

# Hybrid Languages: The Case of Sheng

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## 1. Introduction

Sheng has become the basic urban vernacular for the youth in Kenya today. Indications are that the young people in the rural areas now also commonly use it together with a sizeable portion of the adult population, who grew up with 'old school' Sheng - the Sheng in their days of youth. Sections of the electronic and print media regularly use Sheng and popular music features Sheng as a language of choice. With approximately 40 living languages in Kenya today, two of them, Swahili and English, arguably co-official (see Skandera, 2000), one wonders where this new language came from and why it arose. Mazrui (1995) has stated that the foundation of Sheng lies at the traditional code switching between Swahili and English (hence the term *sh-eng*) while others credit Sheng to the demand for a lingua franca in the colonial period during the beginnings of urbanization in the country. In this paper, we trace these and other arguments posited in the literature with a view to characterizing the most probable profile of Sheng.

Organization of the paper: the paper has three sections. Section one is the introduction while various parts of section two discuss the arguments for and against the various characterizations of Sheng in the literature, pondering the pros and cons of each position leading up to the conclusion that Sheng needs a new and comprehensive classification. Section three features the conclusion. Unless stated otherwise, data for this paper was collected by the researcher intermittently while visiting Nairobi and during a pilot fieldwork in Kenya in 2005.

## 2. Competing views about the nature of Sheng

### 2.1 *Sheng as a pidgin or creole*

The argument that Sheng is a pidgin is linked to Kenya's colonial history. The growth of urban centers in Kenya since the 1900 is due to the building of the Uganda railway from Mombasa to Jinja. These centers started to attract a steady rural-urban migration (Aseka, 1990). The resulting population in towns (and plantations established by colonial settlers) created a need for a lingua franca. It is conceivable that a form of mixed code, perhaps a pidgin, may have emerged at this time. Innovative elements in the community may have started to extend the resulting code mixing to specialized uses and unwittingly gave rise to Sheng. Mazrui has suggested that Sheng may have originated in the 1930s as a Nairobi underground argot:

The most explicit suggestion of a Sheng-like code that was in existence as far back as the early 1930s is to be found in Miaka 50 Katika Jela (Fifty Years In Jail) by Michael Ngugi Karanja...the examples he gives like (*namdekea pai anakam saiti hii, ebu tupangue...*) strongly suggests that "Sheng" emerged as an underground professional code way back in the colonial period (1995:173).

However, the pidgin hypothesis in the origin of Sheng is controversial not only because the terms pidgin and creole are controversial in the academy, but also due to the fact that in the case of Sheng they fail to capture the full nature of this code. Osinde (1986) argues that Sheng is not a pidgin because it sprung up in areas where English and Swahili were already established as lingua francas and therefore there was no dire need for a compromise medium of communication, a view also shared by Mkangi (1985). This is more the case given the practice of code switching that was and is still rampant in the urban centers. Indeed, the example given by Mazrui above shows an instance of Swahili-English code switching as opposed to a pidgin.

A concomitant question is if Sheng is not a pidgin, is it a creole? Spyropoulos argues that the ethnically and linguistically diverse Kenyan workers brought together in plantations and urban centers in the colonial era, had imperfect knowledge of both English and Swahili and thus spoke a mixture of broken English and imperfect Swahili mixed with their own vernacular which their offspring enhanced into Sheng (1987:129)<sup>1</sup>

The definition of a creole is quite controversial although a common approach is that creoles are considered contact outcomes with the most persistent definition of a creole being Thomason's that 'a prototypical creole is the main language of a speech community' and they 'draw their lexicon primarily from one language whose speakers are in some sense dominant' (1997:78-79). Although that definition may be true of plantation creoles, Sheng does not qualify to be termed as such since it is neither the primary language of its speakers nor does it draw its lexicon from one dominant language but from a multiplicity of sources<sup>2</sup>. All references to Sheng speakers point to the youth (especially the youth of the working class sections of Nairobi) who speak Sheng as a secondary code to their first languages. The fact that it is debatable at the moment whether Sheng is a first language to any group of speakers<sup>3</sup> indicates that it has limited functions and cannot therefore qualify as a creole. Instead, the other plausible suggestion as to the nature of Sheng is the idea that Sheng is code switching or perhaps a slang based on code switching.

## 2.2 *Sheng as code switching*

Code switching is a pervasive linguistic practice in Kenya leading Myers-Scotton to observe that English-Swahili code switching in Kenya is the 'unmarked choice' in communicative codes (Myers-Scotton, 1993:12). Mazrui categorically states:

"Sheng is a slang based primarily on Swahili-English code switching"<sup>4</sup>... with elements from Swahili and English ending up obeying the morpho-syntactic structure of Swahili whereas the reverse, where Swahili items fit into an English morphological frame, does not happen:

So, the English verbs 'relax', 'come' and 'elapse' and many others, can take the Swahili subject, tense, aspect (and even object) markers to form words like ali-relax, ana-come, ime-elapse; but no Swahili verb can take the English tense-aspect markers. (Mazrui, 1995:176)<sup>5</sup>

This position has been collaborated by others. Consider the example from Osinde & Abdulaziz (1997):

- 1) **Woyee<sup>6</sup> tichee** u-si-ni-rwand-e – buu ndi-o i-li-ni-leit-ish-a<sup>7</sup>  
Please teacher you-neg-me-punish-fv – bus is-it it-past-me-late-made-final vowel (fv)<sup>8</sup>  
'Please teacher don't beat/punish me – I am late because of the bus'

Compare with Swahili:

- 2) Tafadhali Mwalimu u-si-ni-pig-e – basi ndi-lo li-li-lo-ni-chelew-esh-a  
Please teacher you-neg-me-punish-fv – bus is it it-past-that-me-late-make-fv  
'Please teacher don't spank me – I am late because of the bus'

<sup>1</sup> Note the reference to the creative nature of children in language, a theme that is repeated and alluded to in the discussions of pidgin and creole formation. See especially Bickerton's Bioprogram approach mentioned earlier

<sup>2</sup> There is some talk of 'deep' Sheng being L1 for some speakers in the Nairobi slums but this is yet to be ascertained and needs looking into.

<sup>3</sup> See Kiptoo (2000), Osinde (1986, 1997)

<sup>4</sup> Underlined in the original

<sup>5</sup> However, see Osinde & Abdulaziz (1997)

<sup>6</sup> **Woyee** loosely translates to Swahili *jamani!* And is used to request for understanding or help as in the utterance: "*jamani nisaaidie!*" 'Please help me!' However, its etymology is unknown at this point.

<sup>7</sup> Ku-ruanda is most likely a term that has been coined to describe beating, harming or punishing others and may have been fashioned from the Rwandese genocide of the early 1990s.

<sup>8</sup> The final vowel in Bantu has been identified as a different morpheme from the of the verb root since it varies according to the mood.

Note that the non-Swahili words *Rwanda* and *late* have been affixed with relevant Swahili morphemes and appear as (3) and (4) below:

- 3) u-si-ni-rwand-e  
 you-neg-me-punish-fv  
 ‘do not punish me’

(Where /u-/ is 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular, /si-/ is negation, /ni-/ is object and the final vowel /e-/ is used to mark such subjunctive forms). The form ‘late’ has not only been appropriated into Swahili but it has also been inflected appropriately:

- 4) i-li-ni-leit-ish-a  
 It-past-me-late-causative-final vowel  
 ‘it made me late’

Compare the corresponding Swahili form below with an identical structure where the morphosyntactic structure is identical except for the root morpheme:

- 5) li-li-ni-chelew-esh-a<sup>9</sup>  
 it-past-me-late-made-fv  
 ‘it made me late’

Whereas these examples apparently point to code switching as the main process going on in the creation and transmission of Sheng, to the contrary, there are indications that Sheng is more than code switching for several compelling reasons. One, there are all sorts of code switches that can and do go on in the Kenyan urban setting given the multiplicity of languages in the country especially in the urban areas where Sheng is most common. For instance, it is not apparent that code mixing between English and Kiswahili per se, or between English and Ekegusii or that between English, Swahili and some other language say Kikuyu, would all be labeled as Sheng. Since code switching proceeds in a situation where the speaker and hearer are both fluent in the dueling languages, it is not apparent that the speakers of Sheng are fluent in both Swahili and English. Secondly, Kenyans are not only bilingual but also multilingual. Consequently, code-switching scenarios are quite diversified and include switches between two or more languages for instance between: Swahili and Ekegusii, Swahili and English, English and Ekegusii<sup>10</sup> etc. To restrict Sheng to any one of these switches would beg the question about what to call the other types of abundant code switching – the code switching that involves switches between other Kenyan languages on one hand and Swahili or English or both on the other.

In addition, it is worth noting that since Sheng incorporates elements from different languages, a claim that it is a mere form of code switching assumes that the speakers will be fluent in all of the languages involved in the switch and there is no evidence to show that Sheng speakers are also speakers of all the languages incorporated in Sheng. I would further submit that whereas Sheng is primarily an urban, youth commodity, code switching is fairly common across the age, gender and regional divides. In addition, code switching does not have the same negative connotations that Sheng

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<sup>9</sup> Many borrowed nouns like ‘basi’ from English ‘bus’ end up in class 9 or class 5 and speakers often confuse which is which. In this case, the speaker has analyzed ‘basi’ as being in class 9 and hence the concord but ideally this is a class 5 noun and should take the object prefix [li-] as opposed to [i-].

<sup>10</sup> The fourth possible combination of switches say, between Ekegusii, Swahili and English is extremely rare. This is because code switching is not only subject to structural constraints like those formulated in Myers-Scotton’s MLF model, Poplack’s ‘free morpheme’ and ‘Equivalence’ constraints, but also follow functional and sociological constraints that rank languages in a repertoire, assigning different roles and interactional spaces (Dell, 1971; Bosire, 2006).

has so that while Sheng is stigmatized in some sections of the population and is precluded from some discourses, Swahili-English code switching is considered fairly neutral, and even natural. Indeed, a considerable number of Sheng speakers who use Sheng primarily as an in-group identifier, depend on the crucial difference between Sheng and code switching to thrive and may be the reason why Sheng vocabulary is as fluid as a slang's.

### 2.3 *Sheng as a dialect of Swahili*

Some researchers consider Sheng an urban variety of Swahili that has been shaped by code switching and influenced by the languages in the interior of the country, away from the coastline on the Indian Ocean where Swahili is native. It is certainly the case that Sheng differs from standard Swahili in some very marked ways. For example, there is evidence of the re-analysis of the infinitive marker /ku-/ as part of the root in some verb forms in a number of Swahili dialects. The infinitive in Swahili is formed by prefixing /ku-/ to the root of the verb:

6) Root	Infinitive	Past	Negative
a. pika 'cook'	ku-pika 'to cook'	a-li-pika 'he read'	Si-piki <sup>11</sup> 'I am not cooking'
b. soma 'read'	ku-soma 'to read'	a-li-soma 'he cooked'	Si-somi 'I am not reading'
c. fikiri 'think'	ku-fikiri 'to think'	a-li-fikiri 'he thought'	Si-fikiri 'I am not thinking'

But as we see in the following past tense forms, [ku-] seems to be part of the roots:

7) Root	Infinitive	Past	<compare>
a. -la 'eat'	ku-la 'to eat'	-li-ku-la '-ate'	* -li-la
b. -ja 'come'	ku-ja 'to come'	-li-ku-ja '-came'	*-li-ja
c. -fa 'die'	Ku-fa 'to die'	-li-ku-fa '-died'	*li-fa etc
d. -cha 'revere'	Ku-cha 'to revere'	-li-ku-cha '-revered'	
e. -nya 'defecate'	Ku-nya 'to defecate'	-li-ku-nya '-defecated'	
f. -wa 'be'	Ku-wa 'to be'	-li-ku-wa '-was'	

The forms in (7) show that the infinitive prefix appears to have been recast as part of the root in these Swahili past tense forms. A similar trend is observed in the immediate past perfect and future perfect where the prefix /ku-/ is apparently analyzed as part of the root as seen in the forms given in (8) below:

8) Immediate past	Future
a. a-me-ku-la 'he has eaten'	a-ta-ku-la 'he will eat'
b. a-me-ku-ja 'he has come'	a-ta-ku-ja '~ come'
c. a-me-ku-fa 'he has died'	a-ta-ku-fa '~ die'
d. a-me-ku-cha 'he has revered'	a-ta-ku-cha '~revere'
e. a-me-ku-nya 'he has defecated'	a-ta-ku-nya '~defecate'
f. a-me-ku-wa 'he has been'	a-ta-ku-wa '~ be'

One explanation is that there is a tendency to include the infinitive marker in finite forms if the root is less than bi-syllabic i.e. monosyllabic. But this line of reasoning gets into trouble when we examine the negatives and the present progressives below:

9) Negative in Swahili	Present progressives
a. si-li 'I am not eating'	na-la 'I am eating'

<sup>11</sup> A morpheme break showing that the final vowel is a different morpheme has been ignored here in (6) through (10) since that distinction is not crucial to our illustration

- |    |                              |                          |
|----|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| b. | si-ji ‘I am not coming’      | na-ja ‘I am coming’      |
| c. | si-fi ‘I am not dying’       | na-fa ‘I am dying’       |
| d. | si-chi ‘I am not revering’   | na-cha ‘I am revering’   |
| e. | si-nyi ‘I am not defecating’ | na-nya ‘I am defecating’ |
| f. | si-wi ‘I am not _’           | na-wa ‘i am being’       |

Where in (9) (a) - (f), the roots are monosyllabic but do not have the prefix /ku-/. The reasons for the use of the infinitive prefix before some finite monosyllabic roots would be interesting to explore but nevertheless do not overly concern us here and we shall not go into them<sup>12</sup>. What is crucial here is the fact that the use of the infinitive marker /ku-/ as part of the root in these finite verbs is productive in Sheng and in other nonstandard dialects of Swahili. For these varieties, the present progressives and the negatives regularly have the infinitive prefix /ku-/ affixed to the root, showing that Sheng speakers have re-analyzed the prefix as part of all the monosyllabic roots:

#### 10) Negatives in Sheng

- si-ku-li ‘I am not eating’
- si-ku-ji ‘I am not coming’
- si-ku-fi ‘I am not dying’
- si-ku-chi ‘I am not revering’
- si-ku-nyi ‘I am not defecating’
- si-ku-wi ‘I am not \_’

#### Present progressives

- na-ku-la ‘I am eating’
- na-ku-ja ‘I am coming’
- na-ku-fa ‘I am dying’
- na-ku-cha ‘I am revering’
- na-ku-nya ‘I am defecating’
- na-ku-wa ‘I am being’

Other systematic differences between Sheng and Swahili can be seen in the nominal class system. Swahili manifests a fairly elaborate system of noun classes and concordial agreements which Contini-Morava (2004) has described as “a characteristic pattern of grammatical agreement, whereby possessive pronouns, demonstratives, verb, subject and object prefixes, and other sentence elements co-referential with a noun are assigned a prefix that co-indexes the class of the noun, if it denotes an inanimate object”<sup>13</sup>. This means that there are specific prefixes that are used to index any given noun and its co-referents in the sentence (see Appendix 1) so that it is possible to know the class of a noun from the prefixes that co-index it in the sentence, e.g. from the pronominal prefixes used.<sup>14</sup>

- ni-li-ona **mi-ti mi-tatu mi-refu** pori-ni  
I-tense-see cl.4-tree cl.4-three cl.5-tall forest-in  
‘I saw three tall trees in the forest’
- vi-le vi-ti vi-refu ni vy-eusi**  
cl.8-that cl.8-chair cl.8-tall are cl.8-black  
‘Those high chairs are black’

Sentences (13) and (15) below which are common and well-formed in Sheng, are illegal in standard Swahili as the correct sentences show in (14) and (16):

<sup>12</sup> Bi-syllabic roots may be getting a prefix as a conspiracy between the phonological component that demands a penalty for the default stress rule to operate while the morphological one may be specifying that stress may not be marked on the tense markers. (See McCarthy, 2001 for a discussion of conspiracies). It may also be due to the influence of other languages in contact with Swahili since Swahili has become a major lingua franca spoken by upwards of 80 million people in Eastern Africa. The phenomenon needs further investigation

<sup>15</sup> The prefixes that are used to mark animals and human beings are invariant across different classes so that they are not a good pointer to the class of a particular noun. See appendix 1 for a list of the classes and concordial prefixes for each class.

<sup>14</sup> Note that these classes come in pairs of singular and plural so that class one is the singular and class two is the plural prefix of a noun in class one (except for classes 5,9, 10 and 14 which have zero morphemes as options). For that reason, some researchers group together the singular and corresponding plural class as one class

**Nairobi Swahili**

- 13) u-me-on-a vi-tabu za-ngu?  
You-tense-see-fv cl.8-book cl.10-my?  
'Have you seen my books?'

- 15) Ma-i-nzi zi-me-jaa hu-ku  
cl.6-i-cl.9-fly cl.9-tense-fill here  
'there are so many flies here'

**Standard Swahili**

- 14) u-me-vi-on-a vi-tabu vy-angu?  
You-tense-cl.8-see-fv cl.8-book cl.8-my  
'Have you seen my books?'

- 16) n-zi zi-me-jaa huku  
cl.9-fly cl.9-tense-fill here  
'there are so many flies here'

The sentence in (13) above, where a class nine possessive prefix {za-} has been used to index a class eight noun {vitabu} is unacceptable in Swahili. Similarly, the construction in (15) above is ungrammatical in standard Swahili and the correct sentence is given in (16) because of a mix-up in concordial prefixes.

Not only is the grammatical concord flouted as seen in (12), there is also a significant change in the class prefixes for classes 9, 10 and 14. Sheng has made class 6 the 'default' plural class so that all nouns that traditionally do not have overt plurals (class 14) and most borrowed nouns especially those in class 9 that should be pluralized in class 10 (in standard Swahili), are all pluralized in class 6:

17) Class 9 nouns	Plural in Swahili (class 10)	Plural in NS (class 6)
a) m-bwa 'dog'	m-bwa	ma-u-m-bwa
b) ø-hewa 'air'	ø-hewa	ma-hewa
c) n-zi 'fly'	n-zi	ma-i-n-zi
d) n-guo 'cloth'	n-guo	ma-n-guo
e) n-dizi 'banana'	n-dizi	ma-n-dizi
f) ø-pua 'nose'	ø-pua	ma-pua

The same thing happens for class 11 (which generally makes their plural in class 10) and 14 (note that most nouns in class 14 are largely abstract with no overt plural). In Sheng however, some nouns from this classes regularly find their plurals in class 6:

18) Swahili/NS singular	Swahili plural	NS - Plural	Gloss/plural
a. u-kame >cl.14>	u-kame	ma-u-kame	'famine/ drought'
b. u-chawi <cl.14>	u-chawi	ma-u-chawi	'witchcraft'
c. w-embe <cl.11>	ny-embe <cl.10>	ma-wembe	'razors'(street smart)

Even those class 9 nouns that do have a prefix, the tendency for Sheng speakers is to make their plurals take a class 6 prefix, (perhaps to disambiguate the singular and plural because the class 10 (plural) prefix is identical to the class 9 one i.e., both are /n-/). Thus in Sheng, the reduction of prefixes used in the concordial agreement between lexical categories in a sentence indicates a movement towards using fewer noun classes – especially for the plural –and thereby simplifying the noun class system<sup>15</sup> – perhaps due to the influence of other languages like English which, has the bulk of its plural now largely regularized.

All these systematic differences between Swahili and Sheng point to a dialectal differentiation between them. But while that conclusion may seem plausible, there are factors which point to the contrary. First, there is anecdotal evidence that a Nairobi Swahili dialect does exist and which is different from Sheng and from standard Swahili (Kiswahili **Sanifu**). This Nairobi dialect is referred to by Mombasa Swahili speakers as '*Kiswahili cha bara*' meaning upcountry Swahili – different from Mombasa Swahili. In addition, we have seen above that code switching is ubiquitous in Nairobi so that it is another code available in the repertoire of Nairobians. Secondly, unlike a regional dialect, Sheng

<sup>15</sup> This assertion is only apparent however as this process may actually introduce newer mechanisms to compensate for what is lost or reconfigured and therefore creating complexity elsewhere in the grammar.

is not localized into a particular geographical area and Sheng speakers span the many urban centers of Kenya unlike being congregated in Nairobi, the cradle. If we call it a sociolect, then we must define the social class that speaks Sheng. As has been pointed out by many Sheng researchers including Mazrui (1995), Osinde (1986, 1997) and Spyropoulos (1987), this is a youth language. The youth come from diverse social backgrounds so that the idea that Sheng is a social or regional dialect misses some accuracy. There is something unique to Sheng which needs to be pointed out in any attempt at classification. Mazrui (1995) has pointed out that Sheng has a slang-like fluidity that points to a dynamic and conscious structuring and re-structuring of the elements of the grammar that far exceeds ordinary, 'natural' language cleavage into dialects. In terms of the structure too, Sheng exhibits a synthesis of diverse elements from different languages that point to a composite linguistic and socio-cultural nature. Consequently, it is a framework of contact linguistics and language mixing that we might best describe Sheng.

## 2.4 Sheng and Hybridity

A description of Sheng that captures its composite nature seems to us to be the best approach. Researchers have consistently stated that Sheng has a preponderance of lexical items from many languages, with Osinde & Abdulaziz (1997) calling it a mixed language. They have given examples that demonstrate how Sheng utilizes Swahili morphosyntax to make sentences out of lexical items drawn from a variety of sources. Consider the sentence (1) above: the bolded words in (1) are non-Swahili in origin but have been fitted into Swahili morphosyntax to make a perfect sentence in Sheng, analogous to the Swahili one given in (2). Note that the bolded words in (1) have either been 'borrowed' from some language or coined from scratch. Consider too the Sheng constructions in (19) below:

- 19) Ma-babi lazima tu-wa-pige pasi. Kwani wa-na-fikiri sisi ha-tu-demi?  
 The-rich have-to we-them-press iron. Why they-tense-think us neg-we-demolish?  
 'we have to steal from the rich. Do they think we do not eat?'

Compare the Swahili equivalent below:

- 20) 'ma-tajiri lazima tu-wa-ib-i-e. Kwani wa-na-fikiri sisi ha-tu-li?'

The words *ma-babi* and *dema* (from *ha-tu-demi*) in line (21) have been borrowed from English but note how their phonological forms have been altered as 'babi' and 'dema' to give them a Sheng character. Often, the created words connote some contemporary social-political or economic reality of Kenya and the world at large. Thus, the word *ruanda* in (1) above, (which literary means 'Rwanda') has been appropriated by Sheng and its meaning expanded to include any hostile situation (following the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s). In the context of the sentence above, it has been used to mean punishment. The word *mababi* in (19) means rich people in the sentence, but it alludes to the Biblical story of the exile and oppression of the Jews in 'Babylon' Note how the two words describing historical and/or socio-political events have been recast into the local Sheng conditions implying that there is a political or social statement being made by the appropriation and use of such forms. Note also the expressiveness and imagery in Sheng's idioms like the one in (19) above *kupiga pasi* 'ironing' - imagine the flattening of one's pockets in pick-pocketing.

Kashoki (1972), while describing Town Bemba, states that speakers of Town Bemba, Zambia's urban vernacular, derive immense satisfaction from using new/foreign words in place of existing ones or in using old words in new expanded ways. Childs, makes a similar observation that "these urban varieties symbolize the high life of the city – the urban, the cool, the hip, and the sophisticated, "life in the fast lane" (1997:343). The fact that Sheng-like codes exist in other emergent African urban centers just like Town Bemba above and Isicamtho in South Africa, point to a general phenomenon in colonial and post-colonial Africa. Childs lists some of these vernaculars across the continent as Lingala (in

Zaire), Sango (in Central African Republic) and, Indoubil in Zaire (Childs, 1997:342)<sup>16</sup>. He goes on to say that these urban vernaculars share some core features including origin in criminal argots, are typically for the young and linguistically, they have a hybrid/mixed nature (1997:343).

The concept of hybridity in describing these urban vernaculars and Sheng in particular is important in this paper for several reasons. First, hybridity from biology implies a conscious and deliberate crossbreeding to produce a better, enriched or superior variety. Secondly, it brings together and re-invents both this biological aspect and the postcolonial studies in the literature that describe Hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1981:118)<sup>17</sup>. Crucially, a description of Sheng as a hybrid language captures the inherent duality of the product as both a linguistic and a cultural mixture as opposed to terms like mixed language, which may denote linguistic mixing without a reference to the intense cultural heterogeneity that is involved in such a project. As a matter of fact, Thomason (1997) speaks of bilingually mixed languages as only those where the contact situation is strictly between two languages and the resulting language has modular/discrete elements that are isolable in terms of their language of origin. In Thomason (2001), the author revises the earlier position however and acknowledges that the term is a misnomer because more languages than two may be involved in a mixed language so formed.

### 3. Conclusion

The hybrid languages of Africa are contact outcomes that have evolved at a time when African communities are coming to terms with the colonial and postcolonial situation that included rapid urbanization and a bringing together of different ethnic communities and cultures with a concomitant exposure to different ways of being. The youth are caught up in this transition; they are children of two worlds and want a way to express this duality, this new 'ethnicity'. Sheng is a way to break away from the old fraternities that put particular ethnic communities in particular neighborhoods/'estates' and give them a global urban ethnicity, the urbanite: sophisticated, street smart, new generation, tough. Forging these links creates a desire for new peers, new forms of dress, socialization, behavior, manner of speaking and language. As Childs (1997) says of Isicamtho, (the Tsotsitaal, the language of the criminals), is a language of masculine power and control. Sheng is a culmination of a hybridization process, which Bhaktin has described as "a mixture between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor," (1981:358).

Consequently, Sheng's linguistic hybridity underlies the hybrid nature of its speakers. The hope is that ultimately, studies of this kind will reveal how languages evolve on the one hand, and on the other, the intricate connection between language, culture and society.

Future studies will need to explore the discourses/strategies/ideologies that have sustained and continue to propagate the Sheng phenomenon across Africa and Kenya in particular. In addition, specifics of the structure of this language were largely ignored and need to be made more explicit with a robust description of the structural hybridity and the constraints that are involved. For instance, why are the two languages most represented in the mix and not others? What are the limits to linguistic hybridity?

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<sup>16</sup> Anecdotal evidence puts other codes like Street Setswana, Chilapalapa in Zambia Camfranglais in Cameroon and Nigerian pidgin English in this group

<sup>17</sup>See <http://www.qub.ac.uk/en/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm> of 3.10.05. Although hybridity was not always a desirable thing in the sense of adulteration and the metissage mentality, it is a term when shorn of its negative connotations, brings a much richer view of these kinds of contact languages and the environments and aspirations that spawn them.

#### 4. Appendix 1: Swahili nominal and concordial prefixes (some morphophonemic alternations ignored).

Class ( traditional Bantu Numbering)	Nominal Prefix (Affixed to ‘fixed class’ stems)	Adjectival Prefix (Affixed to ‘variable class stems)	Pronominal Prefix (Affixed to V stems as sub. /obj.; to dem. Pro. & poss. Pro.)
1	m-	m-	a-/m-; yu-; w-;ye- (depends on stem)
2	wa-	wa-	wa-
3	m-	m-	u-
4	mi-	mi-	i-
5	ø/ji-	ø/ji-	li-
6	ma-	ma-	ya-
7	ki-	ki-	ki-
8	vi-	vi-	vi-
9	ø /n-	ø /n-	i-
10	ø /n-	ø /n-	zi-
11/14	u-	m-	u-

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