Necrolinguistics: The Linguistically Stranded[1]

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1. Introduction

What is happening to African languages? As in all natural life, languages either evolve or die. Languages evolve because new and different forms develop in small increments, which accumulate over time to bring about significant changes. Language demise can be sudden, especially with natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, which wipe out entire ethnolinguistic communities, but it is often gradual. The decimation of language does not always mean that its people cease to exist, but rather that people carry on with adopted languages. Languages may vanish leaving behind linguistically stranded populations, who may be described as "discordant monolinguals" and "semi-lingual folk." Language shift is not a neat process by which populations blissfully commute from one language to another; rather, it is a process that is fraught with untold problems and difficulties. This paper discusses the linguistic estrangement of East Africans (and by extension, sub-Saharan Africans) as an epiphenomenon of language shift.

2. The linguistically stranded

Linguistic strandedness is characterized by those who speak only one language, but are socialized in the culture of another. This *strandedness* sometimes takes two forms. The first—linguistic monoligualism—means that nowadays we can talk about a Swahili monolingual Mchagga (Chagga person), an English monolingual Mugikuyu (Kikuyu of Kenya), a French monolingual Mukoongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and a Portuguese monolingual Makhuwa (Mozambique). Being linguistically stranded in this manner leaves one with a double consciousness as described by the scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (in *The Souls of Black Folk)* such that a person belongs to a particular culture yet the language they speak is that of another. I refer to this state as "discordant monolingualism." This condition is not simply immediate and transitory, but often spans centuries as in the conditions of Jacques Derrida's life. Derrida, a Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian, describes himself as one who is monolingual, yet speaks a language that is not his own, a condition he terms 'disorder of identity' with "psychopathological sociopathological connotations."[2] Even when successful, language shift is often a troubled conquest.

The second type of linguistic strandedness is descriptive of a people whose only language is a argot/jargon or an unelaborated pidgin. People speaking this type of argot/jargon/pidgin also usually exhibit a stranded cultural consciousness. I refer to certain nuanced instances of this state as "semi-lingualism."

Both discordant monolingualism and semi-lingualism are some of the debris or fragments left behind in the process of shifting from one language to another. Language shift,[3] has been described as follows:

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1 This paper is part of a larger manuscript on Necrolinguistics that will be published in the Du Bois Review for Social Science Research on Race [Vol.2:2] in 2006.

2 Derrida (1998:14).

3 According to the free encyclopeadia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_shift, language shift, sometimes referred to as language transfer or rate of assimilation, is the process whereby a speech community of a language shifts to speaking another language. The rate of assimilation is the percentage of individuals with a given mother tongue who speak another language more often in the home. The data is used to measure the use of a given language in the lifetime of a person, or most often across generations within a linguistic community. In addition, the process whereby a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language, and gradually shift allegiance to the second language is called assimilation. When a linguistic community ceases to use their original language, we speak of language death.

> A homogenous sociolinguistic group may expand its territory through conquest and swallow up other ethno-linguistic groups. Over a period of time, the conquered may adopt the language and cultural norms of the conquerors, so that, eventually, the emergent nation would have passed through the stage of its consciousness as a sociocultural entity before becoming a geo-political one[4].

Language shift is about conquest. The conquerors are those whose language and culture are adopted, in most cases, unwillingly by others. The conquered are those who assimilate. Language shift is therefore mostly about erasing specific cultural and social identities and taking on those of the dominant other. Conquest imposes changes in the ethno-linguistic constitution of groups. Often the changes are so momentous that hunter-gatherer groups over time change into pastoralists and pastoralists become farmers. This process of language shift is typified by the fate of many hunter gatherers who speak the Ndorobo languages in Kenya and Tanzania. "Ndorobo" is a derogatory cover term for several small hunter or forest groups. The languages of these small groups include: Akiek (200 speakers), El Molo (400 speakers), Yaaku (250 speakers), Omotik (200 speakers), Nilotic, Asax (350 speakers), Aramanik (3,000 speakers), Kisankasa (5,670 speakers), Mediak (5,268 speakers), and Mosiro (5,268 speakers). Based on such threateningly low numbers,[5] Ndorobo languages are nearly extinct. The exact origin of Ndorobo languages is unclear, but it is known that they shifted from their hunter-gathering cultures to those of their pastoral and farming neighbors. Similar phenomenon is observed with regard to the Pygmies of Central Africa. The agricultural expansion of the Bantu replaced the original Pygmy languages in Central Africa's rain forest. Just as with the Ndorobo, the Pygmies transitioned from foraging to farming; what remains of their original languages are mere fragments such as the names of forest animals and plants.[6]

Looking at the Ndorobo and the Pygmies, we see that language shift involves the attrition of numbers of people who speak a language. Reasons for language shift are many and varied in scope but the root, ultimately, is power. When hunter-gatherers meet pastoralists, they became pastoralists and when they encountered agriculturalists, they became farmers. In the amount of time that a language shift is required to take place, instances in which individuals and or groups are linguistically stranded prevail. The reasons behind language shift ordain the paths that are linguistic cul-de-sacs, beyond which further progress is impossible. When on the path toward language shift, turning back is very difficult. As in the case of the Ndorobo and the Pygmies, total absorption into their neighbors' language and culture took place without creating intermediate speakers who are partial speakers of the initial language and the language they are shifting to. Language shift is greatly influenced by history. Hunter-gatherers had to content with pre-colonial Bantu migration. In colonial and postcolonial times, language shift is also predicated on power, oftentimes on the politics of socio-economic dominance. The primary forces that indigenous languages have been up against over the last century or so are the forces of linguistic Orientalism and linguistic incarceration to which we now briefly turn.

3. Linguistic Orientalism

Edward Said describes Orientalism as

> "The corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[7]

Sub-Saharan Africa is the ultimate "Other," –the ultimate dichotomization through European conquest and colonial rule. Derogatory statements and descriptions, intended to dominate the world's psyche on Africa have multiplied in modern history, their beginnings appearing to coincide with the transatlantic slave trade.[8] In 1831, the notable German philosopher Friedrich Hegel, even though he had never been to Africa and knew nothing of its people,[9] spoke of Africa as "the land where men are

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[4] Goke-Pariola, Abiodun (1993:5).
[5] Numbers obtained from ethnologue.com.
[6] Cavalli-Sforza, Luigi Luca (2000:170).
[7] Said, Edward (1979:3). Orientalism.
[8] according to Basil Davidson. ibid.
[9] Ibid.

children. A land lying beyond the daylight of self-conscious history and enveloped in the black color of night. Africa is no historical part of the world."[10] The explorer Samuel Baker, (knighted by the British Crown for his exploits in Eastern Africa)[11] spoke of Africans in the 1860s as "Human nature viewed in its crudest state."[12] Many more such proclamations are not lacking in colonial history.[13] Not surprisingly, these prejudicial statements about Africans have also led to derogatory remarks on black languages, hence the term Afrolinguistic Orientalism.

Linguistic Orientalism refers to the way indigenous African languages are described, taught, ruled over, and dominated. What has been said about African languages and cultures has been an important part of the arsenal that has been used to repress, stymie, and eventually destroy these languages.

Afro-linguistic Orientalism treats indigenous African languages as a modern day Tower of Babel and these languages are said to be an anathema to efficiency, progress, and ultimately the environment. The most insidious effect has been indigenous Africans buying into the idea that their languages are shameful, of no value, and above all inferior to non-African ones.

The suggestion that the complexity of a people's intelligence is proportional to the complexity of the languages that they speak it is not new. Back in 1930, Alice Werner, Professor of Swahili and Bantu Languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies asserted, on the basis of pre-supposition, that the simplicity of the languages they encountered proved the simplicity of the people. On Sudanic languages, Professor Werner offered the following expert opinion:

> Complex sentences are quite unknown; what we should make into subordinate clauses are principal –consequently, for one thing, there are no relative pronouns. All statements are grammatically of equal importance; in other words, the construction is co-ordinative. "when he came I saw that he was in trouble" would be: "He came. I saw him. He was in trouble."[14]

A simple language means a simple people according to Professor Werner, who was rehashing a refrain that Africans are the ultimate Other —they are not like the Europeans or the people of the Orient, but are something far lower and therefore doomed to suffering. Such was also the sentiment with amateur linguist F. W. H. Migeod (a mere Transport Officer in Ghana, then the Gold Coast) who, referring to the 2000 plus languages of sub-Saharan Africa commented:

> As a matter of fact the majority of languages of Africa are simple both in structure and their grammatical forms, and it is of course perfectly possible to convey ideas of considerable complexity and with abundance of detail, even with a simple means of communication. Brute beasts, with a very limited number of sounds, seem able to convey a considerable number of ideas to others of the same species (Migeod 1911:72-73).[15] Plentifully supplied by nature, most of his necessities being near at hand, or obtainable with relatively small amount of labor, the Negro is indifferent in many matters, therefore, a nice distinction in language is unnecessary. The individual words too, as a rule have a perfectly clear meaning, and the use of metaphor is uncommon (Migeod 1911:75).

Migeod saw a connection between the vast riches of Africa to the downfall of its inhabitants. Abundance, Migeod believed, left Africans lazy and soporific, speaking very simple languages whose words have only transparent meanings.

African languages were thought useful for intra-species purposes, but not as languages of international commerce, religion with universal appeal, or for relaying abstract concepts. To find a people with simple languages implies their inability to develop complex thoughts. With the rejection of African languages as real languages, colonialism created an intellectual, racial, and cultural superiority. The experts were "making statements about African languages, authorizing views of it,

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[10] Davidson, Basil (1984) "Different but equal" Africa video recording.
[11] According to Were, Gideon S. and Wilson, Derek A. (1968:52).
[12] Davidson, Basil. Op cit.
[13] See for instance Captain Stigand writings The Land of Zinj, 1913 quoted in Gates, Henry Louis (1999:149).
[14] Werner, Alice (1930).
[15] Migeod, F.W.H. (1911).

describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" as Said tells us to expect of Orientalists then, but still today.

Afro-linguistic Orientalism has followed African people and robbed them in literally every epoch. Gullah, [16] a Diasporan dialect," spoken in the South Carolina Sea Islands, was described in 1908 as:

> […] a grotesque patois … the quite logical wreck of once tolerable English, obsolete in pronunciation, dialectal in its usage, yet the natural result of a savage and primitive people's endeavor to acquire for themselves the highly organized language of a very highly civilized race. " In 1922, Ambrose Gonzales, one of the most accurate and meticulous recorders of Sea Island languages, gave his version of its genesis: "slovenly and careless of speech, these Gullahs seized upon the peasant English used by some of the early settlers and by the white servants of the wealthier colonists, wrapped their clumsy tongues about it as well as they could, and, enriched it with certain expressive African words, it issued through their flat noses and thick lips…. Both Bennett and Gonzales were convinced that the Gullah dialect's economy of words and elision of syllables stemmed from the Negro's "characteristic laziness.[17]

Europe's view of African languages continues to be unambiguously negative –mostly hostile. African languages been prohibited where possible and muzzled to silence when recalcitrant. The prohibition of African languages from the pursuit of knowledge has a long history.

4. Linguistic incarceration

Once it was established that indigenous African languages were a hindrance to progress, the moral basis on which to take action against indigenous languages is established. Examples are everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Three examples suffice: the first example involves linguistic prohibition. In 1921, the Portuguese forbade, by decree, the use of African languages in Namibian schools including publications in African languages, and by 1950, the Portuguese had become the sole medium of instruction in all schools including private ones[18]. The second example involves linguistic control. The Belgians in the Congo (also known as Zaire with more than 200 languages) strove to avoid multilingualism and when that failed, the French remained at the apex and local African languages were to be helped to develop "rationally."[19] The third example involves linguistic curfew. On June 16th, 1974 in apartheid South Africa, M.C. Botha, Minister of Bantu Education and Development, issued a decree making Afrikaans the compulsory medium of instruction in black schools—a curfew against local language use in school—leading to the Soweto uprising involving over 30,000 students in which more than 500 people were killed.[20]

This bludgeoning of indigenous African languages from the education system has culminated in what is now the standard where many African languages have been sidelined from educational and institutional developments in modern Africa. In policy, but mostly by decree, the traditional black school was/is shut down by the incarceration of black languages and black folk were/are forced to 'pay attention' in languages they do not speak for the most part, much less understand.

It is noteworthy that linguistic incarceration for some is not merely the shutting off of sub-Saharan languages, but also keeping Western languages out of reach to even to those who wished to learn them. When it comes to linguistically dominating Africans, there was no hiatus even during both World Wars. When Africans were conscripted to fight European wars, they were denied the use of their native languages — a strategy much used by the French. Franz Fanon observed, and wrote about *Petit Nègre*, one of the strangest legacies of World War I as:

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[16] For a more extensive analysis see John Mugane, *Du Bois Review*, forthcoming, 2006.
[17] Levine (1977: 146-147).
[18] Goke-Pariola, Abiodun (1993:35).
[19] Goke-Pariola (1993:35).
[20] Figures taken from CNN News report of June 15, 2001,
http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/africa/06/15/inside.africa/ and the City of Johannesburg's official website: http://www.joburg.org.za/june_2002/hector.stm.

[…] a simplified, deformed version of French that the military codified and taught to African soldiers as they came to fight in Europe, as a means both to infantilize them and to control their modes of interaction with their mainly white commanding officers.[21]

The phonological and syntactic structure of Petit Nègre was constructed using the subversive approach of reinforcing mispronunciation and other deformations in grammar.[22] The irony is not lost: while fighting for France, Africans were also fighting a linguistic combat with the French.

Linguistic incarceration in Kenya is best illustrated by the profound paradoxes between the languages people speak and the languages of power and access. In Kenya, there is no explicit benefit associated with the mastery of local languages except Swahili. Consider the following incongruities in language use between things that ought to go together, if sanity were to prevail. *(≠ reads 'is not equal to or very seldom is')*

- The language of local knowledge (indigenous) ≠ the language of education (English)
- The language of the home (indigenous) ≠ the language of instruction (English)
- The language of the child (indigenous) ≠ the language of the textbook (English)
- The language of daily life (indigenous) ≠ the language of the textbook (English)
- The language of play (indigenous) ≠ the language of learning (English)
- The language of acquisition (the child's own) ≠ the language of the school (English)
- The language of comprehension (indigenous) ≠ the language of exams (English)
- The language of problem solving (indigenous) ≠ the language of exams (English)
- The language of the teacher (indigenous) ≠ language of instruction (English)
- The language of survival (indigenous) ≠ the language of education (English)

In the area of education there are pronounced incongruities between the language the child understands, the language of the parent, and the language of schooling. Often the language of the child is also different from that of the teacher and both do not have a command of the language of instruction. It is vehemently argued that schooling in indigenous languages is not viable,[23] politically and economically, except perhaps for grades one through three in primary school as a bridge from vernaculars to English in Kenya. The performance of Kenya's children in 2003 is illustrative of the quality of their education. Announcing the results of the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, Kenya's minister of Education Prof. George Saitoti, revealed that:

Other than Kiswahili objectives (59%), geography, history and civics (55.92%) and religion (56.43%), the rest had a mean score of less than 50%. The lowest mean score was in English composition (30.64%) and Kiswahili composition (41.73%). Others mean scores were science (42.74%), mathematics (44.22%), and English objectives (44.86%). What this means is that the majority of the candidates did not score more than 50% in the subjects. "The low mean score in English, mathematics and science is worrying, because these are key subjects for future education as well as our national goals for economic development and industrialization," the Education minister said. "I urge teachers to re-sharpen their teaching skills and make deliberate efforts to improve candidates' performance in these subjects." [24]

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[21] Quoted in Edwards, Brent Hayes (2003:52).

[22] *Petit Nègre* is characterized by the following analogy :

> Suppose that having to teach our language to the Englishman, we carefully took
> note of all the deformations his first attempts inflict on French pronunciation and
> syntax, and that from then on, we draw on them to present him with a French
> reduced to his English compatibilities.

Quoted in Edwards, Brent Hayes (2003:52). *The Practice of the Diaspora, Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts.

[23] UNESCO (1953:47-49) has for over half a century held the view that vernacular languages are essential in the development of a child's cognitive skills.

[24] From *The Sunday Nation*, December 28, 2003, report by David Oduda, Education Editor.

The first language of the child is incarcerated, reducing education to the pursuit of fluency in English mediated by markedly non-proficient instructors. Whenever the switch is made from the child's first language to the language of the school there is always an instructional blackout. For the vast majority of children, the blackout is total and final. Learning is then reduced to verbatim memorization (and in numerous cases good hand writing)! To arrest the use of indigenous languages where they are most needed begins the process of necrolinguistics, the erasure or non-mastery of the vernacular.

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, English is not well known by the majority of the people –in spite of claims to the contrary. Many appear to have receptive competence. This has been understood for a long time as observed by Bamgbose (1972:7). A perennial complaint states how most graduates of the education systems are incompetent not only in the use of English, but also in that of their mother tongue. *This is the linguistic strandedness of semi-lingualism*. Two decades later, the same complaint was still being asserted with regards to Kenya's University students. The Daily Nation of June 5, 1993, reported that the Vice Chancellor of Egerton University, Professor J. Kiptoon, said that many undergraduates in Kenya's public universities are functionally illiterate in English and could not even write a simple application for a job in the language.[25]

The report card on Francophone studies is not any different:

Schooling in French has undergone a great decline. A continuing increase in the cost of teaching French has been accompanied by a noticeable drop in the competence levels attained by graduates. The non-mastery has a broad effect upon attainment in other areas since the language of instruction; the 'vehicle of knowledge' is French. The paths of knowledge are open to a small minority. The use of French to promote national unity has not diminished tribalism. (N'ouéni 1994:60) [26]

It is well known that adult language learners need intensive formal training even in the target language environment. To make language matters worse, Africans would have a virtually intractable problem of trying to learn English as adults in the absence of native speakers of English. This strandedness led to inferiority in perpetuity where one strove to reach the unreachable. While working so hard to learn Portuguese, French, and English, sub-Saharan Africans abandoned their own languages and ways of thinking. Without much practice in indigenous languages, many of the educated occupy a linguistic no-man's-land speaking English, French, and Portuguese, exhibiting the *monolingual strandedness* of speaking a language that native speakers of these Western languages continue to view as bastardizations of their own language—unable (and often unwilling) to understand African accents. This strandedness is also a form of necrolinguistics: the extraction of native African languages from the people who speak them, described by Mazrui and Mazrui (1998:59):

[…] in spite of all the desperate attempts to become European, these Africans never quite attain a European identity. European society never accepts them as full participants; they always remain outsiders. The more European the Africans become in cultural terms, the more they are regarded by European society as exotic or even quixotic.

It is estimated that 90% of Africans speak only African languages.[27] Bernard Heine estimates that up to 20% of Nigerians speak English, no more than 10% speak French in 'Francophone' Africa, and 5 to 10% speak Portuguese in 'Lusophone' Africa.[28]

Demanding that Africans use the European languages gives continuing advantage to the powerful elite, but even local languages have developed peculiar challenges in the last ten to twenty years. As a result we are nowadays raising questions which were unaskable only a generation or two ago because we now have labels that were not previously in vogue: What does it means to be a Chagga person who is a Swahili monolingual? Or its double –what does it mean to be a monolingual

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[25] Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1992:27) Cited in Mazrui A. M (2004).
[26] N'ouéni Raphael (1994).
[27] quoted in Kangas (2003:232).
[28] quoted in Kangas (2001:233).

English/French/Portuguese speaker socialized in a specific ethnic African culture? How do *in-situ* heritage communities come to exist? These questions are inescapable when one considers the issue of what is happening to African languages and their speakers today.

Discordant monolinguals include children who have receptive understanding of their parental language, but never utter a word in it. There are many children who respond to requests by their parents without replying in their parental tongue. A conversational exchange could be in English-Gikuyu by the parent, but exclusively English from the child. This Afro-Saxon[29] in the making grows up in total disregard of their parental language, and may have hostile attitudes towards the local language, seeing it as backwards, old fashioned, embarrassing – a direct result of Afrolinguistic Orientalism.

The supreme paradox is that in spite of the reported poor use of European languages, many indigenous languages are still threatened. It is this limited use of English, French, and Portuguese going hand-in-hand with the loss of indigenous languages that is a milestone of necrolinguistics: the de-linguisticizing of people – with total loss and no compensatory gains. While in Western cultures a loss of language may not mean a loss of connection to the land, in oral cultures, loss of language means loss of geography (in the sense of place and orientation). Discordant monolingualism creates *in situ* heritage communities. The word Gikuyu not only refers to the language but also the people, the land, and also is the name of the father of all Gikuyu people. Loss of Gikuyu, the language, translates to loss of connection to the land, the people, and the trace of one's identity. It is indeed the case that loss of indigenous languages means that knowledge gained through centuries of experience in the Gikuyu environment, for example, gets lost (knowledge of the biological diversity of species of Gikuyuland, the topography of the land and its historical importance, etc). Unmistakably then, the loss of Gikuyu creates *in-situ* heritage communities who must now reconstruct knowledge of their environment in a new language.

The linguistic strandedness of semi-lingualism is primarily an urban phenomenon that is closely associated with some versions of CitySpeak or Swanglish (Swahili-English) or SHENG.

5. SHENG/Swanglish

Semi-lingualism describes people speaking a jargon/rudimentary pidgin/argot and no other language. What do we make of the rapidly growing group of individuals who speak only a jargon? What is it like to live on an argot? Nowadays in Kenya, we must confront what it means to speak SHENG as the only language a child knows. SHENG is an argot, jargon, and sometimes pidgin. Kenya's urban youth living in multi-ethnic neighborhoods created the SHENG jargon to communicate with each other. SHENG had its beginnings in the neighborhoods of Nairobi's Eastlands, which are congested with mostly inadequate housing that has resulted in one of the largest slums in the world. While SHENG is Swahili sounding, its vocabulary comes from Kenya's forty-plus languages and any other languages that Nairobi city dwellers come into contact with. English is the most favored source of vocabulary outside Kenyan languages, but the sources of loanwords are diverse and often emanate from such subtle sources as movies (as in the case of the Spanish word *gringo*) or novellas from the West. SHENG is also a private language among young people, who for lack of personal privacy, resort to a linguistically constructed space where the younger generation gain communicative privacy from their parents and other authority figures. The need to exclude authority figures (such as parents, teachers, law enforcers, etc.) from communication between young people is a defining characteristic of SHENG. The need for privacy in congested space requires secret vocabulary to be changed from time to time so that authority figures cannot catch on to what the youth are doing. SHENG has over 40 words for "girl," over 20 words denoting police, over 10 words for marijuana, and 10 words for 'money' (with 8 different ones for five shillings), some examples being:

Girl: *babe (pronounced /bahbeh/) , bebi, besta, boksa, buksi, chikii, chile, demu, gathoni, gibenje, kago, kamadu, kangongo, kashano, kasunda, kasupu, kenge, kifaranga, kingwati, kipusa, kirenge, Kiyegiyegi, korona, kromu, kuro, malaika, mame, manduano, manyanga, manzi, mauzi, mashrobe, matunda, mbitu, mkasoo, mkuki, ndito, ndogondogo, ngeke, ngochino, ombachi, ong'ura, wanga*

Police: *njako, sonyi, sinya, ponyi, ponye, karao, wahea, karai, flik, pai, paire, popi, kachero, ako, kahio itina, danse, gava, mambuchbuch, sanse, hindra, pije, wakorino,*

Money: *beksi, chapaa, chums, do (pronounced /dough/), kege, kenge, michuzi, mnago, munde, nyandu.*
5 shilling coin: *king'ori, kobuangi, kobole, kobore, konglo, gongoro, museveni, panchi*

   To further compound the complexity of SHENG are the many varieties that are available. Illustrated below in Figure 1 is a type that is rampant in poor sections of Kenya's urban areas. SHENG combines the phonology of the various indigenous languages to form words pronounced like Swahili in terms of stress patterns (penult stress). This involves the Swahilization of Kenya's indigenous languages. SHENG varies from one neighborhood to another and there are several forms that function as intragroup communication. Examples from SHENG and the Swahilization of words drawn from multilingual lexicons are provided below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Swahilization of Kenya's languages

1. semi-regular word formation of SHENG
a. Orwach 'shorts'
o- = a prefix from Nilotic languages such as Dholuo
rwa- = taken from Swahili 'su<u>rua</u>li'
-ch = a common ending of words in Dholuo names
other such words include:
b. Othumo/ from Kisumu via Kikuyu Githumo
c. oruro '5 cents' (root = ndururu –Swahili for 5 cents)

d. Okwengo 'Gikuyu person' (root = Gĩkũyũ)
e. Oshago 'village/rural area'
f. onyus 'a little'

2. words with indeterminate (or nuanced) roots
a. Mjathe/Mlum 'Luo person'   b. dinga 'car'
c. sonyi/njako/wahea 'police'   d. chash 'give me'
e. mdosi 'boss'   f. hamoch 'find on the wayside'

   A word like 'oshago' (root –*shag-*) in the examples above may either come from the English word 'shaggy' or may be derived from *Gĩshagi* the Gĩkũyũ word for village. The root –*shag*- is surrounded by *o-* morphology typical of Nilotic languages such as Dholuo, but with penultimate stress as required in Swahili pronunciation.

   In SHENG roots are often taken from English even when adhering to Swahili grammar as seen in Figure 2 where verb roots are English, but the morphology is Swahili in examples (1) and (2) and in Kikuyu, in example (3). Pronunciation is Swahili driven, keeping a penultimate stress for most words.

Figure 2: Anglicization of Swahili
1. tukonekt 'to connect'
tu- = *1ˢᵗ person plural prefix 'we'*
konekt = connect 'spelled using Swahili pronunciation'
2. nimekumiss 'I have missed you'
ni = 1ˢᵗ Person Singular prefix 'I'
me = present perfect tense
ku = 2ⁿᵈ persion object prefix 'you'
miss = English verb 'miss'

Swahilization of Kikuyu

3. kumethũũka 'things have gone bad
ku- = verbal subject marker for place'
-me- = present perfect tense

thũũka = Gĩkũyũ verb 'deteriorate'.

The Swahilization of English shown in Figure 3 is the reverse of the situation in Figure 2. Here, Swahili roots are used with an all English morphology. The pronunciation is English driven. The word *kulad* 'ate' uses English morphology *-d* affixed to *kula 'eat'* to make the past tense form, *kulad*. Of all the different types of SHENG, it is this variety that seems to have inspired the naming of Kenya's UrbanSpeak as SHENG (Swahili-English) –a name that grossly misses the composite nature of the urban language.

Figure 3. Swahilization of English
1. I kulad him kofi 'I slapped him'
kutana = the Swahili verb 'meet'
2. I have kosad you 'I have missed you'
kosa = Swahili verb 'fail/miss'
koda-d = the *–d* is the past tense morpheme of English
Pronunciation follows English stress patterns.

3. Kyuks 'a Gĩkũyũ (Kikuyu) person'
trancation of 'Kikuyu' given an anglicized pronunciation 'que-k'. The *–s* in *kyuks* is the English plural marker.
4. *Shagz* 'rural area'

The root –shag- may either come from English word 'shaggy' or may be derived from *Gĩshagi* the Gĩkũyũ word for 'village'. The root is given an anglicized pronunciation by adding –s which following English rules of phonology, -s is pronounced as –z after voiced consonants of which *g* is one. Sometimes "home-squared" is used to refer to ancestral homes instead of 'shagz'.

SHENG is rampant in the poorer sections of Kenya's urban areas and its various forms often do reflect social status and education levels of city dwellers. The anglicized Swahili type of SHENG is used by the elite, while the Swahilized English is used by urban dwellers that know some English and use it in Swahili conjugations.

The most impressive phenomenon in SHENG is the Swahilization of indigenous Kenyan languages. The code is very hard to decipher because the phonology and morphology at play is compositional. One would require much information to decipher discreet roots of many of the words since they may be of Dholuo-Kamba-Swahili origins and other multilingual sources. SHENG then, in part, is the distillation of Kenya's rich linguistic and cultural heritage and also has parallels elsewhere in Africa. Ngom (2004) discusses urban Wolof in Senegal as a "convergence language" with no ethnic significance, as more and more "uprooted" members of other ethnic groups regard themselves as Wolof'.[30]

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[30] Ngom, Fallou (2004:95-111).

It is not clear what linguistic abilities inner city Kenyan children have. People who have their native language functioning as their language of socialization and of achievement have a distinct advantage on building a linguistic arsenal capable of taking on life's challenges beyond the immediate surroundings.

And, as Steven Pinker (1994) points out:

> Children begin to learn words before their first birthday, and by their second they use them up at a rate of one every two hours. By the time they enter school children command 13,000 words, and then the pace picks up, because new words rain down on them from both speech and print. A typical high-school graduate knows about 60,000 words; a literate adult, perhaps twice that number (Pinker 1994:149-151).

Thus far the assumption in Kenya has been that Kenyans are losing the forty- two or so indigenous languages to English and Swahili, the latter being the largest regional language of Eastern Africa. But there is ample evidence suggesting that neither English nor Swahili is being mastered by Kenyans whichever age group one chooses to consider. For children it is reflected by the poor performance in language exams mentioned earlier. Since the use of the vernacular to teach the standard[31] appears to be axiomatic, the impoverished state of a stable vernacular is undermining the efforts of language education.

6. Linguistic in-betweenness

If language is an instinct as Pinker (1994) persuasively presents, semi-lingualism must be seen as a pathological outcome — to be semi-instinctual is diagnostic of a defect in the language organ. Semi-lingualism is not entirely unknown in the literature, but wherever it is found disaster looms. Leonard Bloomfield (1927:395) describes a young Menomini[32] man as follows:

> White Thunder, a man around forty, speaks less English than Menomini, and that is a strong indictment, for his Menomini is atrocious. His vocabulary is small; his inflections are often barbarous; he constructs sentences of a few threadbare models. He may be said to speak no language tolerably. His case is not uncommon among younger men, even when they speak but little English.

Clearly, White Thunder was living in a time of a language shift and happened to have hit linguistic cul-de-sacs wherever he turned. He did not learn his own people's language or the dominant language of his day.

White Thunder's case is descriptive of a growing population of children and young adults in many sub-Saharan African countries with restricted vocabularies and highly limited grammar abilities. They appear fixated on a limited set of constructions not as a matter of preference but as a matter of paucity in the command of the requisite grammatical structures available in the language. Within East Africa's urban areas and increasingly in rural areas, many children, youth, and young adults are increasingly unable to master any one of East Africa's languages including Swahili.[33] Semi-lingualism, in this case, can be said to be a form of linguistic zombie-ism. As Oliver Sacks so wittingly observes:

> […] to be defective in language, for a human being, is one of the most desperate of calamities, for it is only through language that we enter fully into our human estate and culture, communicate freely with our fellows, acquire and share information. If we cannot do this we are bizarrely disabled and cut off –whatever our endeavors, or

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[31] See Goke-Pariola, Abiodun (1993:34) *and* Rickford, John (1999).

[32] Menomini (also called Menominee) is an Algonquian language spoken in parts of Wisconsin, belonging to the Algonquian-Wakashan languages. The case of White Thunder is also discussed in Mugane (*Du Bois Review*, forthcoming, 2006).

[33] A modern Ocol in Okot P' Bitek (1966) book *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* who is linguistically dead to his cultural roots identifying the frontline enemy to progress being the Acoli language.

capacities. And indeed, we may be so little able to realize our intellectual capacities as to appear mentally defective.[34]

7. Conclusion

Political power or domination over people encourages language shifts through coercion. We have seen that coercion comes in many forms and in this paper we have identified and discussed two specifically: linguistic Orientalism and linguistic incarceration. Both of these conditions in part explain the diminishment of African languages. As a result, there has been a disorder of priorities in governance where dominant languages do not become companions with smaller ones but instead overwhelm them. This condition is reminiscent of the last four lines of Richard Ntiru's insightful poem 'an introduction'[35]:

> society is a market stall
> with *languages,* goods on display,
> where the label is more important than the labeled
> and the price more fascinating than the value.

Thus far, dominant languages have remained inaccessible and not learnable to the vast majority of adults in sub-Saharan Africa. This leaves them in the perverse situation of linguistic strandedness whose fitting description is a linguistic cul-de-sac where indigenous languages are unwanted, frowned upon, neglected—and attempts at using and speaking the colonial or imposed language go largely unrecognized because these attempts are grossly non-proficient.

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[34] Sacks, Oliver (1990:8-9). *Seeing Voices: A Journey Into The World of the Deaf.* New York, Harper Perennial.

[35] In Kariara & Kitonga (1976:1-2). In his poem, Richard Ntiru has 'men' not 'languages'. The latter is my emphasis and parody.

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Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: African Languages and Linguistics in Broad Perspectives

edited by John Mugane, John P. Hutchison, and Dee A. Worman

Cascadilla Proceedings Project   Somerville, MA   2006

Web access and citation information

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This paper can be cited as:

Mugane, John. 2006. Necrolinguistics: The Linguistically Stranded. In *Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. John Mugane et al., 10-21. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

or:

Mugane, John. 2006. Necrolinguistics: The Linguistically Stranded. In *Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. John Mugane et al., 10-21. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. www.lingref.com, document #1292.