 17 'not bad,' then Muthurwa 23 'very well,' 12 'not bad,' and finally Kangemi 17 'very well,' 12 'not bad.' In contrast, Kileleshwa speakers are rated poorly, only 7 'very well' and 14 'not bad.' This shows that just like in table (9) the Sheng that the majority of the respondents favor is that from the poorer estates as compared to that from the affluent estates. This can be explained in terms of symbolic capital where we can argue that the need for cultural capital is greater in poorer areas due to the fact that the economic capital is out of their reach.

Surprisingly, five out of eight South C respondents rated Kileleshwa speakers as 'not well'. Bearing in mind that Kileleshwa and South C share a lot in common in terms of socioeconomic status, this unexpected rating can partly be attributed to the dynamics

of social affiliations in the two estates. While houses in South C are close together, those at Kileleshwa are isolated (similar to the Riverside house shown in Figure 2). We don't have *bazes* for *Mabeshte* to hang out in Kileleshwa, but we do have them in South C. If the *bazes* are small clusters where a great deal of interaction takes place in Sheng, then the perceived differences can be explained within network theory (Milroy 1980, Milroy and Milroy 1992). Lack of such clusters in Kileleshwa, means that the networks of the residents are very weak. This inhibits the enforcement of vernacular norms, which makes the residents resort to basic codeswitching, or to insert isolated Sheng words here and there. In contrast, due to their participation in *bazes*, the South C residents have very strong networks, almost similar to their counterparts in the informal settlements like Kibera. Therefore, the poor rating of Kileleshwa by the south C respondents converges with that of the raters from the poor residential areas in this respect.

To explain Kibera's positive rating of the Kileleshwa variety, we must assume that Sheng does not evoke very deep in-group emotions among the *Mabeshte* in the Kibera baze. We must also bear in mind that their Sheng has a lot of Swahili influence. Most of their coinage, for instance, involves Swahili lexical items that have undergone semantic shift. Assigning Samper's (2003) label of *basic Sheng* to the Kibera variety will equate it with the Kileleshwa variety except for the fact that while the Kibera variety uses Swahili, Kileleshwa uses English.

Relative comparisons of the *bazes* with relation to estates reveal the *bazes* that can be considered to be occupying the liminal space between the two marginal extremes. These are the most interesting settings in which to examine identity construction since they keep on moving to and fro, as contexts dictate. Although the Kariobangi raters

identify with Korogocho when it suits them, they are not blind to the fact that Korogocho people are 'fellow sufferers'. However, comparing themselves with their Korogocho neighbors enhances their self esteem. At the same time, when they compare themselves with the upper class people who live in 'flats', they join their Korogocho comrades in claiming to suffer a common identity. We can look at the South C raters in that same light. When they compare themselves with the posh Westlands, Lavington, Kileleshwa and Runda estates, they perceive a socioeconomic difference, which arouses inter-group feelings. On the other hand they recognize that they are not like the people from the low class Eastlands estates or the informal settlements such as Mathare. Depending on who they are comparing themselves with, they can either project their identity as the rich kids — not from the ghettoes, or as a deprived group — jobless residents of not so good estates.

4.7.2. The question of proximity

Varieties spoken near a certain *baze* are likely to be perceived more favorably because they would be regarded as similar or close to the variety used in that *baze*. There is evidence of this in the Kabete subjects' positive rating of Kawangware and Kangemi, their closest neighbors. Similarly, Makadara raters unanimously regarded their close neighbors, the Jericho and Makongeni estates, as 'exactly like them'. The same can be said of Buruburu and Sinai's *bazes*' positive rating of the Muthurwa variety. Nevertheless, we must be aware that proximity itself does not always result in positive ratings. A good illustration is the different ratings for Mathare by the two genders from the Kariobangi *baze*. We have also seen how Kariobangi females rated their neighbors in

Korogocho poorly. Similarly, Shauri Moyo subjects considered the Makongeni variety to be 'childish,' using oldskool words that they had already abandoned. This might be a case of over-exaggeration, considering that Makongeni is a neighboring city council estate. Surely, the difference should not be so huge.

While proximity can be invoked to explain Kariobangi females' positive rating of Mathare speakers, the same cannot be said for the case of Kariobangi males. Similarly, proximity cannot explain the positive rating of Dandora speakers or the mixed rating of Muthurwa speakers by the South C respondents. In the light of this inconsistency, I will downplay the inconsistency of the Kibera raters' favorable rating of the Kileleshwa variety in favor of a more universal generalization. For these raters the most important distinction is the one between the ghetto and *Ubabini* speakers.

4.8. Summary

I began the Chapter by invoking the Saussurean conception of words as linguistics signs with a dual semiotics of the signifier and the signified. I discussed how ambiguity serves to build identity among speakers of different varieties. I also explained how certain Sheng words and other practices vary according to age. I used the concept *oldskool* and argued that generational variation comes about not only because of actual age, but also as a result of some people failure to update themselves with new innovations. *Oldskool* items sometimes surface in daily interactions, even in highly innovative *bazes* as a result of the fluid nature of the *bazes*. It is this fluidity that is responsible for different shades of identity of the *baze* members. I also discussed the lexical construction of the female gender and how women contest derogatory labels by using labels that portray a positive

image. Different categories of people were shown to choose positive terms to refer to themselves. Discussing how symbolic labels that are used to attenuate the 'us' vs. 'them' boundaries, I demonstrated how terms such as *Wanati, Wababi, Mabeshte* and *fala* vary according to different bazes and the position one occupies within the group in question.

When discussing the performance and negotiation of multiple identities through non-conscious and conscious discourse practices, I argued that some identities are activated non-consciously in spontaneous discourse because they have become ingrained into the speakers' habitus. I also demonstrated how Sheng speakers accommodate to the Sheng varieties of other speakers as per the changing contexts. On vernacular discourse, I analyzed the case of two prostitutes and illustrated how their daily reality as whores, sex workers, heterosexuals and mainstream females are performed through discourse. Still focusing on the vernacular, I examined *michongoano* — a face-threatening verbal contest discourse, as an in-group enterprise. I discussed how it can be used as a diagnostic for inter-group perception and how local, national and international identities are performed in *michongoano*. Other non-linguistic ways of constructing identity that complete the identity project were also discussed. Apart from the *bazes*, other discourse sites where identity is constructed and performed such as mass media, internet and popular culture were also examined. Concluding this Chapter was discussion of language attitudes and their relevance to identity through comparison and judgment of other Sheng varieties.

Chapter 5

Concluding remarks

Conclusions

Cognitive social psychology conceptualizes identities as cognitive schemas, or internally stored information and meaning that serve as the frameworks for interpreting experience (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). This study equated these "cognitive schemas" with the background knowledge that cues the shared reality that help speakers in interpreting experience. This was taken within the context of variation in Sheng's lexicon acting in tandem with other discursive practices to represent the speakers' multifaceted identities. In this pursuit I did not limit myself to the Saussurean sense of words as concrete entities with arbitrary relationship with their signified; instead I also regarded them as cognitive symbols with associated meanings. Basing my argument on the logic that meaning making is a shared enterprise that varies according to different speakers and contexts, I set to examine the picture of variation and its relevance to the identity discourse.

The overriding issue addressed in this dissertation is how people in small groups in Nairobi make use of vocabulary resources of Sheng in projecting their different identities. The various discussions point to the conclusion that due to the ephemeral nature of some of Sheng's vocabulary, as well as the high rate of innovation, the identity of Sheng speakers cannot be said to be complete. It is an ever-changing process that involves negotiation, renegotiation, modification, construction and deconstruction. Even when we look at other ways that complete the identity picture, we notice that they are also in a state of change. Today's music will be tomorrow's old music, and while some

people will remain in both physical and psychological 'relic areas'[58] or what the Sheng speakers call *oldskool*, others will move with the tide and adopt the new innovations. Lexical variation thus becomes the symbol of the Sheng speakers' different identities as long as such speakers shift their vocabulary depending on the prevailing situations.

In this study, a case of Sheng as an order of discourse, in relation to other languages used in Nairobi was made. Various bazes were equated to institution which justified relating their variants with discourse types. This way of perceiving Sheng was shown to have advantages over various classifications such as pidgins, Creoles, jargons and slang as defined in the literatures because of lack of consistency and the confusion that arises when Sheng data is introduced to such definitions.

Variation in Sheng was regarded as an overt manifestation of different cognitive schemas that different categories of Sheng speakers exploit to interpret their different experiences. I demonstrated how the words that speakers use are created to express a certain reality and are laden with meanings that require the background knowledge for interpretation. This underscored the importance of paying attention to the way they are used in discourse. Speakers who share background knowledge are able to disambiguate ambiguous words in discourse. In addition, the ease with which Sheng synonyms can be substituted in Sheng discourse promotes intergroup interaction among Sheng speakers thus continually altering the speaker's previous identities.

To emphasize the importance of discourse as a cue to shared meaning, vernacular speech of two female respondents in Sinai was analyzed where it was demonstrated that

[58] In sociolinguistics these are the areas or places that are left out or change last in linguistic innovation (Downes 1998: 143): i.e., where old forms persist whereas surrounding areas have adopted new innovations.

their identity as whores or sex workers was reflected in their use of vulgar language that transcends social inhibitions. The same was seen to apply on the discussion on verbal contest genre known as *michongoano* which was seen to rely so much in the shared background knowledge among the speakers, who know the issues they can talk about and those that are out of bounds.

Turning to the highlights of this study, I will briefly show how I addressed the hypotheses stated in Chapter 1. Hypothesis 1 that sates that "different identities are reflected by the use of different names for the same referent' was addressed by presenting data on the productive lexical innovation in Sheng that breeds high rate of synonymy, defines as a semantic relation where various lexical items bear the same meaning. I argued that synonymy occurred because speakers prefer to use different lexical items in order to draw group distinctions. It was shown that some terms have a high frequency of use among the respondent as opposed to others. I argued that the lexical terms that are used widely across the board are not very useful in the construction of identity. Such terms are shunned because they are known by almost everybody and would therefore burr the group boundaries leading to loss of identity. It is for this reason that words that are not widely used were regarded as the most important in the study of group's identity.

Standing in stark contrast with synonymy was ambiguity, a semantic relation where a lexical item might have different meaning. Ambiguity addressed the Hypothesis 2 that states that 'different meanings for the same referent are a reflection of different identities'. Speakers from different *bazes* were shown to construct their identity around their shared meaning which deviated with the meanings of other groups. The relevance of ambiguity in identity was equated with Geneva Simitherman's (1977) example of the

different level of meaning of some words used by the African American. A word could have the mainstream meaning for both Whites and Blacks, but its semantics could change to the exact opposite when used among the African American as a racial category. Similarly, it was shown how groups of Sheng speakers could build their identity by changing the semantics of some widely known words as was the case with *mũbatari* whose mainstream use was needy, but meant 'police' among 'manamba', and 'manamba' among the Sinai females.

Although my discussion on the politics of identity demonstrated the problem with adopting either the static or dynamic perspectives as exemplified by the critique by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), this study adopted the dynamic view where the argument that identities are fluid and constantly changing was advanced. The logic of this was essential in discussing my Hypothesis 3, which stated that 'Sheng speakers can learn and use the words that are identified with groups other that their own'. Capitalizing on the fact that identities are coded in lexical items in Hypotheses 1 and 2, I argued that it is through the ability to learn and use the lexical items, as well as their various significations that Sheng speakers from different bazes shift their identities. Ability to learn the Sheng from different *bazes* was attributed to the respondents' claim in a statement 'Sheng from all ghettoes is the same'. This was explained in terms of the almost similar reality experienced by all ghetto residents. In addition, a claim was made that variation in Sheng, and indeed Sheng itself was overwhelmingly a lexical issue. Hence it was easier to learn vocabulary when the speakers are not burdened by learning a new grammar.

The motivation behind shifting identities was attributed to the change in social situations. Since the majority of the respondents were from the ghetto, identification with the varieties of other ghettoes was driven by their shared reality, while identification with the varieties spoken in affluent neighborhoods was driven by the status symbolism that the ghetto people aspired for.

The discussion on conscious and unconscious shifting of identities addressed Hypothesis 4 that 'Speakers shift identities both consciously and unconsciously'. Unconscious shifting of identities was attributed to speakers' habitus which have become ingrained into their linguistic norms. At the same time conscious shifting of identities was attributed to cognitive processes where the speakers took initiatives to shift their linguistic norms to suit those of desired others. It is possible to conclude that the speakers' habitus is built through these conscious discursive linguistic practices.

Hypothesis 5 that says that 'shifting of identities is greater in densely populated residential areas as opposed to sparsely populated residential areas' was addressed by relating residential dynamics to the network patterns between the poor and affluent neighborhoods. The strong networks in the ghettoes promoted heavy interaction in Sheng which bled many small units. Since members of these small units interacts with members of other small units within the ghetto then Sheng lexical material are able to spread. The same was not possible in affluent neighborhoods because of lack of small units of interaction. Consequently, there was no enforcement of norms that could make a group distinctive as per the claims of network theory (Milroy 1980). However, due to intervention of popular culture and mass media in Sheng dissemination, some terms from the ghetto have trickled to the affluent neighborhoods. Although their adoption, to an

extent modifies the identity of the ubabini residents, they do not lead to major shifting of identity because widespread terms are useless in identity construction.

My final hypothesis was that "Sheng speakers identify with Sheng varieties that are similar or close to their own". This issue was addressed by examining attitudes of the respondents towards other Sheng varieties. It was shown that the ghetto raters, who comprised the majority of my interviewees, rated the other ghetto varieties better. This was attributed to the fact that these varieties were very similar to their own varieties. Divergent cases such as that between Kariobangi and Korogocho, or Westlands and South C were attributed to relative comparison, where speakers used factors other than linguistics to draw intergroup boundaries.

The role of individuals as members of social categories must be underscored in the identity project. This is because the negotiation of identity takes place at a personal level. Innovations begin with individuals and then spread within the group before spreading outside the group. It needs to be taken into account that even among the groups in which innovations originate; they might not have a uniform effect. There are for instance, members who simultaneously mix the old forms with the new (e.g., Mosh in Ngara), or outside norms with the group's norms (e.g., Joe in Makadara), while others only stick to those forms that are identified with their baze. It should not also be assumed that belonging to a social category like a baze dwarfs other social categories that those baze members belong to.

While the major focus of this study was linguistic variation, other non linguistic practices that teams up with linguistic choices in the construction of identity were also considered. This is what complicates the picture of Sheng's variation, which increases the

distance in social categories that speaks Sheng. With this lack of uniformity in the social categories together with the differing pattern of identity among various groups, the issue of whether whether we can talk of large-scale group identity as in Samper's work (2002) arises. How, for instance, can we talk of Nairobi as a meta-category with its own identity if all groups are different? Even in cases of micro categories like *bazes,* how can we talk of identity on one hand while emphasizing individual distinctiveness? These are some of the issues that should be addressed in future studies. This shows that even though this study advances various issues not addressed in Samper's study, it has just scrapped the surface of this broad issue of Sheng and identity.

Implications and future research

As concluding remarks, I will tie the implications of this study to the direction for future research in Sheng. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that Sheng has been blamed for poor performance in the standard languages among the school students. First of all, the languages teachers need to understand the reality that Sheng serves a very important social function among its speakers. Exhorting student to stop using it is not going to work. It is sad that the language teachers still regard Sheng as a 'concoction' or 'corrupted language' with no rules. As we have see, Sheng operates like any other mainstream language at least in terms of syntactic structure and word formation rules; only its lack of standardization especially in terms of orthography inhibits uniformity. Appreciating this fact will encourage the teacher training colleges to develop a curriculum that integrate understanding of Sheng among language teachers in order to equip them with the pedagogical knowledge necessary for making students understand

the boundary between spoken and written language. This study has shown that when there is a clear motivation, Sheng speakers accommodate to other Sheng varieties. It is my belief that they can also accommodate to the standard language in the necessary contexts so long as teachers adopt the right attitudes. Since demonizing Sheng has proved to be counterproductive, strategies that appeal to students local and national identities should be adopted so that they can see the value of both and make the optimal choices as situations demand.

Another implication of this study is tied to the growing use of Sheng in the internet. Kenyans in the diaspora are interacting with their counterparts at home and sharing their experiences. In addition, internet users are blurring the identities associated with the *bazes* or neighborhoods since cyberspace connects people of different backgrounds. This does not mean that networks are eliminated altogether. I believe the study of the internet use of Sheng and the network patterns of Sheng speakers will come up with interesting findings concerning identity interaction in cyberspace.

I also pointed out that once innovation spread to the mainstream, its function as a symbol of a group's identity reduces. The study of the use of Sheng in popular culture and the media will therefore reveal how speakers of Sheng varieties respond to this invasion of their private spaces by continuous innovation.

One of the major limitations of this study was the amount of time spent on subjects. I believe that in order to account for different patterns of identity construction in a particular *baze*, a single visit is not enough. While this cross-sectional study came up with interesting findings, a longitudinal study would have revealed more dynamics among the individual members of the *baze*. Eckert (2000) was able to come up with such

detailed findings in her study of adolescents in a Detroit suburban High School because of the amount of time she spent interacting with the students. I believe this approach would yield better results in the study of Sheng. It is just not enough to attend one-interview sessions and then make generalizations. Now that I have concluded that *bazes* are an important locus for Sheng variation, future research should focus on three or four *bazes*, perhaps with only two females and two males in each, and spend a lot of time in such environments. This will allow the researcher to verify the claims that members make in their interviews. In addition, there will be a chance to observe different discourse genres, which might be governed by their own rules, even within a single *baze.*

Without such an investigation, however, this study has shown that the emergence of a contact variety such as Sheng cannot be properly assessed, not even understood for what it is in its locale without an understanding of both its influence and dependence on the emergence of multifaceted identities in such a setting.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire 1: For school children under 18 years old

1. Age _____ Sex _____

2. School (if applicable) _____

3. Which residential area have you lived in Nairobi (begin with the most recent in that order

	Residential areas	Duration
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		
e.		

4. In this scale, how much would you say that you speak any of the given Languages per day? mark (x)

	Languages	All times	A lot	Little	Very little	Never
1.	Sheng	___	___	___	___	___
2	Swahili	___	___	___	___	___
3	English	___	___	___	___	___
4	Others 1.	___	___	___	___	___
5	Others 2	___	___	___	___	___

5. How good is your Sheng
   a. perfect b. very good c. fair d not so good e. not good at all
6. How old were you when began speaking Sheng? _____years

7. Where did you learn Sheng
   school, home, friends, church, TV, music, radio
8. Who do you speak Sheng with?
   Friends, bothers and sisters, parents, teachers, policemen, anybody
9. Who would you not speak Sheng with, even if s/he knew?
   Parents, teachers, strangers, friends, policemen, nobody
10. Do all people speak Sheng the same way?
    Yes_____ No_____
11. Write down some of the differences between the Sheng you speak here with your friends and the Sheng that others speak?

Father	to eat	foolish person
Mother	to sleep	to go
to rest	thief	child
policeman	house	car
girl	money	teacher
boy	music	

12. Would you like to move out of your estate?

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire 2: For Subjects over 18 years

1. Age _____ Sex _____

2. School (if applicable) _____

3. Which residential area have you lived in Nairobi (begin with the most recent in that order)

	Residential areas	Duration
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		
e.		

4. In this scale, how much would you say that you speak any of the given Languages per day? Mark (X)

	Languages	All times	A lot	Little	Very little	Never
1.	Sheng	___	___	___	___	___
2	Swahili	___	___	___	___	___
3	English	___	___	___	___	___
4	Others 1.	___	___	___	___	___
5	Others 2	___	___	___	___	___

5. How old were you when began speaking Sheng?
_____ years

6. Where did you learn Sheng

7. Who do you speak Sheng with?

8. Who would you not speak Sheng with, even if s/he knew?

8. Do all people speak Sheng the same way?
Yes_____ No_____

9. Write down some of the differences between the Sheng you speak with your friends and the Sheng that others speak?

10. Identity: How do these people speak Sheng? Mark (X)

locations	Exactly like me	A little like me	Very different from me	I don't understand them
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				

11. Judgment: How do these people speak their Sheng' Mark (X)

locations	Very well	Not so bad	Not well	bad
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				

12. The Sheng' Index: How would you rate your Sheng?
    a. Perfect b. Very good c. Fair d. Not so good e. Not good at all

13. Where did you go to School? Primary..... secondary.....

14. Do you have a small group of friends in your neighborhood whom you speak Sheng with?

15. Who would you consider as people who belong to your group?

16. Are there times you want to belong to other groups?

17. Do you have other family members in the neighborhood who also speak Sheng?

18. Do you have at least two people from the neighborhood with home you work at the same place?

19. Where you work, do you work with at least two others of the same sex?

20. Are the social activities you engage in restricted to the same neighborhood?

21. How many of your closest friends belong to your ethnic group?
    a. 85-100% b. 70-84% c. 55-69% d. 40-54% 3. Below 40%

22. Do you consider moving into another neighborhood?

APPENDIX C

Rift Valley Academy RVA Lingo

Record: [**26 to 50**] of **219**

29.	**chapos**	chah-POHS, n., Swahili: chapati: food; chapati--similar to flour tortilla, but greasier.
30.	**choo**	CHOH, n., Swahili: toilet: toilet.
32.	**chop**	CHAHP, n., Swahili: kuchapa kazi, meaning to work energetically: one who works energetically. Alternate spellings: chap
35.	**chilé**	chee-LAY, n., Unknown: a girl. Alternate spellings: chile, chilley, chillay, chillet
36.	**chuck**	CHUHK, v., English: to leave.
38.	**chumes**	CHOOMZ, n., Swahili: uchumi--economy: money. Alternate spellings: chums, chooms
39.	**chupes**	CHOOPS, n., Swahili: chupi--underwear: underwear, especially briefs.
40.	**conch**	KAWNCH, adj., English: conch: hard, difficult.
42.	**convos**	kawn-VOHZ, n., English: conversation; see also 'convo'.
43.	**crop**	KRAWP, v., English: to fall, especially as a result of tripping.
44.	**cruise**	KROOZ, v., English: to travel or do something very quickly.
45.	**cruisist**	KROO-zist, v., English: one who travels or does something very quickly.
46.	**crust**	KRUHST, n., English: see 'nast'.
47.	**dido**	dee-DOH, n., Maasai: 'entito'--a young girl: a girl, especially a girlfriend.
49.	**diros**	digh-ROHZ, n., English: diarrhea; see dirocks , None . Alternate spellings:
50.	**dirocks**	DIGH-rocks, n., English: diarrhea. Alternate spellings: dirox

Adapted from Davids Leber's website at http://www.freepgs.com/lebes/ with his permission.

APPENDIX D

Synonym frequencies N=212

Frequencies for **'father'**
buda [62] budeng' [1] budengdeng [1] fatha [17] fathe [1] fusebox [1] gadabu [1] kize [1] mbulala [1] mbuyu [141] mdabu [3] mdagala [4] mzae [2] oldman [1] papa [1] tifar [1] warinzu [1] zeiksman [1]

Frequencies for **'mother'**
buda [1] gadama [1] mama [1] masa [103] matha [22] mathako [1] mathe[55] mathor [5] mdhema [1] mnyaka [3] mnyasa [3] mokoro [1] monthere [1] monthero [1] msa [1] mtassi [1] mthama [1] mthas [1] munthre [1] muthama [25] muthes [1] mwothes [1] themaa [1] therma [2] tima [1] zeikswom [1]

Frequencies for **'rest'**
Bangaiza [10] bentle [1] gichi [1] kubanjuk [1] kubarizi [1] kubazz [1] kubreeze [1] kubuaga [1] kuchill [3] kudozi [3] kugandiz [3] kujibanz [1] kukeyo [2] kula njaro [2] kumanya [2] kumorea [1] kumoss [1] kupoa [11] kupoza [1] kupozi [34] kupumz [1] kupumzika [3] kurelax [12] kurest [5] kutulia [27] kutulix [1] kutuliza [26] kutuna [3] kuuma vako [2] kuwaka [1] liatu [2] nawengine [1] poa [1] swach [1] take rest [1] tinare [2] tired [1] tulia [2] tuliatulia [1] tuliz [1] tuliza [3] usiogope [1] wasee [2]

Frequencies for **'police'**
afuade [1] antimege [1] babby [1] banga [4] gava [43] goshogi [2] gwang [1] karao [115] mabeast [14] manyani [1] mapolisi [1] mban'ga [1] msoro [1] oraka [1] pai [5] ponyi [16] sanse [10]sarka [1] sinya [4] tipoli [1] vedi [2] wachi [1]

Frequencies for **'girl'**
Azguoba [1] bogola [1] buss [1] chibela [1] chik [3] chile [3] cholosa [2] dame [3] dem [36] gala [1] gwaru [1] hoe [1] jaba [1] kemfaa [1] kenta [1] kff [1] kichuna [1] kidalipo [1] mama [1] man [1] mandu [3] manyake [2] manzi [132] mbas [1] mbus [5] miogar [1] mlosho [1] mresh [1] mroro [13] mshe [3] mshi [5] msusu [2] mtasi [1] mtoi [1] motto [1] nyambizi [1] nyang'we [1] nzima [1] roro [1] shore [17] shwala [1] siste [2] supuu [1] toto [1] wanyina [1]

Frequencies for **'boy'**
beshte [1] boi [6] boy [1] boyboy [1] boyii [1] bro [1] chali [178] charty [1] dume [1] hommie [1] huyu boy [1] jamaa [8] kaboy [1] kijana [5] licha [1] mdhi [1] mru [1] msee [3] mthi [1] muthee [1] muthii [1] mzee [1] ndaume [1]

Frequencies for **'eat'**
bonya [6] dema [34] difu [1] dishi [20] ficha [1] finya [1] fweba [1] fyamba [2] fyenfa [1] hog [5] jibonda [2] jirock [1] jistack [1] jitibu [1] kumachez [1] kumatema

[2] kupiga [1] kusosi [2] kustack [3] kutia nbani [3] manga [129] minya [2] munch [1] ngama [1] sosi [1] stack [2] venga [2]

Frequencies for **'sleep'**
K.O. [1] bleki [1] kudoro [52] kudoroi [1] kudorome [1] kudosro [1] kudoz [3] kudoze [4] kudozi [68] kuduna [1] kukaita [1] kukata [1] kukoma [1] kulaka [1] kulala [3] kunatu [2] kushonga [2] kuswatch [5] kutulia [1] kutuna [59] kuuma vako [1] natu [1] swachi [1]

Frequencies for **'thief'**
Bandi [5] bandishi [1] bandit [1] chizi [1] conmen [1]dindo [1] dingo [23] dongi [1] goda [1] gondi [107] goya [1] jambazi [1] jambo [4] jangili [1] kauzi [13] mgosa [37] mnati [1] mwizi [1] pinji [4] shifta [1] sinya [1] sniper [4] thegi [10]

Frequencies for **'house'**
boma [1] cube [1]digz [3] ghetto [1] hao [66] jake [1] keja [132] krib [5] kubalo [2] maskan [1] mbanyu [11] moroto[2] mtaani [1] riggs [1] wou [1]

Frequencies for **'money'**
alpundez [1] capital [1] chaga [1] chantu [1] chapa [26] cheda [12] chumbs [1] daf [1] dongera [1] doo [84] ganji [76] gashai [2] greens [1] hela [1] kenge [2] macheda [1] mafuta [1] majani [1] mapesa [1] monyo [4] munde [6] munke [1] murangi [1] ngoma [1] niado [6] niadu [1] papers [1] pesa [1] sape [1] winchi [2]

Frequencies for **'music'**
Beats [1] chizi [1] debe [3] genge [5] gogo [1] hewa [1] lyrics [2] maflavou [1] mahewa [50] malyrics [1] mavitu [1] mogithi [1] music [1] ngoma [134] reggae [2] rwembo [1] song [1] timus [1] vokol [2] wimbo [2] wingnimb [1] ziki [1]

Frequencies for **'fool'**
anti-nyita [1] bani [3] barhe [3] bore [7] bure [2] chizi [34] chodha [1] chununu [1] danda [13] dula [1] dawn [1] dwanzi [1] fala [117] fika [1] fyatika [2] fyatuko [1] gamlez [1] gwethe [1] gweze [3] jamaa [1] kamande [1] kemothe [1] kerothi [1] kichoyo [1] kwaya [1] lafa [1] mbatopas [1] mbonye [1] mdongo [1] mjinga [3] mjeshi [1] mshakee [2] mwenda [2] mwere [1] nduwele [1] ng'ea [1] ngamres [1] ngamwe [1] ngoie [1] nongwe [6] pankass [1] punju [1] quir [1] shenzi [2] shoga [1] thati [2] tiwetini [1] tost [2] tothi [8] upende [1] weri [3] zushu [1]

Frequencies for **'go'**
Bail [2] bounce [4] chak [3] cheza [1] chora [1] dark [1] gich [1] gushia [1] gwan [1] inua [1] ishia [133] jiches [1] jicurve [1] jikata [43] jikate [1] jikov [1] jipanga [1] jitoa [5] jivuta [1] kacha [1] kugo [1] kuhepa [1] kula vako [1] kung'oka [1] kuwiz [1] kwenda [2] lembe [1] mkidi [1] ndae [1] nyaa [6] nyorosha [2] ramus [1] shoot [2] tinago [1] tuende [1] tukore [1] uiz [1]

Frequencies for **'child'**
chali [1] doli [1] kijanaa [1] mdiki [11] mdoido [1] mjunior [12] mkidi [49] mless[1] mniaju [2] mtoi [141] myoung [3] ndai [1] tich[1] wothes [1]

Frequencies for **'car'**
bima [1] breka [2] dinga [111] gari [2] mathree [4] mboko [3] mbokonya [1] mode [1] moti [11] mots [1] murenga [10] ndai [84] nganya [1] rack [6] ride [4] ticar [1] wheels [3]

Frequencies for **'teacher'**
D.H [1] mchals [1] mdie [1] mdijo [1] mode [66] mtiche [1] mwalimu [1] no [1] odich [15] odicha [1] odicho [1] odido [1] odijo [123] odisa [6] odish [1] odiso [1] odojo [2] ondiso [4] t.a [1] tiche [9] tie [4] udicha [1]

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