Linguistic effects of English on Luyia languages

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When contact occurs between two or more languages, there is bound to be some sort of language change, which can affect either of the languages concerned. The nature and extent of the linguistic change is dependant on the circumstances of the social, cultural and political relations that exist between the linguistic communities concerned. The goal of this paper is to examine the influence English has had on Luyia languages spoken in western Kenya. English has had both an intensive and extensive contact with the Kenyan speaking communities for nearly one hundred years, and due to this, there has been a considerable influence of English on Kenyan ethnic languages in all aspects of language areas. I discuss three linguistic effects in this paper: the first of such is borrowing of vocabulary from English which is phonologically adjusted to conform to the phonotactic constraints of the Luyia languages, the second is code-switching and code-mixing between English and the Luyia languages and finally language shift that has resulted to language 'death' in some cases.

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Cuando ocurren contactos entre dos o más lenguas deben ocurrir algunos cambios lingüísticos, las cuales pueden afectar a cualquiera de las lenguas involucradas. La naturaleza y extensión del cambio lingüístico depende de las circunstancias de las relaciones sociales, culturales y políticas que existen entre las comunidades lingüísticas respectivas. El objetivo de este trabajo es examinar la influencia del inglés en varias lenguas étnicas. El inglés ha tenido contactos intensivos y extensivos con comunidades de Kenya durante casi cien años y debido a esto ha habido una influencia grande del inglés en las lenguas étnicas de Kenya en todos los aspectos. En este trabajo considero tres efectos lingüísticos: el primero se refiere a prestamos de vocabulario del inglés que se ajustan fonológicamente para estar conforme con las restricciones fonotácticas de las lenguas étnicas, el segundo es el cambio de código y la mezcla de códigos entre el inglés y varias lenguas étnicas, y finalmente, el desplazamiento de lenguas que en algunos casos ha producido la "muerte" de la lengua.

"*No English, no job and ....*"
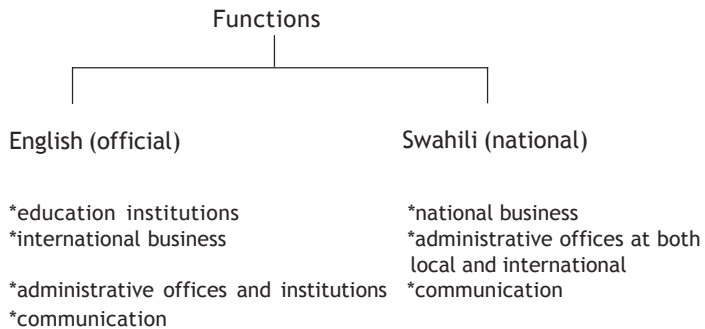The most commonly used phrase by Kenyan parents
to stress the need for education to their school going children.

Introduction

Kenya is a multilingual country. It is approximated that over 150 languages (dialects inclusive) are spoken in Kenya. These ethnic languages are usually defined according to geographic boundaries within which they are spoken, though there has been movement and settling of people in other geographical areas as desired, a factor which has contributed a lot to bilingualism and multilingualism. The ethnic languages are divided into three main language groups namely: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic (Omondi 1999). The Bantu language family forms the largest population subsequently occupying the widest area. The Nilotic group comes second and finally the Cushitic group. The Kenyan language situation is that, Swahili is the national language, while English is the official language. Thus, English as a language of communication is co-present with Swahili. However, there are other forces other than the internal need for communication which have brought to the fore English as a world language: these include education, business, technical as well as scientific reasons amongst others. Obanya's (1999) quoted by Okombo (2001) in support of this states that:

> … A language grows by being used. Using a language for education, business, socio-cultural activities, administration etc exposes it to challenges. Like human beings, languages also adapt, invent, and innovate to meet new challenges.

The different functions performed by English and Swahili languages are outlined below.

Functions

English (official)   Swahili (national)

*education institutions   *national business
*international business   *administrative offices at both
                                                   local and international
*administrative offices and institutions *communication
*communication

English enjoys a special position as the official language of Kenya. It is also used as a medium of instruction in the education system right from primary level onwards and is also used in conducting international business and, in administrative offices and institutions (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). The language policy in education since independence favours English. In 1964 a decision was made in which English became the medium of education throughout the school system. However, in 1979, the use of ethnic languages was introduced at primary level because it was discovered that the use of a foreign language especially in the rural areas deterred the children's progress in all academic areas (Itebete 1974).

Because English is used in education, it has repressed, dominated and disempowered other language users whose practices differ from the norms that it establishes. As a result, English is seen as a language of upward mobility, a status that gives it a lot of prestige, making it the most sought after language in the country. English is so much identified with a higher socio-economic status, such that individuals who have made it in life through non academic channels, still have the desire to acquire English, so as to create the impression of men and women of status (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). Thus, in this multilingual community, English forms part of the linguistic repertoire of the educated elites. And because of this, study of English is perceived as a legitimate authority for children to take, by both parents, the government and society in general as seen in the phrase quoted earlier on " *no English, no job….*" As a result of the contact situation between English and ethnic languages, numerous loanwords from English exist and samples of these are examined next.

Borrowing

The nature and extent of borrowing is dependent upon a number of factors such as the social, cultural and political relations between the communities concerned. Socially, culturally and politically, English is 'exalted' above the ethnic languages. When English words are borrowed, they get assimilated into the phonological or morphological system of the borrowing ethnic language. Phonological adaptation then occurs because speakers interpret the pronunciation of the borrowed words in terms of the phonological elements of their own borrowing or recipient languages. This is done in a manner such that the phonotactic constraints of the borrowing languages are not violated. The case described here is not that of speakers naturally adapting words from the English language, but rather that of speakers trying to use and pronounce the English words without adopting any of the phonology of the English language. Therefore, when faced with the task of pronouncing a foreign word or expression, the phonology of the ethnic language is used. When this happens, two things are bound to happen.

1. Each of the segments in the foreign word is interpreted in terms of the native segment systems.
2. No strings arise that violate the syllable structure constraints or any phonotactic constraints of the ethnic language are permitted.

Examples cited here illustrate borrowed words from the English language which are phonologically adapted, and these examples are drawn from different ethnic Luyia dialects under the mentioned headings. Note, however, that the list is not exhaustive.

Church

Borrowed word	gloss
lußaso	verse
olutare	alter
sabato	sabath
sietani	satan
emisa	mass
kulisimasi	christmas
yesu	Jesus
kirisito	Christ
ßißilia	bible

With the control of the British government, administrative and political structures changed with the borrowing of new lexical items.

Government

polisi	police
(a)ofisa	officer
(t)disi	district commissioner
poloßinji	province
disitulikiti	district
minisita	minister
sipika	speaker
kanjola	councilor
komiti	committee
ßaisi	vice
meeja	mayor
pulesitendi	president
ßacheti	budget
tauni	town
pasipoti	passport

With the introduction of formal education, various concepts were also borrowed.

Education

yunifomu	uniform
edimasita	headmaster
leèisita	register
efisi	fees
sayanji	science
èokolafi	geography
emapu	map
efomu	form
litesiki	desk
etesiti	test
failo	file
epenjo	pencil
elipoti	report
esikulu	school

Borrowing also took place in the judiciary, medical field, business world, and domestic appliances.

Judiciary

ekoti	court
esamanji	summon
looya	lawyer
limanda	reminder

Medical equipment

ekisire	x-ray
eßandeèi	bandage
epulasita	plaster
etaulo	towel
kiliniki	clinic
wadi	ward
(t)dakitari/	
dokita	doctor

Business

kambani	company
kasitoma	customer
silingi	shilingi
èeki	cheque
ßalanji	balance
akaundi	account
sitoo	store
elisiti	receipt
polofiti	profit
poloèekiti	project
mutoka	motor-car
eßus	bus
ndereßa	driver
takisi	taxi
sipana	spanner
sikurundereßa	screw-driver
oilo	oil

Household appliances

sitofu	stove
ekeeki	cake
sokisi	socks
eture	tray
etai	tie
lisati	shirt
etaulo	towel

Phonological adaptation process

On comparing the English and Luyia consonant systems, English has 24 consonants and 12 vowels, while majority of the Luyia varieties have an average 16 consonants and either a five or seven vowel system. While English allows branching onsets and codas, Luyia does not allow neither consonant clusters nor codas. Let us examine the differences between English consonants and Luyia consonant through analysing the consonant inventories of each language.

English consonants

	bilabial	labiodental	interdental	alveolar	alveopalatal	velar	glottal
stops	pb			t d		kg	
fricatives		fv	θ ǒ	sz	šž		h
Affricates					čj		
nasals				n			
retroflex	m			r		ŋ	
lateral				l			
semi-vowel					y	w	

Luyia consonants

	bilabial	labiodental	interdental	alveolar	alveopalatal	velar	glottal
stops	P			t (d)		k(g)	
fricatives	β	f		s	ꞎ(Š)	X	
Affricates					č		
nasals	m			(ṇ)	ň	ŋ	
retroflex					r(ŗ)		
lateral					l		
semi-vowel					y	w	

A comparison of the two consonant systems reveals that Luyia has the following consonant gaps:

>   b, è, d, ž, j.

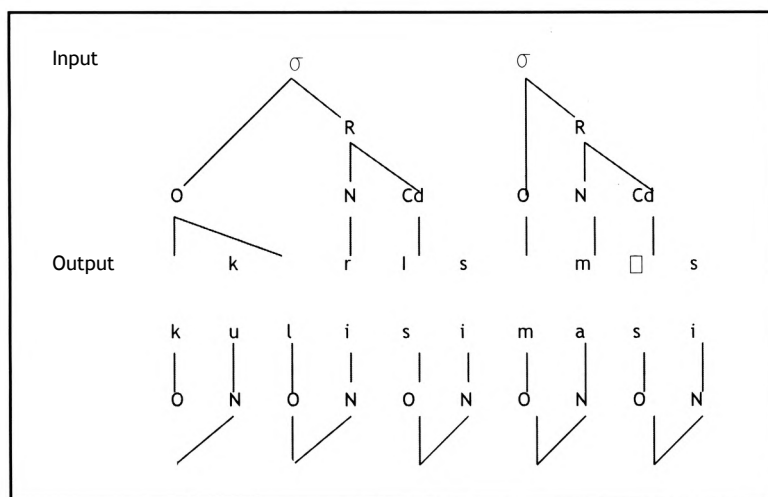Therefore, English words containing such consonants are integrated into the recipient language.

>   b > ß
>   θ > s
>   j > ě
>   r > 1   (that is if /l/and /r/ contrast in the language, in
>   other languages they are both used interchangeably

The phonological adaptation of the word *kulisimasi* 'christmas'is represented below.

Syllable structure

Luyia, like other Bantu languages does not permit consonant clusters, thus *CC. The syllable structure is open, CVCV, reason why vowels are inserted in loan words with closed syllables. There are instances where deletion of a coda consonant or an onset consonant occurs so as to phonologically fit the sound pattern of the language. For example: *sitoloßio* 'strong rope' has

r-deletion
n-deletion (*Coda)
r > l
p > β
o - insertion

Input	**s**		t	r	a	ŋ	r	□	p
Output	s	i	t	o			l	o	ß	o

What are more fascinating are some of the domestic words since they show how the different ethnic languages phonologically adopted in different ways. For instance,

	Gloss	**Language**	
/o-nget-i/	ongeti	blanket	Luo
/li-runget-i/	lirungeti	blanket	Luyia
/oBo-ranget-i/	oBorangeti	blanket	Gusii

When English words containing nasal consonant sequences are borrowed into these languages, they are integrated into the recipient phonological system, where the consonant after the nasal becomes voiced, a process known as post-nasal voicing that occurs in a number of African languages. Thus the sequence */n/k* becomes */n/g* and these are viewed as one segment [n]. Note also the prefixes *o-, li-* and *oβo-* of Luo, Luyia and Gusii respectively affixed to the root noun */-nget-/,* and the insertion of the final vowel /i/at the end of the word which occurs to avoid violation of the phonotactic constraints of the languages which emphasizes on words ending in open syllables, thus CVCV syllable structure. This is applicable to all other borrowed words that exhibit consonant clusters, where the vowels */i/* or */e/* are inserted so as to create open syllables.

There are instances where words are borrowed but sometimes replaced by ethnic words. This occurs mostly in certain discourse contexts. Swahili examples of language use in sports illustrate this point.

English borrowing	**Swahili version**	**Gloss**
fowadi	ushambulizi	forward
chenji	kubadilisha	change
enta fowadi	mchezaji wa kiungo cha kati	centre forward (Musau 2000)

Swahili equivalents may replace borrowings for euphoric reasons or for national purposes and they are more appropriate because many of the English words such as *fowadi* do not

sound good to the ear, especially to the listener whose excitement and enjoying of the game is based on what he/she hears from the reporter.

Loan translations (calques) also occurred. This refers to the literal translation of an expression from the source language. What happens is that the borrowing language does not borrow actual lexical items but rather a figurative expression or an idea. For example, in Bukusu, a Luyia variety, there is *omwixalili we ndeße* meaning *he who sits on the chair* as an equivalent term for the English word 'chairman'.

Summary

Borrowing took place mainly in areas where foreign concepts existed, since these very concepts were non-existent in the ethnic languages. As a result, there occurred in the phonology of ethnic languages segmental effects [phone substitution-English /r/ = [r] or [l], hypercorrection, reinterpretation of contrast], phonotactic effects [syllable structure: English CVC ⟶ CV, distributional constraints] and lexicon [nonce borrowings, calques, reinterpretation/loan shift].

Other factors such as the imposition of English on the people and the prestige that English carries leads to automatic borrowing when other languages come in contact with it. Moravcsik (1978) in Thomason (1988) supports this by stating that, "*nothing can be borrowed [i.e., "borrowed" in the broadest sense, not in a narrow usage] from a language which is not regarded as prestigious by speakers of the borrowing language*." This type of borrowing, which does not necessarily lead to nativization of the borrowed English terms, is most often used in speech in the form of code mixing and code switching, which is discussed next.

Code-mixing and code-switching

Code-switching is defined in this paper as an alternation of two or more languages within a single discourse. Alternation here referring to an identified pattern of the switch from one language to another involving both the grammar and the lexicon. According to Poplack (1980), switching is only possible where it does not violate the structural integrity of either of the participating languages. For example, the following is a switch between Swahili and English, *Nimechoka* (*I am tired. I am going to sleep)*.

Code-mixing on the other hand occurs when speakers switch from one language to another in the course of a conversation without necessarily following an identified pattern. Muysken (2000) distinguishes three types of code-mixing patterns namely: insertion, alternation and congruent lexicalization. Following Muysken's categorization of code-mixing, one can say that code-switching is a subset of code-mixing because alternation, which is a pattern type of code-mixing, is a key concept in explaining what code-switching is.

Code switching is as a result of factors such as lack of competence in a language, clarity of ideas, identification of oneself as belonging to a certain speech community amongst others. Determinants of code switching in Kenya include identification with a certain speech community, clarity of expression, an indicator that one is educated (especially when most of the switched words are in English) and at times it is used as a language game to find out how much knowledge one poses, amongst others (Kisembe 2001). For an individual to be able to penetrate other cultures, requires the language of that culture. To participate and become involved in the core of a culture requires the knowledge of the language of that culture. Being able to switch between two languages may at times lead to more sensitivity in communication. Most bilinguals often monitor which language to use in different situations. This also contributes to code switching and code mixing in Kenya.

A good number of people, regard speaking English as a sign of being sophisticated. Thus, an individual switches or mixes English with their respective ethnic language to show some sophistication. This kind of scenario rose to its peak among individuals within the rural setting during the time when the government introduced literacy classes for adults within the rural setting. To date this kind of mixing still takes place. There are two types of code switching. The first of which is Intra-sentential code switching, which refers to different languages used within the same sentence. In the following examples, English words are in bold.

1. *Eyo se- li- **proper** tawe.*
   That is not proper.

2. *Kwenu kuna vumbi **mob** mpaka **cockroach** zinatembea na **slippers**.*
   Your home has a lot of dust such that cockroaches walk around in slippers.

3. *Omwana oyo sali **straight forward** tawe.*
   That child is not honest.

4. *Bali kameno kewe kali **sensitive** nono Kenya kamechi kali **warm**.*
   His teeth are sensitive and that is why he needs warm water.

The second type of code switching is referred to as inter sentential code switching. This is the use of one sentence in one language to another sentence in a different language. For example:

> *Nitaenda nyumbani hivi sasa. **I have read enough**. Nimechoka.*
> I will go home now.   I am tired.

There are instances when both inter and intra sentential code switching are used.

When a language is associated with higher education and employment, it becomes a means of social advancement, status and security and thus a key to social mobility (Dua 1996). This creates group conflicts, and to neutralize this, equality of treatment among major language groups is needed. To illustrate Dua's claim, Sheng a code which has its grammar based on Swahili, while its vocabulary is mainly borrowed from English, Luyia, Kikuyu and Luo arose as a result of code switching and code mixing among teenagers residing in the middle class estates in Nairobi in the early 70's. The other source of vocabulary for Sheng is derived from word formation processes such as clipping and semantic shift. These processes are employed so that words can conform to the Sheng syllable structure, CV. The rest of the vocabulary is derived from shapes or object structures, colors of items, and names of individuals. I will not get into the details of this. I focus mainly on the borrowed words from English, and show how English words are mixed with words from ethnic languages.

The following are examples illustrating Sheng sentences. The first member of the abbreviation [S-Swahili, E-English, L-Luyia, K-Kikuyu] pair under each item indicates origin of the item. The second refers to the language of the operating grammar. Thus, (K-S) means that the item itself is of Kikuyu origin but it adapts to Swahili grammar.

1. **Si ubring hizo bikwii tuzidish**
        E-S   E-S
    You bring those biscuits we eat them
    'Why don't you bring those biscuits so that we can eat them'?

2. **Tuliora tulipocheki na tukaona makopa wanakam**
        K-S   E-S   E-L   E-S
    We ran away when we checked and saw the police men coming
    'We took off when we spotted the policemen coming.'

3. **Budako anachest bigi mpaka imeandikwa 'the end'**
        E-S
    Your father has chest big until it is written 'the end'
    'Your father has a big chest that is written on the 'the end'

One can argue for the fact that, the Sheng case illustrates a struggle for representations of the languages in question. Sheng first emerged as a secret code among teenagers who felt marginalized and unaccepted and whose goal was to shut out strangers. Why? Exclusion from education and political participation and economic deprivation, stigmatization, external pressure could probably have been contributing factors. To date, Sheng has spread to other geographical regions in Kenya, and one can easily tell the socio-economic status of a Sheng speaker by examining the number of English borrowed

words within a conversation: a case that could qualify for Sheng dialects. The more the English forms the higher the socio-economic status and vice versa.

Use of Sheng has critiques and supporters. Critiques claim that speaking Sheng waters down their English as evidenced in the following quotation where a high school teacher was excited about sending her students off to South Africa for participation in school debates was quoted saying, *This will help us improve our English skills and not ruin it, as opposed to speaking Sheng which most of us are used to, and which waters down our English* (Daily Nation newspaper, January, 2000)

Another critique claims that Sheng is not a decent language as evidenced in the following extract which is from an unknown writer of an article-addressing parents to mind their language and their children's language. It states that:
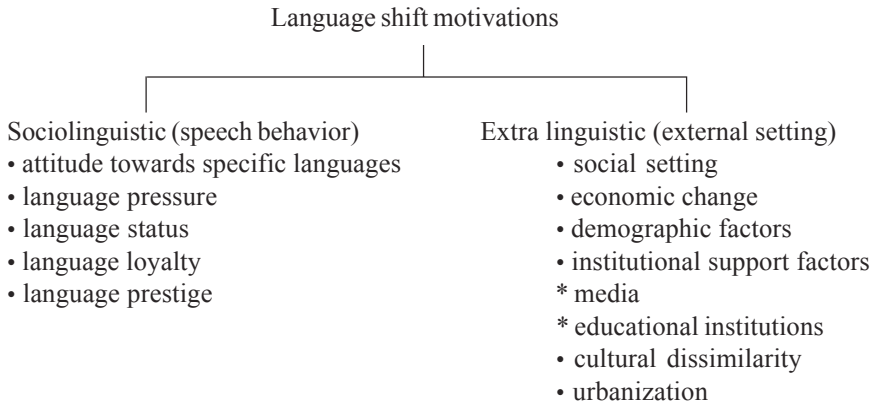
> That is why a responsible parent will ensure that when his or her child returns home from school, they leave the street language (Sheng) outdoors. The family should communicate in a decent language, be it the mother tongue, Swahili or English (Daily Nation newspaper, January, 2002)

However, supporters argue that the development of such a language as Sheng should be encouraged as evidenced in the quotation; *we should encourage our people to develop a new language and not only rely on western imposed languages* (Daily Nation newspaper, January 2002). With both the critiques and supporters, Sheng is widely used and has spread rapidly across the entire nation. Why the rapid spread, is a question worth investigating.

Language shift and language "death"

Language shift as defined in this paper refers to the shift towards the extended use of a new language, which results in the replacement of a former primary language with a new primary language. This means that the use of the old language shrinks because it is used in fewer and fewer domains. It also results in the change of loyalty from the old to the new language. Primary language shift is normally triggered by the decision of a speech community, to cease to transmit their language to their descendants. When a language is being abandoned (shift) the process will involve a decrease in the number of speakers, functional domain and competence.

Attitudes towards languages develop on the basis of political and socio-economic pressure, and this pressure develops in turn on the basis of the historical situation in which a speech community finds itself. Various factors serve as motivations to language shift, and they are summarized as below:

Language shift motivations

Sociolinguistic (speech behavior)
• attitude towards specific languages
• language pressure
• language status
• language loyalty
• language prestige

Extra linguistic (external setting)
• social setting
• economic change
• demographic factors
• institutional support factors
* media
* educational institutions
• cultural dissimilarity
• urbanization

Dua (1996) states "*decisions about allocation of language use in education can determine the function, status and development of the languages in question, significantly altering patterns of communication and potentially leading to change and modernization*". Part of this is taking place in Kenya within the urban areas, where English has replaced the use of ethnic languages as a language of communication within the household. For instance, a substantial number of children in Nairobi and other major towns in Kenya speak only English. They have little or no knowledge of their ethnic language. These children's attitude towards Swahili and their various ethnic languages are negative except in a few cases. This is because the official recognition of the English language, and the authoritative attempts to restrict use of English in various contexts such as offices and schools, has led to ethnic languages being associated with a stigma. At the same time, the school's demanding through its definition of success, competence in use of English, demotivates children to use their ethnic languages. Students were often punished for speaking ethnic languages. For fear of lapsing into ethnic languages, most children resorted to speaking only English. Ochieng (2001) points out this kind of scenario in his words when he states that;

> In upper primary school, we were all required to speak only English and were often punished when we lapsed into vernacular. Of course, I benefited. I am among the few who can take part effectively in global debates through English. But it arrested all my further acquisition of indigenous wisdom through Dholuo.

The type of punishment administered to those students who lapsed into vernacular at school ranged from working out English problems to punishment. Komugor (2002) illustrates this in an article where he discusses the role played by teachers in 'killing' mother tongues:

> In preparing yet another language of the world for the cemetery, our teachers introduce a tool called the disk, often in the shape of a triangular or square chip of wood. Sometimes it would be a bone. This awful artifact was to be passed from one mother tongue speaker to another.

This disk, an anti-language weapon, states Komugor was referred to as 'a disease' which was so dreaded that one could smell an infected person a mile away. He mentions that anger; surprise and poor memory were some of the things which degenerated ones ability to resist the disease. What an individual therefore did was to walk around looking for a client to infect the 'disease'. Such individuals would provoke others, for instance, by making an outrageous allegation about ones private life. Mixed with anger in trying to deny the allegations, one (the client) would explode and hit back using rich vernacular and then:

> Smiling, the fellow you are about to swallow alive proffers a hand and blurts, "catch the disease". In the evening before leaving for home, the vernacular club received their wages of sin: ten wicked strokes of the cane.
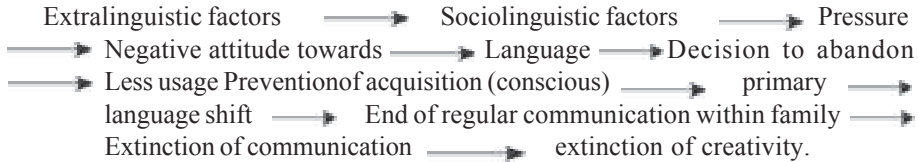
This scenario led to ethnic languages being associated with a stigma. As a resulted some children resorted to being monolinguals with use of English leading to a creation of a dominant culture resulting to shift in the function of the ethnic language of facilitating communication within the household, for fear of getting used to speaking ethnic languages at home and unconsciously using it at school and subsequently being punished. Once the memory of the punishment recurred in one's brain, there was that fear of speaking his/ her ethnic language. English, to such children became a language acquired in early years and thus a natural instrument of thought and communication.

Given such circumstances, various ethnic languages cease to be neither used nor learned, a situation that leads to what is referred to as language 'death'. In this case the ethnic languages are likely to disappear because of changes in the language use patterns in the community: that is their speakers and not the languages disappear. A UNESCO report as quoted by Opala (2002) in an article featured on the Daily Nation, gives the definition of an endangered language which states that " *the language of any community no longer learned by children, or at least by a large part of children (at least 30%), should be regarded as "endangered" or "potentially endangered*". The UNESCO report states that among the three East African countries, Kenya faces the greatest threat with 16 of the indigenous languages in danger and four already extinct. See map-showing languages that face the greatest threat in Kenya. In this article, Opala (2002) discusses how Kenya stands to loose more than 10 indigenous languages. Opala quotes a university professor of linguistics who supports the fact that languages are dying and lays the blame on urbanization and lack of parental guidance saying; "*Yes, languages are dying and urbanization and lack of parental guidance are the biggest threat to diversity*". Opala further mentions that multi-ethnic languages such as English and Swahili have resulted to ethnic languages being assimilated and that such a trend is common in urban areas.

Summary

LANGUAGE SHIFT

Extralinguistic factors ——————▶ Sociolinguistic factors —————▶ Pressure
—————▶ Negative attitude towards ————▶ Language ———▶Decision to abandon
—————▶ Less usage Preventionof acquisition (conscious) ————▶   primary ————▶
language shift ———▶   End of regular communication within family ———▶
Extinction of communication ——————▶   extinction of creativity.

Conclusion

While it is appreciated that English has enriched ethnic languages with vocabulary for expression, we cannot hesitate to mention the fact that it is detrimental to the development of ethnic languages in the following ways:

- substantial reduction in stylistic expressions within ethnic languages
- reduced lexicon with a lot of intrusions
- changes in ethnic language phonology [prosodic, phonetic features]
- decrease in competence of ethnic languages
- linguistic and cultural identity lost.

The main motivating factor seems to have been as a result of colonization, that is, the imposition of English as the only medium of upward social and economic mobility, a language of prestige, modernity and wider acceptance. Individuals got assimilated to this, and once the assimilation process is over, it could as well imply language 'death'. This assimilation continues because it was created administratively and is maintained administratively.

       Because children start school through a foreign language, majority of them lack self-expression through their ethnic languages, and since language is part and parcel of a culture, these children loose their culture. Language is the key factor in reproducing and maintaining conventions and traditions of cultures and societies. Therefore when a language dies, a culture dies. *Why can't Swahili studies be seen in the same light, as English?* is a frequently asked question. This question, asked by many is a cry towards the struggle for rescuing ethnic languages in Kenya by encouraging their being used, appreciated and documented as well. My plea goes to those who carry the stigma of using their various ethnic languages to 'cleanse' themselves and be proud of their culture and language not forgetting the governments' role in encouraging ethnic language use while formulating policies on language planning and development.

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