

**A COMPLEX LINGUISTIC CODE IN KENYAN LINGUISTIC SCENE:  
A CASE STUDY FOR SHENG**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has never been submitted to any other university for any academic award.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as the candidate's supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Joseph Ntongodu, Paulina Mutoria , My children ; Edna ,Patience and Amani. Thank you for standing by me and your invaluable support that you accorded me during this tasking period. You give me the strength to go on.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sheng has become a popular language in Kenya and it is being spoken in all corners of this nation and beyond (East Africa). Due to its rapid growth and spread it has attracted a lot of linguistic research from many scholars both locally and internationally and still continues to do so as evident in this case. Despite the dense coverage in this area of research, research findings in the area have raised more questions than answers. Thus leaving most of the questions asked about Sheng as a myth that requires explanation. It is from this point of view that a research gap was established for this research (A complex linguistic code in Kenyan linguistic scene: A case study for Sheng). Most of the Sheng definitions tend to lean towards argot, jargon or slang. A situation that is not very clear though, because we are left asking what Sheng really is. However this does not mean that this literature is obsolete. Indeed these early studies on Sheng lays a framework for this current argument, depicting Sheng as a complex subject, out of which such a research gap would not have existed. The assertion here is that the many differing views on Sheng, presented in this study outlines Sheng as a complicated subject that needs more research, so as to be able to rediscover Sheng in order to give it a befitting description, one that would reflect the true image/nature of Sheng as it is today.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Kenya is a multilingual nation with over 40 ethnic languages, many foreign languages and a linguistic code called Sheng, whose description is not yet clear. Sheng is spoken all over Kenya but majorly in Kenya urban centers. Sheng emerged in the early 1950's in the Eastland's of Nairobi as a Swahili based code among urban youths and underclass of within the ghettos of Nairobi (Osinde 1986, Kembo Sure 1992) Sheng has ability to borrow vocabulary from other languages. This is a common characteristic with all human languages. *Gikuyu* and *Dholuo* are some of the examples of languages where Sheng has largely borrowed

The word Sheng is coined from the initials of two languages namely Swahili and English (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). When you coming this initials you will get the Word *Seng* which sounds a bit strange. To remove this strangeness the letter h was introduced between *S* for Swahili and *eng* for English hence forming the name Sheng. Other sources (Mukhwana 2008) have it that the word *Sheng* is a back formation of the word English where the [li]' sound was omitted (Osinde 1997, Mukhwana 2008). Although *Sheng* originally began as argot, jargon and slang in the slum areas of Nairobi, it did not remain there. A lot of changes have since occurred. These changes have been very robust, an element that has caught the attention of many linguistic scholars from both within and outside Kenya all aimed at understanding Sheng. However despite having massive research in the subject, Sheng still remains a complicated code within Kenyan linguistic scene because these scholars seem to differ on many aspects of this language in terms of definition, structure, acceptability and usage.

It is also worth noting that, the attitude of people towards Sheng which was originally negative argotic (Abdulaziz 1997) has changed and the language has acquired prestige and popularity regardless of the stigmatization that has been associated with it for a long period of time. This issue among others outlined in this study makes Sheng a complex subject, a factor that motivated this research. Sheng which was originally considered as a language of the underclass (outlaws) has become a bridging instrument between the *haves* and *have not's* in Kenya.

The code has also developed a great deal in terms of spread, acceptance and vocabulary development. The internet and social media has been instrumental and contributed a lot towards Sheng development and spread of Sheng across Kenya and East Africa region (Annah and Frida 2015). Sheng is characterized by regular changes in its vocabulary. its complicated nature has made it become a viable research field as is in this case, the aim here being to remove the linguistic confusion that has existed on the language for a long time by coming up with facts generated through academic research. When research on Sheng takes place scholars in the field of socio-linguistics are able to give *Sheng* a clear identity and thus assigning Sheng communication roles will be far much easier as opposed to the past where the latter task has been difficult if not impossible.

Earlier in 1950s, Sheng was regarded as an argot (as a language of less privileged/underclass) within the ghettos of Nairobi. Today the trend has changed – as sheng is used by both the *haves and the have-nots* of this country (Kenya). Looking at the technicality involved in formation of sheng vocabulary, one would be tempted to classify or define Sheng as a jargon but this cannot be the case either because all Jargons uses high technical words purposely with an aim of trying to block anybody considered to be an alien of a particular social group. On the contrary, Sheng is a hybrid language that borrows ( Osinde 1996,Mokaya 2006,) from Kiswahili, English and other local languages like *Gikuyu* and *Dholuo* among others. All the above issues are of great interest to linguistics and therefore it is from such impetus that this research work is founded and motivated with the sole aim being to redefine Sheng for a better understanding of the language that has caught the attention of everybody talking within Kenya and outside.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Sheng has received a lot of attention as far as linguistic research on Kenyan languages is concerned (Githiora 2008, Githinji 2008, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mokaya 2006, Freer & Moga 1997, Ogechi 2005, Mazrui 1995, Samper 2002, Kembo-Sure 1992, Spyropoulos 1987, Mutonya 2008, Mukhwana 2008, Momanyi 2009). Going by the above observation, it is clear that research in Sheng lies in depth. With all this research geared towards unraveling the puzzle associated with Sheng for a long time. Most of the research works on Sheng have raised more questions than answers. Some of the yet to be answered questions are based on origin, growth and development, usage, its significance to society and influence to other languages in Kenyan linguistic scene. However none of these earlier researches has

been able to say what Sheng really is. Some have called it an argot (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995), on the other hand some scholars have argued that Sheng is a Jargon because it uses high technical vocabulary (Ogechi 2005), to others (Githiora 2008, Githinji 2005, Mukhwana 2008) sees Sheng merely as slang. To others Sheng is a mere peer language but at the same time fails to reconcile with whether Sheng is a Swahili dialect or an emerging creole? All these issues demonstrate that indeed Sheng is a complex subject and a viable area in academic research. So far, there is no single agreed definition of Sheng, it is from such an academic gap that this research work on Sheng is founded where the key aim is to create a better understanding by finding out what Sheng really is in Kenyan linguistic scene.

Thus we felt we a more need to give a more water tight argument as in this case, of course by not washing away the existing literature but try and add value by giving Sheng a clear description that will be universally acceptable ,something that earlier researches have not addressed. This is the key aim of this research. This research therefore, is aimed at re-describing Sheng in the context of what is already known for a better clarity without undermining the body of existing knowledge in the field. The following is a list of scholars who have attempted important studies on Sheng ,some of which became the cornerstone for this research without which a research gap could not have existed. (Githiora 2002, Githinji 2008, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mokaya 2006, Freer &Moga 1997, Ogechi 2005, Mazrui 1995, Samper 2002, Kembo-Sure 1992,Spyropoulos 1987, Mutonya 2008, Mukhwana 2008, Momanyi 2009).

Going by the above observation, it is clear that research in Sheng lies in depth and the language of Sheng has been a big puzzle to linguistic scholars for a long time, Looking at a number of descriptions given by scholars, there is no agreement on what Sheng really is, for instance some view Sheng as an Argot(Mazrui1995,Abbdiaziz 1997),to a more recent breed of scholars like(Githiora 2008,Shitemi 2002,Ogechi 2005,Mutonga 2008 ,Mukhwana 2008) view Sheng as a slang .

About usage there are those who see Sheng as a language of the youths thus writing on titles such as , *Sheng a peer language: a Swahili dialect or an emerging creole?* Githiora (2008),while to some it is language that cuts across all the social domains. However none of these earlier researches has been able to say what Sheng really is. Some have called it an

argot (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995), on the other hand some scholars have described Sheng as a Jargon because it uses high technical vocabulary (Ogechi 2005), to others (Githiora 2002, Githinji 2005, Mukhwana 2008) sees Sheng merely as slang. All these demonstrate that indeed Sheng is a complex subject and a viable area in research study. It is from such an academic gap that this research work on Sheng is founded where the key aim is to create a better understanding by finding out what Sheng really is in Kenyan linguistic scene by presenting a more water tight argument of course by not washing away the earlier studies of which to a large extent forms a foundation for this study. By so doing our research argues out a more universally acceptable position based on a research approach.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The following research questions will be addressed in this research work:

- i) Is Sheng an argot, jargon or slang in Kenyan linguistic context?
- ii) Is Sheng a linguistic code limited to the youth of Kenya?
- iii) Has Sheng as linguistic code been assigned any communication roles in Kenya?
- iv) Has Sheng undergone any development in structure, usage and spread over time.?
- v) Has technology and mainstream media helped in the spread and acceptability of Sheng as a language in use in Kenya?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The following research objectives will be addressed in this research paper:

- i) To find out whether Sheng is an argot, jargon or slang in the Kenyan linguistic scene.
- ii) To ascertain whether Sheng as a linguistic code is limited to the youth of Kenya.
- iii) To find out whether Sheng has been assigned any communication role in Kenya..
- iv) To find out whether Sheng has undergone development in terms of structure usage and spread over time.
- v) To ascertain whether technology and mainstream media has helped in the spread and acceptability of Sheng as a language in use in Kenya.

### **1.5 Rationale/Justification**

This research work on Sheng as a linguistic code in Kenyan linguistic context is timely and will be very useful in the following ways: One, it will help remove the linguistic confusion that has existed on Sheng over time, by giving Sheng a clear description without associating

it to argot, Jargon or slang, as it has been for a long time, by offering valid explanation supported by research facts as to whether; sheng is a development from above linguistic codes (argot, Jargon or slang)

Secondly, this research will be able to explain why Sheng is popular to the youth in Kenya and if the code is only restricted to the youth and whether this trend is likely to remain or not, especially considering the current widespread and usage of the code vis-a vis the past and explain why Sheng is unique language and not a pidgin that is about to be discarded once its communication purpose is over.

This research will also help us understand why Sheng is seen as a prestigious language currently among the Kenyan youths as opposed to the ire that has been associated with it for a long time by explaining why sheng has become so popular in Kenya, its stigmatization notwithstanding. The research will be able to show the significance of Sheng in Kenyan linguistic society while at the same aid language planners in Kenya in assigning Sheng communication roles as it is with other languages like English, Kiswahili, Gikuyu, among others. The research also provides a basis for better understanding of Sheng, this will therefore help to do away with the stigmatization that has been associated with this language for a long time for instance where some people regard it as a language of criminals (argot).

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation**

The scope of this research work will be guided by the features of the slang, jargon and argot as terms applied in socio-linguistic studies. This will be done by looking at how these features relate or differ with those of Sheng. This research work was done in Nairobi (The capital city of Kenya) because of its diversification (all Kenyan tribes are represented in Nairobi) the choice of Nairobi was informed by the fact that Sheng is predominantly used in Nairobi and that most of the earlier researchers on the subject have pointed out that Sheng originated from Eastland's, (a popular residential area in Nairobi). Nairobi was also chosen because it represents all languages that Sheng has borrowed from for instance (Swahili, English, Gikuyu, Dholuo, among others) and that most of the scholars who have done research in this field work and live in Nairobi (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mutiga 2013, Mukhwana 2008, Ogechi 2005) and therefore access these scholars work and personal contact where possible was deemed useful to this research.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

Key terms: Sheng, Argot, Jargon, slang, code

In this research some terms are used in specific ways, therefore they need some working definitions Key words are Sheng, Slang, Argot and, Code

The terms are defined below:

*Sheng* – A Kenyan urban language constantly developing out of mix of English, Kiswahili and mother tongue: it is common amongst the youth and is currently the most dynamic language in East Africa (JowalJones 2013)

A Swahili based slang, with bits of English thrown in alongside other Kenya and non-Kenyan languages and is remarkably catching on across all society (Laura Dean 2013).

*Argot1* – Also known as *cant*. borrowed from French which means a secret language used by various groups but not limited to thieves and other criminals to prevent outsiders from understanding their conversation.,

A code used often by criminalized communities for example thieves, prostitutes, beggars and drug dealers.

*Argot2* (Noun)-a specialized idiomatic vocabulary peculiar to a particular class or a group of people, especially that of underworld group, devised for private communication and identification.( Merriam Webster dictionary)

*Argot 3*-a Restoration for thieves(dictionary.com)

The first definition of Argot has been adopted for use in this context.

*Code*- a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by the members of a social group(p.278)Little John 2002). According to Bernstein , class codes and control(1971),’’Forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize and reinforce special types of relationships with the environment and thus create for the individual particular forms of significance’’(p.76)That is to say that the way a language is used in a particular societal class affects the way people assign significance and meanings to things which they are speaking.( Little John2002)Little John agrees and states, people learn their place in the world by the virtue of language codes they employ.(p.178)

The code that a person uses symbolizes their social identity (Bernstein, 1971)

In Kenya Sheng is a mark of social identity and identity among the youthful generation but not limited to the youth

### **1.7.1 Types of codes according to Bernstein**

*Restricted code*- within restricted code speakers draw on background knowledge and shared understanding. this type of code creates a sense of included-ness, a feeling of belonging to a certain group. Restricted code can be found among friends other than intimately knit groups. Sheng uses vocabulary that are highly technical and which can only be understood by Sheng speakers, any member considered alien to these group will automatically be locked out because of failure to comprehend the language. *Elaborated code*: a code that can 'stand on its own', it is complete and full of detail, most overhearing a conversation would be able to understand it as compared to restricted code which is shorter, condensed and requires background information and prior knowledge.

### **1.7.2 Meaning of code as applied to this study**

In this context the term code will be used throughout this study in more a general sense to refer to a human language. In this study Sheng is regarded as a code.

## **1.8 Literature review**

For a longtime Sheng was perceived as an Argot language, a variety restricted in its domains of use. It was seen by many researchers for a long time as a language of the urban youth.

Mazrui(1995) asserts that Sheng originated in the 1930s as a Nairobi underground argot.

He gives documented examples of Sheng like phrases that can be found in 'miaka 50 katikajela (fifty years in jail) by Michael Ngugi Karanja. Examples of Sheng phrases like (namdekea pal anakamsaitihii, ebutupague-- ) this illustration suggests that Sheng emerged as an underground language code way back before the colonial period (Annah. K. Fridah, Erastus and Hilda k 2015).

Several arguments have been fronted by different researchers as to the exact origin of Sheng, for instance Mazrui 1995) points out that Sheng is a language variety whose origin in society can be attributed to factors that are extra- linguistic in nature Mazrui further argues that the foundation of Sheng lies in the traditional in code- switching between Swahili and English

(hence the far term Sh-eng) the emergence of Sheng is also credited in the demand for a lingua Franca in the colonial period during the beginnings of urbanization in the country, Osinde (1986) argues that Sheng emerged in area where Kiswahili and English were already established as Lingua Franca a situation that rules out Sheng as a pidgin because pidgins are makeshift languages in areas where Lingua Franca is nonexistent.

Spyropoulos (1987) observes that the ethnically and linguistically diverse Kenyan workers brought together in plantations and urban centers in colonial era and Swahili thus spoke a mixture of broken English and imperfect Kiswahili, mixed with their own vernacular which their children developed into sheng. According to Abdul-Aziz and Osinde (1997) the genesis of Sheng is argotic and its inventors were Kenyan urban youth living in multi ethnic neighborhoods. The youths in most cases played truancy from schools and experimented with smoking and alcohol and living in small crowded quarters, they lacked privacy from adults as well as their younger siblings. Driven by this need of privacy a language code that would lock out their unwanted member(out group) of this social group within the family level and neighborhood was crucial and thus sheng was intelligently crafted. This made communication between the youth easy besides giving them a social identity. (Githiora 2002) Momanyi 2011 and Muaka 2011) have studied the origin of sheng and its development and the function it serves in the society.

According to Bosire(2006) Sheng is a hybrid language that has come as a result due to Kenyan languages coming into contact as a result of pre-colonial and colonial issues such as rapid urbanization. He sees Sheng as a language of the youth who are caught up in the transition of the two worlds and who must find a way to express this duality(the new ethnicity).To the youths Sheng is a way to break from the old fraternities that put particular ethnic communities in particular estates/neighborhoods and give them what Bo sire calls urban global ethnicity. He says that, Sheng is a culmination of hybridization process and further describes Sheng as a mixture of two different linguistic consciousness separated by another an epoch by social differential or some other factors(1981.358). Bhaktin (1981) also sees Sheng as a hybrid language.Hesa

According to Annah, Fridah, Erastus and Hilda 2015 language is a subject to human manipulation in order to reflect the speeds of experience that sustain it. It reflects people's



position in an abstract, hierarchical society demarcating social class, sex and age group. People from any given society enable a language thrive from the way it is used, in Kenya for instance, the growth of sheng has not only been facilitated by the youths but also the business enterprises institutions of learning (schools, colleges and universities) churches and even the government in their attempt to promote and impart certain ideologies, principles all in an effort to reach out to the greater Kenyan audience.

Sheng is used to give identity and pride to a group that maintains distinct features (Mutonya 2008). According to Abdulaziz and (Osinde 1997) Kiswahili provides most of the grammatical framework within which words from other languages are blended into sheng. This view is also upheld by (Ogechi 2005) who argues in his lexicalization of sheng research that, Sheng has a morph syntax based on Kiswahili grammar. For a long time about three decades, Sheng was a highly stigmatized variety and viewed as a language used by thugs and young matatu touts from low income neighborhoods, (Muaka 2011). This is no longer the case since Sheng has now become acceptable in the mainstream society as way of identifying with the youths who comprise about 60% of Kenyan population (Kenya bureau of statistics 2009).

Key business enterprises (banks, mobile companies like Safaricom and Airtel, insurance NGO's Coca-Cola Company among others) are using Sheng currently to market their products. This deviation has caught everybody by surprise since it is going against the norms of the Kenyan society, where normally one would have expected English and Kiswahili to be used instead, because they are Kenyan official languages. Sheng is a language of identity and pride to a group that has distinct features for a long time (Sheng speakers-the Kenyan youth-Ogechi 2005). Sheng is a medium of instruction to certain-in-groups (Fink 2005). Sheng has a social function of linking up its speakers.

Non-standard varieties like Sheng are considered to be of low prestige, but in some situations languages stigmatized by education system (for instance Sheng) still enjoys a covertly prestige among working class men for every reason that they are considered incorrect (Labov 1972). Such a situation may occur when a speaker wants to gain a recognition, acceptance or solidarity within specific social group. Going by literature review that was gathered for this research there is no clear cut period as to when Sheng emerged in Kenya. In fact majority of Scholars differ largely on the same. what is clear though is that

Sheng is in existent and widely spreading with the speed at which it is doing so just being amazing. This is unmatched compared to the rate of spread, acceptability and spread of other local languages in Kenya like Swahili and English. This makes Sheng another big puzzle that has made it a complex area of interest most of the Sheng words are drawn locally from Kiswahili(a language spoken from Kenya And East African region) .despite its flexibility in borrowing from various languages the grammar and Syntax of Sheng is predominantly Swahili. Sheng in Kenya is majorly used by the youth but not restricted to this social group. Sheng usage is quickly spreading in usage due to prestige which it has acquired lately. It is most common among the youth, though it is fast gaining speakers across multiple age groups. The youths of Kenya are believed to behind the formation of Sheng, they did so because they wanted to remain privy in their affairs while communicating.

In urban centers ,criminal activities historically have been on the higher side compared to rural areas ,this is attributed to high cases of un employment among the youths, who results to criminal activities like theft ,prostitution among others all in the name of trying to make ends meet. In order to keep the authorities at bay the youths adopted a language code called *Sheng* .The youths at the time devised words secretly devised illegal acts like drug smuggling. Those selling bang would refer to it using many names such a *ganja, weed, grass ,bomb* among others. However this argument seems to have changed due to sudden turn of events in Kenya today. The use of Sheng today ranges from streets, homes, publications to business advertisement ,this is enough proof that the attitude towards the language has since change

The touts and drivers within the *matatu* industry(public service vehicle) in Kenya have also to a large extent contributed towards growth of Sheng through invention of new words in their effort to lock out their passengers from their conversation.

When said group travel from one point to another and use Sheng many people as a result come in contact with the language. This thus has enhanced spread and acceptability of this language in Kenya. New technology like Social media has enhanced the spread of sheng as a language for instance Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp.

Although sheng initially was restricted to only city ghettos and Nairobi youth, the language has become a prestigious language that everyone wants to learn and use. Today *Sheng* is seen as a language of social identity. In the recent past Sheng was adopted by many media houses as an additional language of broadcast. Ghetto radio(2008) is one such establishment. The story of Ghetto radio in Kenya in terms of audience is such a big success. As a result other radio stations have designed programs that airs in a blend of Swahili and Sheng. such examples are Citizen radio, ,radio *Maisha* ,radio *Milele* among others. *Mambo mseto*( a citizen radio/ Tv program that airs in in blend of Sheng and Kiswahili. In Kenya) Politicians too have been forced to familiarize with the dialect so as to attract the votes of the Kenyan youth who happen to be the majority (about 60% of Kenyan population). Sheng has also travelled across borders and has been received warmly.(jowal 2013).

The Ugandans and Tanzanians refer to money as Chapaa, a common Sheng word for money also used in Kenya Sheng a Kenyan slang, (Mukhwana (2008) has become unifying language of all and sundry, thus uniting people from across ethnic divides in a country where tribal politics have threatened to tear the country apart based on tribal lines. Sheng has become a first a language to many people born in urban areas considering that the first batch of Sheng speakers (about 1950)s are already grandparents.(Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). Those speaking in Sheng have no tribes, they are simply a nation of their kind, a social group which is seeking a social identity. Despite its wide spread use and acceptability Sheng has its limitations too. Educationists have raised an alarm concerning the language of Sheng .claims that Sheng interferes with the learning of Kiswahili and English as it conflicts with structures of the said languages in a manner that affects the performance . The slang has uncannily found its way into students answer sheets in exam posing a threat to examinable subjects. This shows how unstoppable the code that initially began as a slang, jargon or argot is.

Several linguists have (Abdulaziz and Osinde(1987),Githiora 2002,Mukhwana 2008) pointed out that Sheng is one dynamic language in Kenya today. A fact that has made it difficult to standardize Sheng . Another reason why it is difficult to standardize Sheng is the fact that Sheng words changes often perhaps to maintain the stylish and uniqueness nature of this language .

### **1.8.1 How the research will benefit from literature review**

The literature review in this chapter is essential because it lays a foundation for this research work. Through this chapter we are able to have background knowledge of the language of sheng, for instance what the earlier scholars have done in the area and what has not been done. The strengths and weaknesses as far as their work is concerned thereby giving this research work a foundation and an avenue to add academic value to existing literature on Sheng.

Some of the scholars in the similar field have described Sheng as an Argot (Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995, Syrypoulos 1987) looking at the nature and complexity of Sheng words the picture that comes out of an attempt to describe Sheng is that of jargon. Scholars in like Ogechi (2005) and Fink (2005) who argues that sheng is an in-group language – a feature common to all jargons, argot and Sheng. Looking at the description of Sheng given in this literature review, most of the scholars see Sheng as an in-group language meant to address communication needs of a certain social group, that is the youth of Kenya (Osinde 1987, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Mazrui 1995, Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, Mukhwana 2008 among others). The argument of these scholars form the foundation of this research because it takes a point of departure from this line of thought by showing that Sheng has undergone growth and development and is no longer a preserve language of the youths. Currently, this research has proved, using data supported by facts that even though the language (Sheng) may have begun as a language of the urban youths, it did not remain there.

Research done on Sheng from mid 1990s and moving forward, terms Sheng as slang (Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, Mukhwana 2008, Mutiga 2015). This is a fact that this research tends to explore with the view that slangs are substandard languages just meant to be used in informal settings. So when we see a deviation of this by Sheng in instances where Sheng has penetrated in politics, religion, business advertisements, we can only lay a claim that these arguments have been by-passed b time and needs to be complemented by a research of this nature that seeks to find out what Sheng really is in this decade and project the future of this language in Kenya going by what has so far been documented about Sheng.

The fact that this literature review points out to many scholars having researched on the subject Sheng further demonstrates that Sheng is a complex field of study and that a few studies cannot be adequately be relied on. There is need to have as many researches in the

area so as to shed more light in the field for the simple reason that the magic behind this language (Sheng) growth and development cannot be matched to other Kenyan languages, hence a need to understand why this language behaves the way it does.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This research work has applied Howard Giles communication accommodation theory which will be in this context abbreviated as CAT. CAT is a communication theory that was developed by Howard Giles in the year 1975 according to Giles, “*when people interact they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures to accommodate others*” Giles (1975:1) CAT explores innumerable reasons as to why individuals emphasize or lessen the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication.

*CAT concerns.* CAT is concerned with links between language context and identity and focuses on both intergroup and interpersonal factor that lead to accommodation as well as the way power macro and micro context concerns affect accommodation compartments. CAT was found to be the most suitable theory in this context in the analysis of Sheng because it is an in-group language whose communicative patterns are highly influenced by both personal and intergroup social compartments. CAT relies cripplingly on *social identity theory* which argues that a person self-concept comprises of personal identity and social identity and where this social identity is based on comparisons made by people between in-groups (groups they belong to) and out-groups (groups they don't belong to). According to CAT, people strive to maintain social identity by either joining groups they feel more contented or making a more positive experience of belonging to social groups they already belong to as a way of expressing social identity. speech is a way in which one can express group membership, people in in-group languages like Sheng adopt convergence and divergence (the two major processes in CAT) signal a salient group distinctiveness. In a salient group distinctiveness this stands out as a positive way to strengthen the individual social identity.

Giles CAT theory is based on four socio-psychological tenets which help explain why speakers seek to converge or diverge their language, accent, dialect and behavior to that of their interlocutor. These tenets can clearly be identified in Sheng language. Sheng speakers make use of some of the maxims such as convergence and divergence. The tenets help

to explain why individuals seek to converge or diverge from the language, dialect and behaviors of their interlocutors

The theory is basically about us versus them. This means that it has to do with the in-group and out group members of a social group. Sheng is an in-group language (commonly spoken by the Kenyan youth although not limited to the youth of Kenya) The language has features that make it unique as a language of identity among the Kenyan youth. This theory explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal and non-verbal communication. The theory has a major concern with links between “*language a context and identity*” (Kailikia 2013)

The theory focuses on intergroup and interpersonal factors that lead to accommodation. Giles based that theory on four socio-physiological tenets, which help to explain why speakers seek to converge or diverge their language, dialect, accent and behaviors to that of their interlocutors. Below is a look of how the socio-psychological tenets of CAT by Giles and how they apply to the current research work.

### **1.9.1 Socio-psychological tenets of CAT theory**

- Similarity attraction
- Causal attribution
- Socio-exchange process
- Intergroup distinctiveness

### **1.9.2 Application of CAT on Sheng language**

CAT is basically about us v/s them, meaning it has to do with the in-group and out group. Argots, Slangs and Jargon do exactly that in communication. Sheng being a language that can fall in all the three categories has been analyzed using CAT. Below is a look of how the psychological tenets of the CAT by Giles may be applied to this research.

***Similarity attraction on sheng.*** Convergence through verbal and non-verbal communication is one mechanism that Sheng users use in order to become more similar to others within their social group. The accent and dialects (Sheng varieties) may differ because of geographical factors and interferences arising from other languages spoken by the speakers of Sheng. However the sheng Speakers will try as much as possible to reduce these linguistic

differences between them and their interlocutor with the sole aim of wanting to be understood and increase attraction between the speakers of Sheng.

Adoption of Sheng as a language of the media (print and broadcast media) as evident in local dailies, Sheng adverts, Ghetto radio (2008) Television adverts, bill boards, Sheng adverts, creation of Sheng websites (Okoth 2013) has come out as some of the ways in which convergence has been achieved in Sheng. Certain dialects accents and orthography of Sheng words are adopted. This is seen as a way of increasing similarity between Sheng speakers and their interlocutors, this reducing linguistic differences existing in the Sheng language. As a result attraction between the sheng speakers in different parts of Kenya is increased.

#### *The social exchange process*

Giles (1975:40), argues before individuals act in speech, they always attempt an assessment of rewards and cost of alternate courses of action and that will bring greater rewards and less cost. These tenets address the possible drawbacks of convergence. In relation to the above tenet, we realize that Sheng operates on a multiple of synonyms such as *Masa, mathee, mother* (all to refer to mother), *ndai, mrenga, pira* (all to refer to a motor car), *shags, ushago, gichagi, ocha* (all to mean upcountry). A Sheng speaker at any given time is likely to settle on the word that will aid his/her communication all based on the benefit he/she wants to attain in a given conversation at a given time.

Politicians will settle on certain Sheng phrases just like their business counterparts (see chapter four) so as to maximize based on the possible rewards and cost involved.e.g Peter Kenneth (2013) presidential slogan '*Tunawesmake*' and Obama (2015) '*Hawayuni*' greetings at Kasarani Safaricom gymnasium. Most business companies frame their Sheng adverts all based on the rewards to be attained and on a cost benefit analysis. For instance their switch to Sheng is orchestrated by the need to reach a wider market of their products and the returns to be made. According to Giles (1979: 9) the bi-lingual choice of a language has been shown to be a function of three factors:

- The person to whom one is speaking to
- The topic of discourse
- And the setting to which it takes place

The CAT by Howard Giles, seeks to explain the cognitive reasons for code switching and other changes in speech as a person seeks to emphasize or minimize the social differences between him/her and other person in conversation. Later models of speech dynamics have followed this line of thought (Elaboration likelihood model RT) Giles posits that code switching takes place on a wide range of variables such as the setting, the topic of discourse, the person we are interacting with, the purpose of interaction and so on. He gives an example where we tend to speak an official language when in presence of our superior in the work place. In other words we accommodate to others by adjusting our communication behavior to the requisite roles that participants are assigned in a given context to which languages impinge in our life resulting in the maintenance or breakdown of human relationships, and on the other hand give meaningful insights into tendency of different varieties to evoke or 'trigger' different perceptions of their speakers.

Giles' CAT is based on four socio-psychological tenets. These tenets help to explain why speakers converge or diverge their language, dialect, accent and communication behavior of their interlocutor. These tenets can be clearly identified in Sheng Language. The general argument of CAT is that some of the maxims such as convergence and divergence can only be possible if the speakers of Sheng are bilinguals and multi-linguals in order to be able to switch from one language to the other or at times mix the codes, a process known as code switching and code mixing. Sheng as a language that employs the above process creatively.

The model of CAT will be used in examining the motivation for the use of code switching, code mixing and intergroup distinctiveness in the use of Sheng in communication in Kenyan linguistic context. The findings of the study helped us to determine whether CAT is applicable in the description of Sheng as either: slang, Jargon or argot.

Socio – psychological tenets of CAT theory as outlined by Giles.

- Similarity attraction
- Social Exchange process
- The casual attribution
- Intergroup distinctiveness

The above tenets will be used to demonstrate that Sheng is a complex linguistic code in Kenyan linguistic scene.



**Similarity Attraction.** This tenet describes the positive aspect of convergence. Some aspects of speech convergence may comprise reduction of the linguistic differences between oneself and one's interlocutor in relations to accent, dialect, paralinguistic features or language of prime. By increasing correspondence in communication between two people, it is likely that understanding and attraction between them will also increase. For instance when you are addressing your staff casually and opt to use English and make an error, out of politeness and in attempt to make a rapport, as the boss you will ignore the error and go on with the conversation. We may even switch to Kiswahili to encourage our interlocutor to use it's (A more familiar/fluent) language. Therefore convergence through verbal and non-verbal communication is one of the mechanisms that we can use to become more similar to others and hence increase their attraction to us.

**Social Exchange Process.** Giles (1975: 40) posit that prior to acting we attempt to assess rewards of alternate courses of action and that will bring greater rewards and lesser costs. This norm discourages the possible shortcomings of convergence. The deleterious aspects of convergence yields negative results. Therefore, when one is deciding what to say and how to say it, individuals often choose the option which yields positive outcome other than negative ones.

**The Casual Attribution.** This principle suggests that we interpret other people's behavior, and evaluate the persons themselves, in terms of motivations and intentions that we attribute as the cause of their behaviors. According to the experiment done by Giles and Smiths amongst French and English speaking Canadians, they found out that when a person from a different group used language convergent to reduce cultural barriers it was more positively evaluated than when they attributed convergence to the pressure of the situation which forced them to converge.

**Intergroup Distinctiveness.** The process of intergroup distinctiveness is proposed by Tajfel (1970) who argues that when members of different groups are intact they compare themselves such as personal attributes, ability material possession and so on. In these intergroup comparisons individuals seek to find ways into which they can make themselves positively distinct from the out-group in order to enhance their social identity. Giles suggests that in a certain social interaction, there may exist what he calls dissociate motivational

tendencies on the part of one or both speakers such that speech is modified to become less similar. This is what Giles calls “divergence”.

In what Giles calls the accommodation model, he proposes that an individual can induce another to cultivate into them more favorable by reducing dissimilarities between them. Accommodation is the term normally used by Giles to refer to the means we take to adjust to our ways of interacting with people of different culture in order to facilitate communication. Giles (1982) In his support of the role social context in speech writes: language and society are viewed as independent, not dichotomies as reflected in much of traditional sociology. It is tremendously difficult to separate linguistics and social process in many instances (Giles 1982:252)

Giles (1982:253) also quotes turners (1978) definition of ethnic group as “two or more people who share a common social identification or who nearly perceive themselves to be members of social category”. Here there is a group which speaks each other’s mother tongue but they are a second or third common language which they select from their multilingual repertoires – termed as lingua franca. This situation in Kenya has been described by Myers -Scotton (1976) as lingua franca where multiethnic communities in Kenya have Kiswahili and English as second and third languages respectively

***The Causal Attribution.*** The principal of causal attribution according to Giles means that in intergroup languages like Sheng, one has to interpret other people’s behavior before evaluating the person himself in terms of motivation and intention that one attribute as their causal of his behavior. In the case of Sheng the maxim of convergence is highly employed with the sole of trying to reduce cultural barriers. Those who speak Sheng as a language in Kenya are individuals who come from different Kenyan ethnic backgrounds who have reduced to be bound by their cultural barriers. To them, she is a unifying language and gives them an identity regardless of whether they are Luos, Kikuyus, Kambas, Meru among others. The motivation of speaking Sheng here is a positive one as opposed to the pressure of the situation which forced the speakers to converge. The origin of Sheng has been attributed to the need of a language of secrecy among criminals (argotic) (Abdulaziz 1997), while others regard it as an informal language invented for use in informal situations (slang). For Sheng speakers, they this may no longer be considered as gains despite them having been the situations that forced members of this in-group to converge (Sheng speakers).

Intergroup Distinctiveness. When members of different groups interact, in this case Sheng speakers who are drawn from different Kenyan tribes that also share different Kenyan cultures; they do so by comparing their personal attributes, ability, material possessions and so on. The motivation behind such intergroup in which way can they make themselves distinct from the outer group (those who do not speak Sheng) so as to enhance the social identity. This happens in Sheng because in any social interactions there exist what Giles dissociate motivational tendencies on part of one speaker or both speakers and this is why there is a need for the speakers to modify their speeches so as to become less similar. In Sheng individuals can induce others to adopt Sheng words that they consider more favorable by trying to get rid of dissimilarities in the language structure. For instance, most of the borrowed words in Sheng are retailored before they are incorporated into Sheng (See sheng word formation in chapter 3). Also, some of the Kenyan languages tend to outdo others such as Kikuyu and Dholuo because their popularity and social prestige. Their presence in Sheng makes it stand out.

Once a word becomes so familiar to the extent of being understood by the outer group it is immediately discarded and replaced with a new one. This is why it is even difficult to prepare a Sheng Dictionary. This is a unique feature in Sheng. The youths (majority Sheng speakers in Kenya) are always modifying the language all in an effort to make it unique and stand out from the rest through disassociation. This has made the language more popular and prestigious. To the youths of Kenya the process of divergence is key because to them sheng is not only a language of socialization but a mark of identity, something that is behind the sheng revolution. It is thus no accident that both youth are competing in use of Sheng in Kenya.

### **1.10 Hypotheses**

This research work is founded on the following hypotheses:

- i) Sheng; is neither an argot, jargon or slang on the Kenyan Linguistic scene.
- ii) Sheng; as a linguistic code that is limited to the youth of Kenya.
- iii) Sheng as a linguistic code has been assigned communication roles in Kenya.
- iv) Sheng; in Kenya has undergone development in its structure, usage and spread over time.
- v) New technology and mainstream media has helped in the spread and acceptability of Sheng in Kenya.

### 1.11 Methodology

This research was largely field based and involved both primary and secondary methods of data collection. This research adopted a descriptive research method using questionnaires and interviews as methods of collecting data. For the purposes of investigations the city of Nairobi was chosen. The choice of Nairobi was informed by the fact that Sheng is predominantly used in Nairobi and that the city of Nairobi represents the national outlook, given that all the languages of Kenya are all represented here. Geographically Subjects of this research were drawn from Eastleigh South B, Kibera slum, "babadogo", south Nairobi west and central business district, respectively. The distribution of data was purposely meant to remove biasness and generating a more stratified data Respondents included professionals (doctors, lecturers, teachers, journalists, and politicians) Variables for this research study included ethnic groups, occupation, and age of respondents, education and place of residence.

Primary data was obtained through face to face interviews to a large extent. This helped to get a first-hand information. Secondary data collection methods involved reading from the library, internet, and consultation of scholars in the linguistic field. This was useful in determining the ground that has been covered in Sheng in terms of academic research..

The research purposely used 69 respondents to collect data. The Sampling technique was convenient to this research because the samples were manageable and was considered a suitable technique in getting the views of the majority, in an area covered by large population (Nairobi). Data collected through this technique could easily be analyzed manually without resulting to abstract and complicated analysis procedures. To avoid bias respondents were of both gender and were drawn from varied environment and geographical regions within the city of Nairobi. Respondents for this study were professionals drawn from different professions in Kenya. This is as shown in table 2, of this chapter. This is was informed by the fact that Sheng is no-longer a language of the Have not's ' as it was the case when earlier studies on the language were done.

The age range of the respondents was between 20-50 years as shown in table 1 of this research work. An investigation meant to establish if Sheng is limited in terms to the youth of Kenya. This data would be useful in testing the study hypotheses formulated for

this study. The research findings were analyzed and reported descriptively and by use of tables as shown below.

**Table 1.1 Age of respondents**

<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 20 yrs.	15	27.73	16	23.18
20-35 yrs.	20	28.98	27	39.13
36-50yrs.	20	28.98	12	17.39
Over 50 yrs.	14	20.29	14	23.18
Total	43	105.98	69	123.17

**Table 1.2: Occupation of respondents**

Occupation	Number of Respondents
Lawyers	3
Teachers	15
Politicians	5
Civil servants	6
University Lecturers	8
High school students	6
University students	10
Others	10
Total	69

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SHENG IN KENYA

#### 2.1 Introduction

Sheng is language which has existed for more than five decades now (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). What is not clear though is when the use of Sheng began in Kenya, Mazrui (1995). For more than five decades now Mukhwana (2008) sociologists, Journalists and anthropologists have reported and done several linguistic research on this language variety that is largely associated but not limited to the urban youth of Kenya; for example, Osinde (1986), Spyropoulos (1987), Kembosure (1992), Myers and Scotton (1993), Mazrui (1993), Mazrui (1995), Wessling and Mous (2001), Ngesa (2002), Ogechi (2002), Mukhwana (2008) to demonstrate that there is no clear cut period that shows actually when Sheng began in Kenya. Various theories have been fronted about the origin of Sheng. For instance, Shitemi (2002) Osinde, (1986) and Abdulaziz and Osinde (1997) have argued that Sheng began as a peer language in the socio-economic eastern suburbs of Nairobi popularly known as East Leigh in the 1970s

Some other scholars claim that Sheng emerged in the low class estates of Nairobi (the ghettos, city slums) like Kibera, Jericho and other early slums. As we all are aware slum dwellings are congested and a single room can be shared by parents and children. In such a case children devised a language code that would isolate their parents when it came to communication needs. This language was called Sheng (a blend of Kiswahili, English and popular Kenyan local Languages like Gikuyu and Dholuo (Kembo Sure 1992: 26-27).

Another argument fronted by sociolinguistics scholars like Mazrui and Mphandes (1990) show that a Sheng like code existed as early as 1930's in the Nairobi underworld among the pickpockets (Argots). Mazrui (1995) asserts that Sheng originated in the 1930's as a Nairobi underground argot. He gives Sheng like examples that can be found in *miaka 50 katika jela* by Michael Ngugi Karanja. Spyropoulos (1987: 30) argues that Sheng was used as early as the 1950's but became pronounced in the early 1970's. The language used by the Mau movement in the 1950's was itself considered a code that resembled Sheng in many aspects, for instance, *aigopaigo* (backformation of words) a common method used in formation of Sheng, lexemes was used by the Mau Mau veterans. (Mukhwana 2008). Despite

this disagreement, linguists in this field seems to agree that there is a variety that sounds like Kiswahili and which resemble closely in structure and vocabulary.

This is a peculiar tongue with unstable vocabulary. (Sheng words changes regularly in form and meaning) (Echessa 2002) Looking at the nature of Sheng spoken in Kenya today unlike in the 1980's and 1990's we observed that, the use of Sheng is no longer restricted to the slums (ghettos), the urban underclass and the urban youth but has gained widespread usage across the divides, for instance the political class, modern city churches, the business fraternity as evident in the local TV programs like *HapaKule news* of NTV, radio and billboards advertisement, not forgetting the newspaper advertisements. Ghetto radio which started 2008 and whose broadcast language is purely Sheng, is a good illustration to show how the language has grown over time. Its broadcast has been very successful, a situation that has forced other local media houses to borrow a leaf.

The attitude of people towards Sheng which has been negative for about two decades (Ogechi 2005) has also changed. Earlier in the 1980's and 1990's Sheng was viewed as an Argot (language of vagabonds/outlaws) (Abdulaziz 1997). In fact studies conducted by Abdul Aziz (1990's) points out that Sheng began in 1930's as a language of the underclass being commonly used by pickpockets. The fact that the language was associated by the poor (in the slums) also made it look inferior in use, in formal settings by those who considered themselves as privileged, educated and economically stable. Today, speaking in Sheng in Kenya is a mark of cosmopolitan (not affiliated by bitter Kenyan ethnic backgrounds,).

This means Sheng is a symbol of national unity and not a preserve slang of a few youths within the city. Today in Kenya linguistic scene, Sheng is considered a language of prestige. Those speaking in it are being termed as-digital savvy, informed and not old fashioned). For instance the use of sheng phrase '*Niajewsee and ,Hawayuni*' by president Obama in addressing his audience during his 2015 visit in Kenya, is enough assertion to this. There has been several attempts to resist the spread of Sheng especially in schools where it has been considered as interfering with learning of English and Kiswahili which are Kenyan official languages and medium of instruction in Kenyan schools. However the efforts have not yielded any fruits as on the contrary its acceptance and spread has since increased because the ideal role of any language in society is to be able to serve as many speakers as

possible just like English and Kiswahili which have been a major emphasis in Kenyan national curriculum for a long time.

Sheng is a unique code characterized by many features, some of which look a bit similar to those of argots, jargons and slangs causing this study to go an extra mile conducting an investigation to establish what Sheng really is, an effort that is deemed in doing away with complexities involved in Sheng, thus offer a clear platform for better understanding of Sheng.

## **2.2 Features of sheng**

Sheng as a language variety commonly spoken but not limited to the youths of Kenya is a unique language by itself when compared to other languages like English and Kiswahili.

Lexeme variation in Sheng is very regular and occurs in a very short period of time. It is a unique feature only found in Sheng as compared to English and Swahili. It is true that all the languages have a diachronic and synchronic aspect in lexeme variation but this is not regular as experienced and witnessed in Sheng.

Assuming you live in Kenya and happen to be a speaker of Sheng, when you live and come back after let's say four months or so, you will be shocked by the massive changes especially in Sheng words and yet within the same linguistic environment (Mukhwana 2008). This explains why despite several serious attempts by lexicographers to design sheng dictionaries. It has been difficult to do so, and even in cases where efforts have yielded fruits with scholars like Ileri Mbaabu, the shelf life of such dictionaries have been limited; Thus rendering them obsolete. A Sheng dictionary authored today will cease to be relevant within a one year period. Word change in Sheng, is one of this language unique features.

## **2.3 Lexicalization in sheng**

Lexicalization in this context has to do with how meaning is sourced and encoded in Sheng. A language variety that is common but is not limited to the youths of Kenya for about three decades now (Ogechi 2005). Surface morphemes in Sheng look like Kiswahili leading to the claim by many linguists scholars, that Sheng is a Kiswahili based language. (Mukhwama 2008, Mbaabu, Nzunga 2008, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). another school of thought also exists (Ogechi 2005). Some lexemes of Sheng are also identical to Kiswahili and other Kenyan popular languages.



The Sheng spoken in Kenya has varieties based on geographical regions. For instance the Sheng spoken in Nairobi varies from the Sheng spoken in Meru, Kisumu or any other Kenyan town. It is difficult for those not initiated into this language of Sheng, not even the Kiswahili speakers to follow a Sheng conversation. The reason being that borrowed words may have different meanings in Sheng as opposed to their source languages.

### **2.3.1 How lexemes are created in Sheng**

The language of Sheng gets its lexemes from the Kenyan languages where Kiswahili, English, Dholuo, and Gikuyu stands out as the donor languages. Sheng words are also drawn from other foreign languages like German and French, American westerners and karate break dance films (spyropoulos 1987-85). Most of the among others. Sheng words are borrowed then restructured/modified while others are continuously coined. Although many scholars in this field may not agree on the time Sheng began, all agree consens that Sheng is based on Kiswahili grammars (Myer and Scotton 1993- 39). Kiswahili is main lexyfying language ( feeder language) in Sheng. A lexifier language in this context refers to the source language where most of the lexicon of Sheng comes from (Thomson 2001 -74).

Sheng so far, has no standard orthography. So in all the examples used in this paper Sheng words and phrases are spelt the way they would be sounded following a Kiswahili phonological system.

#### ***Code- switching in Sheng***

Sheng employs code switching where a matrix language is involved (Myers – scotton 2002). A matrix language in code switching is the language that lays the grammar of another language

1. Ma – odijo wa- me – strike (odijo is a Sheng word that means teacher) In the above example, there is code switching between English and Kiswahili where Kiswahili is the matrix language (ML). This is because; if we look at all the system morphemes (classes and tense makers) we notice that they are borrowed from Kiswahili (Ogechi 2005). The matrix language of Sheng varies depending on what is the language of the wider communication in any given speech community. Sheng is based on Kiswahili as a matrix language (ogechi 2005). (Another language variety which resembles Sheng-*Engsh*) is based on the English frame, and is spoken in the Westland's area of Nairobi – a

much higher socio-economic class estate. *Engsh* also has a high density of English surface morphemes as in example 1 above.

2. *Si you akina pass for mwa morrows in your wheels, we do a swallow at the vuras (ogechi 2005)*

### ***Interpretation***

Come for me tomorrow in your car so that we can go for a drink at the carnivore. Mwa ‘me’ morrow ‘tomorrow’ Themvuras- carnivorerestaurant Sheng as indicated earlier has several lexifying languages (e.g. osinde 1986, Echess 1990, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, waithira 2001, Ogechi 2002) it is true to argue that once the lexeme leave the source language(s) and are used in sheng, they assume a new meaning (sense) altogether how these meaning is deduced is a process which cannot be covered in this present study due to the depth of the subject.

Sheng is identifiable at the lexeme level and its lexeme is unstable and keeps changing their meaning (sense) Most of the time Sheng words might resemble the same in the source language yet they carry a different sense from what they mean in the source language.

Just like lexicalization in sheng, English and Kiswahili. Nouns constitute the largest share of items in sheng (Ogechi2005)

### **2.3.2 Words formation process in sheng**

*Reversing syllables (aigopaigo)* In attempt to remain unique and distinctive code for peers only, Sheng speakers employ the reversal or swapping of syllables in a word (Ngeera 2002).

Once a word has been sourced from one of the languages in the speech community where Sheng is being used. The surface form of the word is manipulated so that the resulting word looks completely new and unique from the source language eg the Sheng word *dika* is a *backformation of Kiswahili kadi*

#### *Example*

The noun word ‘*dika*’ – card has such a form. The word is sourced from the English card that is *Bantuized* in pronunciation as ‘*kadi*’ The word’s two syllables swap places so that *kadi* yields’ *dika*’. Its meaning in English however is maintained in sheng, i.e. it still means card in sheng.

### Truncation

In this method, a word is borrowed from one of the local languages in Sheng speaking community, and then the word is *Bantuized*. Thirdly, the *Bantuized* word is truncated either in it in its initial or final syllable (s) depending on the Bantu syllable structure. Fourth, the truncated form may be suffixed either a coined syllable or sound to complete its marking for sheng. The meaning of the resulting word cannot be interpreted by the non-initiated Sheng speakers, until they learn it from the Sheng speakers themselves

### Illustration

*Finje* ('fifty'), *buufewe* (bus+ave), *saaya* (science), *tizi* (practice), *preso* (president), *hasii* (husband) and *goe* (ghost). *Finje* (fifty) is sourced from English fifty then Bantuized to *fifti*. The last sound –fti and the initial syllable fi- is retained. However the dropped syllable is compensated for by *nje* to yield *finje*. Notice that *finje* has a special meaning in Sheng. It does not refer to the numeral fifty (original borrowed word) rather becomes a preserve of fifty shillings in sheng. *More case examples of truncated forms selected from Sheng adverts.* (kariuki et.al..2013)

**Table 2.1 Truncated Forms Selected From Sheng Adverts.**

Form in source language	Form after truncation	English gloss
Toklezea (Kisw)	Toklezea	Shine/be smart
Hause (Eng)	Hao	House
Tunaweza make/tunaweza wait (Kisw/Eng)	Tunawesmake/ tunaweswait	We can make it/we can wait
katizia <sup>a</sup> (Kisw, Causative)	Katsia	Disrupt
Business wise (Eng)	Bis wize	Business wise
Millioni	Milli	Million
Mobile-Pesa, Mobile-Kodi, Mobile- Kanisa (Eng/Kisw)	M-Pesa, M- Kodi, M- Kanisa	Mobile money, mobile rent, mobile church

<sup>a</sup>This form is derived from the Kiswahili verb *Katiza* (interject, interrupt, postpone). Hence, the meaning generated in this advert is 'call rate interrupts life'.

**Table 2.2 Truncated Forms continued**

Truncated form	Full form	Gloss
M-Pesa	Mobile-Pesa	Mobile-Money
M- Kodi	Mobile-Kodi	Mobile-Rent
M-Kanisa	Mobile-Kanisa	Mobile-Church
M-Shwari	Mobile-Shwari	Mobile-??
M-Banking	Mobile-Banking	Mobile-banking

Borrowing

Here Sheng borrows lexemes from other local languages like *Dholuo, and Gikuyu*.

Examples of Sheng words borrowed from Gikuyu.

Ngori (worst/bad)

Ngiri (one thousand)

Wathii (comrades)

Mathafu/githafu/mao (mathematics)

Stori (story - English)

*Semantic expansion*

Words in the category are mainly nouns that have synonyms. Here the meaning of the word is expanded as the name suggest.

Illustration (ogechi 2005)

*Msee* (mzee standard kis) (Oldman)

*Mngaro* (shinning)

*Nduthi* (motor cycle)

*Teke* (kick)

Chuo (college)

*Lapi* (laptop)

*Mburungo* (cargo)

*Nangos* (phone)

Disk (disc) assumes an expanded sense. That is the noun sense in the lexifying language is used as base of the conceptualizing the noun in Sheng.

*Bi-synonym nouns*

In this category of nouns, there is always a possibility that in any one of the two nouns given there was a *diachronic shift*, where one of the two nouns was used earlier than the other, considering that the vocabulary in Sheng are always changing.

Examples

*Jamaa – chalii – boyfriend*

*Mathee – masa – mother*

*Njaro – mchoro – plan*

*Ngoma – mahewa – music*

*Beshte – beshti – intimate friend*

*Msonjo – mngoso – white person*

*Brathee – bro – brother*

*Tri – synonym nouns*

Similarly, we also have tri-synonym nouns in sheng

*Examples*

*Moto –fwaga – cigarette*

*Quadri-synonym nouns*

This is a noun which has three equivalent .in sheng, we have nouns such as:.

*Chick – dem – kenge–manzi – girlfriend*

*Psongi- pal – karau – kopa – police officer.*

*Ushago – shagz – oocha –a dwelling place*

*Verbs in sheng*

Unlike nouns in Sheng which appear to be unstable (constantly changing), verbs in Sheng appear to have high level of stability (Ogechi 2005)

The situation is that there is lack of equivalents as opposed to noun synonyms.

What happens is that verbs appear where no known Sheng verbs existed before.

*polysemous verbs*

They are verbs constituting of more than one sense.

*Examples*

- a) Wahi – is used to mean to outsmart or upstage i.e. ‘niliwahi yule manzi’ (outsmated that girl)

Wahi in Kiswahili is used to mean to reveal a place earlier than expected.

- b) Manga – (i) to dish, eat ‘nilimangachapo’
- (ii) to have canal. Nilimangadonge’

### *Synonyms*

Although not common, some verbs have synonyms.

### *Examples*

Hanya–katia(seduce a girl)

Susu–nyoora(urinate)

Wahi–samba(beat up)

Note that the largest share of verbs unlike nouns have no synonyms. Kiswahili based verbs constitute the bulk of Sheng verbs about 44% (Ogechi 2005). Adjectives in Bantu languages are few, Kiswahili similarly has few adjectives and Kiswahili being the base language in Sheng. The fact that the adjectives are few makes the available few Bantu adjectives to be used with many senses.

### *Examples*

‘poa’ (adj)

Poa –the surface form of *poa* is reminiscent of Kiswahili *poa* for *cool*.(Ogechi 2005)

However in sheng ‘poa’ evokes many senses largely due to semantic borrowing from English.

- a) Mtu ‘poa’ (a gentleman)

- b) Pesa ‘poa’ ( a reasonable pay) especially after some work

‘Nomaa’ is a coined adjective which is variably used

- a) Mtu ‘nomaa’ (a person of good character)

- b) Mtu ‘nomaa’ (a troublesome person)

## **2.4 Kenyan people attitude towards Sheng to date**

Sheng language in Kenya begun to creep into homes, , schools and Kenyan streets at unbearable speed as early as 1950s according to Osinde (1986). However this was not taken kindly by many who considered the language a big threat .Those who did not like the code at that time, claimed that it contributed to moral decadence as it was highly linked to outlaws at the time(argotic).

The schools waged war against Sheng, the pulpit thundered against it and many parents and the working class who aspired to gentility banished it from the home. Despite all this tireless efforts, the storm became bigger and the language of Sheng flourished underground, in male dominated sanctuaries like city streets, lodges, casinos, poolrooms, barbershops, pubs, garages, matatus (public service vehicles)', and salons.

By late 1990's the altitude towards Sheng had begun changing. Today everyone in Kenya young and old uses Sheng. It has become *a lingua franca for Kenyan youth* in Kenyan linguistic scene.

Sheng words are majorly borrowed from Swahili and English words. Kenyan local languages like Gikuyu, Luo, Kamba and Luhya as well as foreign languages like German and French have also had influence on Sheng. In particular, music industry from main genres such as reggae is conspicuously present in sheng words. It is common to hear young people fondly referring to their close friends as '*wagwan!*' A term usually associated with reggae musicians from Jamaica. (Urban dictionary 2016). Like any other Slang, Sheng in Kenya is mainly used by the youth and children including the young generation commonly referred to as *digital gen or dotcom*.

The observation of this study showed that Sheng evolves rapidly regardless of the stigma associated with it. New sheng words come up to replace the old ones once they become too familiar to those deemed outsiders Sheng is a common language in towns and cities. Each town has its own variety on a set of terms.

Most of the commonly used Sheng words and their meanings.

1. Madha –

*Synonyms*

mathe, myaka, moda, masa

Refers to mother. Its pronunciation is borrowed from English.

Mathe amekam – mother has come.

2. Mburungo – refers to cargo.

3. Sonko – refers to a rich person or boss. Synonyms – mdosi.

4. Pack – borrowed from English which means to reside. He packs in westy.

5. Chapaa – refers to money.

Dau, dooh, mkwanja, ganji

Dakamkwanja.

*Different values of money.*

Sh 100 – Thau

500 – jirongo, Punch

200 – Rwabe

50 – chwani, Finje

20 - Mbao, blue

10 – Kindee, Ashuu

5 – Kobole, Ngovo

Commonly used by touts.

6. Ocha - Upcoming, rural home

Also ushago, mashinani, moshatha

7. Sasa – used in greetings

In saying, how are you?

You can also use ‘Niaje’

8. Ndai, Ndinga, Moto, Mwenga – vehicle.

9. Dame, chick – refers to a girl

Also msupa, shore, mresh, manzi

10. Mangware – early in the morning.

11. Mnati	-	Rastafarian
12. babi	-	a person who doesn't speak sheng
13. bonga	-	talk
14. ndai	-	car
15. chapaa		
16. mkwanja	-	money
17. ganji	-	
18. soo, kioo, red	-	100 shillings
19. finje, chuani, guoko	-	fifty shillings
20. mbao, blue	-	twenty shillings
21. ngiri, thau, ndovu	-	a thousand
22. njeve	-	cold
23. buda	-	old man
24. ngodha	-	underpants



25. masa; mathee	–	mother
26. mbochi	–	maid /house help
27. deree	–	driver
28. keja, hao, base	–	house/ home
29. msapere	–	a kikuyu
30. nare	–	fire, matches
31. kirindi	–	crowd
32. chipo	–	chips /French fries

According to Kelvin jacton Okoth from 60 Sheng services, Sheng signifies the negotiations and struggles of the Kenyan youth. The voice of family comes to (youth) in ethnic languages that embody tradition and heritage. Sheng gives the youth the opportunity to challenge the ideologies and identities that attempt to define them. Okoth created Sheng.co.ke when he saw that there was no home for sheng. It has become a platform website for the sheng speakers where visitors can find an extensive dictionary containing definitions for 3900 words, a lively forum, lyrics, translations and crossword puzzles.

The goal of the project being to demystify, document, archive and organically grow Sheng language and culture. Each person feels represented and has a sense of ownership in Sheng, given the fact that the language is continually evolving, “says Okoth. Okoth believes that Sheng is inclusive enough to unite the politically and ethnically fractured Kenyan population. Because the sheng language and culture, to date remains the only initiative that has incorporated the very best of the diverse languages and the cultures of the tribes of Kenya. Sheng has been for a long time termed as the language of the urban youths, especially in the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods since the 1960s (Muthoni.M.2015). It is a language created by borrowing words from Swahili and other languages locally and stringing them together using Kiswahili syntax to come up with this unique yet complicated language.

This is what makes it appear to many a version of Swahili perhaps to some extent a dialed of Swahili being spoken by those city dwellers of Nairobi who are unable to speak standard Swahili as opposed to those living in the Coast of Kenya, despite its artistic nature of borrowed items lexemes. To others the language resembles a pidgin or even a creole. However, going by the analysis of data gathered in this research the linguistic nature and status of Sheng are not clear as it does not wholly fall under any of the solid paralinguistic

codes of language namely: argot, jargon, Slang, , Creole, or even Pidgin. Looking at it keenly one can only assert that it incorporates characteristics of these varieties to a certain percentage.

In summary the Journalistic and scholarly efforts /attempts to situate sheng language within sociolinguistic typology have so far succeeded in raising more questions than answers, and unconsciously perhaps, have tended to re affirm the supposedly enigmatic character of this emergent speech form (Muthoni M.2004). Sheng as a language has been spoken in Kenya by several generations (Abdul Aziz 1987) and is a key part of Kenyan history and heritage and that means it should be studied and given the importance that it deserves. Sheng is not only a means of communication but also a powerful identity tool of successive generations of youth in our country Kenya where the youths constitute 60% of the population. This has historically allowed them to identify themselves as a distinct group from those other Kenyans who speak vernacular languages, Swahili and English.

To majority of Kenyans today sheng is considered as a symbol of unity in a country where tribal affiliations have resulted to a bitter path almost tearing the country apart as inl 2007 post-election violence which was orchestrated tribal incitations by Kenyan politicians.

In relation to this research topic, (Sheng –a linguistic code that is neither Jargon, Argot nor Slang) sheng has grown beyond these Para lingual codes as both Slang and Jargon are basically Para codes of professional groups (e.g. law, military, medicine, engineering among others).

And in both cases those para codes have socio-psychological function of differentiating one group from another, the prostitutes from the street hustler, the chemist from the biologist in short ‘US’ from them. There is need for an extensive study of these sociolinguistic characteristics of Sheng before we one can lay a claim unfolding this apparent puzzle of Sheng. For a long time when Sheng was considered ‘slang’ has not been documented. However projects such as Sheng, Nation among several others, have begun to change this narrative (Maingi-M). Technology has been used as a tool to document various Sheng words and their meanings. Since Sheng is a polysomic language-meaning its words have a number of meanings and, interpretations or understandings. Sheng Nation started by one Okoth.k. has been able to digitize and provide records on its Website that to date is accessible world over

## ***2.5 conclusion***

Among key challenges the language of Sheng is facing, is language experts in Kenya are dedicated to standardizing the language, discrimination-for a long time the perception has been, that sheng is a language spoken by the urban underclass, illegal groupings (an argot) and a preserve language of the economically challenged (disenfranchised). This has had a strong impact on the masses. This has contributed negatively towards growth and development of sheng but to utter disbelief of many the language has stood out It is good to point out that this view is absolutely dangerous and does not project... the heritage and culture of the country negatively especially considering that language is an essential and integral part of a people's culture. Sheng is and will remain part of Kenya rich cultural heritage.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### 3.0 Introduction

In order to be able to answer the research question on whether Sheng is an Argot, jargon or Slang in Kenyan linguistic context, it is prudent for us to analyze this linguistic code in terms of argot, jargon or slang. However, understanding the term argot, jargon and Slang will be a major step to this task. The terms slang, argot and jargon in this context are defined as applied in social linguistics where they stand as synonyms. In a general definition the three were found by this research to refer to a vague and high sounding or technical and esoteric language not immediately intelligible to the un-initiate. For the purpose of this research (Maurer 2016) an attempt was made to have a narrow definition of each term as follows: note that the definition given in this case is the working definition that was found suitable for this study

#### 3.1 Analysis of Sheng as an argot.

Argot is a language code comprised of a specialized idiomatic vocabulary peculiar to a class or group of people especially, that of an underworld designed for Private communication and identification : a restoration play rich in thieves (Oxford English dictionary) This refers to the specialized speech of criminals (vagabonds). In this context the term argot is specifically used to mean a secretive language used by criminalized group (outlaws ) with a sole purpose being to lock out those considered to be non-members of that social group.

Looking at the current nature of Sheng( Miringo2016) , we fail to reconcile with the argument that Sheng is a language of outlaws(argot) because it has been widely accepted as language of all and sundry. business companies for instance banks, mobile companies, media houses have adopted it as a marketing language due to its amazing influence Kenyan masses. Our research observed that yes at one time as various scholars have observed(Abdulaziz 1997,Mazrui 1995) Sheng begun as clever craft by illegal groups but surprisingly enough it did not remain there.it simply got the attention of other people though accidentally and expanded gaining more speakers as time moved on.

### **3.2 Analysis of Sheng as a jargon**

Jargons are a common feature in such fields like law and medicine (Maurer 2016),. Those outside the said groups are locked out in communication and cannot understand the jargon because the terminology used by Sheng speakers is highly coded. Sheng in a similar manner uses highly coded words. Without being initiated to those who speak the language (mainly the youths). It is difficult for a non-Sheng user to pick the language easily. Just like all jargon, once the meaning of a word becomes popular in general public, a new one is invented to replace the existing ones. The old vocabularies are discarded and become obsolete with the key aim being to maintain a high level of secrecy among its members. To many jargons are seen as isolative languages, an attitude that is also common with sheng in Kenya although with the rise of sheng speakers in the country, this is gradually changing. With increase in popularity of the language of Sheng the level of secrecy which was originally intended has diminished as a good population of Kenyans population become acquainted with Sheng words.

### **3.3 Analysis of Sheng as a Slang.**

Slang in most cases is flippant, irrelevant, it may be indecent or obscene – it's succinct sometimes witty, well crafted, frequently impertinent and full of social criticisms. Slang does not only include not just words but words used in a special way in a certain social context. This research found out that the ethnology of slang of the word slang is by itself obscure; it first got a mention in print around 1800 and was applied to the speech of disreputable and criminal classes in London. It is closely related to argot and jargon, where sometimes the terms are used interchangeably in a more less similar manner. Going by this explanation of Slang, our position was that Sheng has some features of a Slang but does not be classified as a slang because in our interviews we found that Sheng in Kenya is used in both formal and informal settings.

### **3.4 A broad analysis of Sheng as either Argot, Jargon and Slang**

Is Sheng an Argot, jargon or Slang in Kenyan linguistic context?

In an attempt to answer the above research question and basing our argument on the given definitions of , argot , jargon, and Slang this research embarked on the analysis of Sheng with a key objective being to establish indeed if and whether Sheng is a, argot jargon or slang

Going by the literature given on this study, by earlier works on Sheng (Abdulaziz(1997) There is a consensus that indeed the language began as substandard linguistic code which was meant to serve communication needs of a particular social group. In slums for instance, this research established that Sheng was as an inventory of the economically disadvantaged or the underclass with the informal settlement. It was meant to keep their affairs privy considering that most of the slums are located next to major estates within the city of Nairobi. Other than this, Sheng had not assumed any communication role. This could have been a reason why most of the studies on the subject described it as a city slang ( Osinde (1986), Sypropoulos (1987), Kembo Sure (1992), Myers and Scotton (1993), Abdul Aziz and Osinde (1997) , This study also established that in the city slums ( there are so many criminal activities that are carried out by gangs who reside there.

Most of the lootings are done in the estates that surround these slums or even far in the central business district, the loots are taken back to the ghettos where the gang leaders make arrangement on how the loots are to be distributed, says one Otieno, a daytime ‘mitumba’(second hand clothes) vendor at Kibera who this research interviewed on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2014. He also told this study that, in order to be able to execute such criminal activities; those involved in the game invent an *argot* (a code language specifically used by criminal gangs). So as to keep their affairs privy and avoid it leaking to authorities. He also in an interview says that new words are invented and once they became known to the public they are replaced with new ones. When asked on the names given to this language, his response was that it is a form of Sheng ( a sheng variety within that region) which is more like Kiswahili..

When asked whether the Sheng spoken in Kibera is all argot, he disagrees by saying that some Sheng variety spoken in the area is just Slang because the degree of secrecy is less. He asserted that this was common among children and youths. When asked whether Sheng is only used by the youth in the area, Otieno told this research that this was no longer the case, as the language is now popular to all age groups and that the speed in which it has gained acceptance and spread was just amazing. Historically, youths who engaged in criminalized activities like gambling, substance and drug abuse the parking boys and other criminal gangs, adopted the language. The sole aim here being to keep their affairs secretive. As a result the working elite developed a negative attitude towards Sheng. The tag given to sheng at the time would best be described as *an argot*. It got condemned in schools as it was

considered to be behind many indiscipline cases and as a language that was behind the mastermind of many city schools strikes. (Githiora2002) Performance-wise it had negative impact on English and Kiswahili which are considered basic subjects in Kenyan education. This explains why many educationists adapted a negative attitude towards the language (Momanyi 2009).

On the contrary, what was considered to be substandard, inferior and technical language (jargon) has gained unbelievable spread and acceptability not only among Kenyans but also to the neighboring countries (Jowal 2016). This turn of event(the Sheng revolution) has elicited a lot of debate. Linguistic scholars both locally and abroad have done key outstanding research on the subject with a an aim of demystifying the language of Sheng, which to many appears strange and complex. However, these studies have raised more questions than answers because there is need to make people understand the nature of this language, A necessity this research seeks to address Looking at the work of the earlier scholars (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, Kießling and Mous 2004, Momanyi 2009, Rudd 2008, Fink 2005, Annah, kanana and Kebeyaa 2015, Mukhwana 2008, Mutiga2013), serious efforts to define sheng have been made. However, we established as stipulated in chapter one of this study, that most of the descriptions given to Sheng tends to lean towards descriptions of argot, Jargon and slang.

The said work cannot be trashed, especially if we consider the fact that Sheng, just like any other natural language has synchronically and diachronically been developing, The current face of the language is absolutely different as compared to the state of the language in the 1980s and the 1990's. Today just like English and Kiswahili (full-grown languages) Sheng has a well-defined structure grammar and phonology. The structure of Sheng grammar, and phonology resembles that of Kiswahili which is considered to be the lexyfying language among other local and foreign languages in Kenya. Therefore, with this in mind, it would be wrong to stick on the same opinion of researches that were done two or three decades ago for a language that is not static or dead.

The attitude of people across the country has also changed towards Sheng. Initially, few wanted to associated with it (an argot) due to its association with the illegal groups (outlaws). The rapid spread of the language has caught everybody by surprise. It has surpassed that of English and Kiswahili which has been given precedence by the government as far as

language planning is concerned. It is amazing to see how Sheng has become popular in Kenya.

Paralinguistic codes like argot, jargons and slangs are not used in formal communication; they are restricted to certain social groups within the society. Notice that Sheng today is a preferred language of advertisement, politics and pulpit especially in major modern Pentecostal churches in Kenya with the city, argot, jargon or slang cannot serve this linguistic role. Our research also established that Sheng is a major language being used in the social media and mainstream media. Most of the radio and television programs use sheng (Citizen East Africa music show on Citizen TV and radio by Mzazi M. Tuva, the trend – NTV, which uses a blend of English and Sheng, *Kubamba* on Citizen TV, a blend of English and Sheng, *Tukuza* on KTN, *HapaKule* News-NTV are among many others).

Radio stations like Ghetto Radio (2008) broadcast entirely on Sheng. One may argue that the radio targets the youth but again, are all the radio products including radio news designed for a particular group? Across our Kenyan streets most of the Kenyan billboards are filled up with Sheng adverts done in Sheng. A study conducted by this research around central business district in Nairobi, indeed was a proof to this. Out of the twelve billboards that we came across nine of them were littered with sheng phrases and words. Even in cases where we found the product being advertised the target group was not limited to youth. Phrases like *mkopwasalo*- an advert put forth by Barclays bank of Kenya. *Kanduda phone* advert by the orange phone company billboard placed at the general post office headquarter building (Kenyatta Avenue), Nairobi next to Koinange Street.

The fact that the language is popular among the youth in Kenya is not enough conclusion that Sheng is a language of the youths.. We can only argue that, going by the bureau of statistics data that is only a coincidence with the knowledge that Kenyan youth form the largest percentage of the Kenyan population (about 60%). Therefore, it is only common sense that they will form the majority of the speakers in this language called Sheng. Early studies in this field have shown that Shengt was pioneered by the youths so as to give them social identity but then it does not also mean that the code remained there for the sole reason that languages are not static.



Our current observation is that, both young and old use the language today in many occasions. This means the idea of a peer language is in the case of Sheng has been bypassed by time

Looking at other slangs in use in Kenya as well as Jargon for instance, the military jargon, the law and medicine jargon or even the *Matatu*(public vehicle industry) Slang among conductors and drivers, we realize that they have not had a strong impact in the Kenyan linguistic scene as Sheng . In terms of popularity and spread one would say that Sheng spread has been unmatched. The military jargon for instance, is invented for use by the military and has since remained a preserve for the military, since it is not common or known among the civilians in Kenya.

Sheng has advanced in terms of language status and has become prestigious. Those speaking fluent Sheng are seen as modern, digital savy as opposed to analogue (term used to mean outdated, old fashioned, un informed generation) in Kenya. This is the reason why you will find it being used alongside English and Kiswahili in office and official functions, sometimes by the big wings in politics. The recent use of phrase '*hawayuni*' by the U.S president when visiting Kenya (2015) when he addressed a political gathering at Kasarani was enough indicator of how prestigious the language has become. Notice that this is not so with other slangs, jargon or argot. For in most cases, the latter are mere underground languages which are known only the in-group members

Although Sheng emerged from city slums and middle class estates like Eastleigh,(Abdulaziz and Osinde1997),this current study has shown that sheng did not remain there. A study conducted by this research in S.t John secondary school (Meru) in a remote locality showed that many of the students were conversant with the language and did most of the conversation in Sheng. A few teachers (two language, and one science teacher) who were interviewed on the same said that the future of sheng in Kenya was bright and that it wouldn't be shocking to see it being incorporated in the Kenyan curriculum as a language of study. They also stated that it would be useless at this era to try and curb the spread of this language because the magic behind it is just amazing. On the contrary, they say it can be used to teach other languages like English and Kiswahili. This is more likely going to bear fruits since the learner's attitude towards Sheng is positive. Analysis of Sheng in terms of features of natural human languages.

### *Displacement*

This feature refers to the ability to speak not only about what is happening at the time and place of talking but also about other situations, future and past, real or unreal sheng has the ability to mark tense and indicate what is real and not unreal.

### *Arbitrariness*

This is a situation in language where there is no natural connection between the world or sound and the thing it denotes. Most of the words in sheng behave like this for instance:

*Mzæe*– person

*Buda* – old man

*Buu*– Bus

*Mrenga* - car

*Chuani* – fifty shillings

### *Productivity/ Creativity*

The potential number of utterances, as well as the number of words and meanings in human languages is practically infinite. Sheng is one language whose productivity/ creativity in terms of words and phrases are unmatched. New words are invented to replace the old ones and also to match the inventions that come with new technology.

### Examples

#### Sheng wordgloss

<i>nangos/teje</i>	mobile phone/radio
<i>lapi</i>	laptop
<i>ukedi</i>	HIV/AIDS
<i>digaga/dingdong</i>	sunglasses
<i>blingbling</i>	ornaments
<i>jumu/ndula</i>	shoe

### *Cultural transmission*

Although human beings are born with certain genetic disposition for language use (e.g. shape or vocal tract) it does not predetermine which language we are actually going to use as our mother tongue. In Kenyan cities today, there are those who are being born and begin using Sheng as their first language – despite having an option of other languages (those of their

parents) This research also found out that the first breed of Sheng speakers are now in the fifties and some now are even grandparents. They had a great influence to their children and now grandchildren. This means there are cases in some homes where children have picked Sheng as their first language observationally this trend is likely to continue meaning that Sheng is no-longer a preserve of the youth.

### *Duality*

Human languages have two levels – minimal units, the alphabets for writing and phonemes for speech – which do not have meaning on their own and the level where the meaning emerges as a result of combination of the units from level one. Sheng language has orthography as well as phonological system. It is a well-structured language.

### *Learnability*

Apart from being able to speak Sheng, the language does not hinder speakers from learning other languages of interest. Any person can learn how to speak Sheng given one has interest and opportunity to do so.

### *Reflexiveness*

This is the ability in a language of being able to speak in abstract concepts. Sheng has such words popularly known as metalanguage which captures abstract concepts.

### *Conclusion*

From this discussion then, we can conclude that sheng is indeed a development from argot, Jargon and slang. Slang and jargon are not standard languages. However, Sheng began here but with time the language became popular, gained spread and acceptability among many Kenya today. It is beyond a code or register. Today, sheng stands as a human language, with all the features of a language as would befit any natural language. Such features include arbitrariness, productivity (also creativity or open-endedness), cultural transmission, durability, prevarication reflexiveness, learnability and displacement. The fact that the language of Sheng may seem to lacking in some aspects of human language is not enough reason to disqualify it as a language considering the idea that the language is still in the process of growth and development.

Sheng is a language that was born in Kenya and Kenyans should take pride in it. It slowly began as an argot, jargon and slang and gradually has developed to a full grown language displaying all the features of a natural human language like Kiswahili. Earlier scholarly works in this field have tried to describe Sheng as either argot, jargon or slang. Such academic works cannot be faulted on the grounds that human languages are not static, something that informs our consciousness that the Sheng we are speaking today might have undergone several changes. Meaning that, the variations we see in earlier studies on the subject are as a result of language growth and development, considering the fact that this happened at different periods. We also cannot say that this research work is exhaustive of the subject because for one, the language is not static and the situations we are seeing today are subject to change because like any other language Sheng is in the process of growing and changing. New words are being invented and old ones become obsolete. In fact, Sheng words change very fast – a unique feature in this language.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

When we embarked on this research, we had hypothesized that:

- i) Sheng is neither argot, jargon or Slang, and that Sheng is not a development from , argot; jargon or slang.
- ii) Sheng as a linguistic code is not limited to the youths of Kenya and that Sheng has been assigned communication roles in Kenya.
- iii) Sheng has undergone development in structure, usage and spread overtime and that, new technology and mainstream media has enhanced the spread and acceptability of Sheng in Kenya.

In relation to the hypotheses stated above, an argot is language that can be created to serve a certain group of people for a given reason mainly outlaws and mostly used in informal situations/settings. Our research established that Sheng began slowly, this way but developmental changes followed thereafter. Sheng is not a argot, jargon or slang but a development from argot, jargon or Slang From the definitions of argot, jargon and Slang, we realize that the terms are synonyms which can be used inclusively to refer to any substandard language used by a particular group.

According to Abdulaziz (1997), Sheng emerged as an argot in Eastlands of Nairobi. The attitude of many people towards Sheng which by then, was that Sheng a language code designed for use to maintain secrecy in a informal setting .At that point in time, Sheng had few users, mostly the youths and criminal gangs who wanted to remain private in their communications as they conducted their daily activities .

The youths (mostly teenagers) because of the urban housing problem that forced them to share limited space (families living in small houses) had to come up with creative ways of communicating with their peers (initiates) by trying to keep off their parents from their conversations in a clever way that did not bring conflict in the house(Ogechi 2005). Sheng vocabulary was invented, mostly borrowed from Swahili (a national language in Kenya). The words were retailored, others coined different word formation methods like *aigopaigo* (back formation), clipping, were used.

To non-initiates these words sounded unfamiliar, a common feature in Sheng .which is the case of Sheng words even today. Once the Sheng words became known to outsiders (non-initiates) they were immediately replaced with new ones and the old ones discarded the goal being to maintain a high level of secrecy. This is a common feature to all slangs, jargons and argots.

However, as time passed by just as it is with other natural languages, Sheng underwent changes synchronically and diachronically. About the Sheng being spoken in Kenya today, this research found out that Sheng has grown into a language that can meet most of the communication needs in any human society. Today Sheng is not only spoken by youths or criminal gangs as was the case historically (Abdul Aziz 1997). The mainstream media, social media and print media have played a great role in promoting spread and acceptability of the language. Ghetto radio (2008) conducts all of its broadcast in Sheng. Sheng websites like the ‘ *Sheng nation*’ have been created where people globally get an opportunity to learn and share new Sheng words and also contribute in developing the language. The youths have also popularized the language through the use of smartphones and other technical-savvy gadgets, in social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Looking at the accounts of most of the youths interviewed by this research, we found out that, majority use Sheng not only as their mode of communication but also a mark of socio identity. The spread of Sheng has further been amplified by social media presence as a tool of communication mainly by young people.

In print media we noted that some scholars have made efforts in publishing Sheng dictionaries (Mbaabu1996). Although we noted that the shelf life of these dictionaries are short because of the changing nature of Sheng words. Looking at the art of lexicography (Okoth. 2013) lexicographers can only come up with dictionaries for languages that are already developed in terms of structure (syntax, phonology semantics) Established business organizations in Kenya such as banks, Coca cola and mobile companies(safaricom, airtel) use Sheng as their language of advertisement in most of their products like loans ( for example *Barclays mkopowa solo 2013, Jienjoyna coke, Bamba 5, Bamba 10, kwa chuana safaricom*) among others.

To ascertain the success of Sheng in usage this research established from the above sources that products that were advertised in Sheng were more successful as opposed to those adverts

done in other languages, thus making Sheng a language of preference. We noted that argots, jargons and slangs cannot perform such communication roles effectively as they are limited in terms of users. This thus showed how sheng has grown over time despite the fact that ,at one time in history as pointed out by earlier scholars, where Sheng was portrayed as a Para lingual code(argot, jargon and slang) .

Sheng as a language is not limited to the youths of Kenya. This research found out that the sheng being spoken in Kenya today (2016) is not just limited to the youths in terms of usage. Sheng speakers are varied, ranging from children to adults, gender notwithstanding.

To the youths, it is a symbol of unity and identity. Most of the urban youths interviewed in this research agree to this. One, Ongera, a 28 year old, who hails from South B, a residential estate in Nairobi ,informed this study that, Sheng is language of unity and social identity among the youths in Kenya, once you speak in Sheng the feeling you get is that of brotherhood, regardless of your ethnic background. Nobody bothers whether you are a Luo, Kisii, Meru or Gikuyu, as long as you can connect in this language. He further asserted that this has helped promote unity among the youths in Kenya. “We see each other as one big family comprised of young Kenyans,” this situation has helped the youths deliberate on various issues that affect them like search for employment, education opportunities, and political issues among others. The social media was cited by one Kamundi (30years old male, who hails from Eastleigh) as a major instrument which has helped Sheng grow and expand.

When asked about the attitude of youths towards Sheng, majority of the youth interviewees told us that Sheng is now widely accepted across the country. In fact, one interviewee, manases Kuria ,a 33 years old from *babadogo*’ ( a slum in Nairobi) told us that speaking in Sheng was more prestigious than speaking English which many us consider foreign and misplaced because it was a language that was imposed to Kenyans by their colonial master, (the British),Sheng has a Kenyan taste because it was conceived in Kenya .This means it is part of the larger Kenyan cultural heritage.

This research also found out that, even though Sheng was a popular among the youths of Kenya it was not a reserve of the youth. Another interviewee Charity Karimi from University of Nairobi, Chiromo campus and Mercy Kendi – Kenyatta University (Main campus) in their response to our interview asserted that indeed Sheng was a brain child of youths which was

originally meant to serve their communication needs as an in group language, but surprisingly did not remain there.

Sheng penetrated into other squares like matatu industry, academic institutions, work places (offices) markets and music industry. This became a spring board for Sheng. The more the resistance it faced, the more the it spread it spread. Muthomi Thiankolu (an interviewee) a popular city lawyer told us that Sheng spread like bush fire – ‘ it was unstoppable and will not be stopped,’ he further adds that “Those who are opposing the language are fighting a losing battle”, everybody loves Sheng and it looks prestigious to speak in the language for both the young and the old.

Those who are unable to speak in Sheng are seen as old fashioned and misplaced. This led to a situation of language shift especially in local cities where Kiswahili was initially given preference as a national language. Parents are also working hard to learn the language so as to be able to communicate with their children in as far the role of parenting is concerned. One senior sergeant Muema administration police officer at Uhuru camp Nairobi told us that initially he did not like the language but with time he was forced to learn it in order to be able to communicate with his children and follow up on them, now that it had become a common language in use “The more I discouraged my children Monica (15 years) and Kelvin (15 years) from using t he language, the more I got surprised by the rebellion that I encountered from them. Sheng was all over the barracks spoken by all generation, ‘.the power behind Sheng is just amazing, it is just a complex language and unstoppable and there is nothing you can do, if you can’t beat them join them’”, sergeant Muema added”. Today he says that he equally speaks Sheng well and has made friends with most of the youths both within the city and outside while on his military duties so as to ensure he doesn’t miss out on the language new inventories.

Police crime investigation units are also urged to learn the language in order to be able to unearth most of the crimes which in most cases are common among the youths. (The digital savvy generation). Prominent businesses too have taken notice of the language. In business, if you want to remain in business, one has to be aware of people tastes and preferences of the people, said Alex Tunya, a 32year old bank manager with standard chartered bank in Nairobi Moi avenue.



We established that this was what key companies like Safaricom, airtel and commercial banks were doing. We noted, a good number of advertisements on bill boards across the city and those aired on television were tailored in Sheng. Going by the progress of these companies, we observed that Sheng played a great role in marketing. Most of the customers were influenced to buy the products because of attraction by the catchy Sheng phrases that accompany different product adverts

For instance Safaricom credit popularly known as 'bamba'.

Other Safaricom adverts done in Sheng that did pretty well include:-

Kwachua Na Safaricom promotion, kopa credo (Airtel)

Looking at 2013 political campaigns, this research also found out among the major language used in campaign period Sheng was one of them. Sheng dominated especially in regions where the political campaigns took place within the Kenyan cities and involving large crowds. One Nairobi senator Mike Mbuvi Sonko who identifies with the youth and a regularly Sheng speaker, sold his political ideologies in sheng. In most of the forums here, we found out that, voters in Nairobi are drawn from different ethnic backgrounds and varied ages, 18 years and above. Going by this relation, we realize that Sheng is not limited to the youths. If it was so, a politician like Sonko who is fond of using Sheng would have bitterly lost the election if a case of attitude and stigmatization were still a factor

Presidential aspirant Peter Kenneth had his presidential slogan in 2013 done in Sheng, *'Tunawes make' this was a calculated move*. The adoption of such a move is a clear indicator how powerful Sheng has become as a social tool. Although he did not win the elections, he did pretty well considering that this was his first attempt in running for presidency. US president Obama use of Sheng greetings *'Niajewassee' and 'Hawayuni'* while in Kenya recently (2015) demonstrated that Sheng had developed and has come of age and that, it was now a language that was being recognized not only in Kenya but globally considering that he was addressing a formal gathering and US president (Super power) like Obama, are respected world over, and cannot take sides with anything that is likely to compromise their reputation.

We noted that his greetings was received with acclamation 'poapoa' (a Sheng response which means "we are fine") by both young and old present in his presidential meeting at Kasarani sports stadium 2015. We also established that Sheng is rich in terms of vocabularies and has a

well-established structure that resembles that of Kiswahili (CV CV). The phonological system in sheng is also borrowed from Swahili which is the key lexifying language. We noted that once a word in Sheng becomes too common. It is discarded and a new one is immediately invented then adopted in the system. The media (print media, social media, and radio) plays a significant role in spread of Sheng words and phrases.

## **4.2 Conclusion**

From our research findings basing our argument on the data analysis provided in this chapter we are able to conclude that Sheng is not an argot, jargon or slang in Kenyan linguistic context but a development from the latter. The development though was not sudden. This study found out that Sheng has grown into a full status language because it can be analyzed using all the features used in describing any human language. Such features include; duality, reflexiveness, learnability, and arbitrariness. Earlier researches in this field (Osinde 1986, Shitemi 2002, Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997) have given Sheng a description similar to that of argot, jargon or slang (see definitions these terms on chapter 1)

However we can not discuss the language in isolation of the argot, jargon or slang, because Sheng despite its tremendous growth still harbors, features of these paralinguistic codes.

For instance Sheng vocabularies are dynamic and the changes are so frequent, something that has made it difficult to prepare and roll out Sheng dictionaries (Mbaabu 1998). When we look at all argot, slang or Jargon, we also realize that lexical changes are a common feature.

This is explained by the fact these languages are Paralingual codes - not standard languages and are specifically designed to serve a certain social group where those deemed be outsiders are locked out. In argots, criminal groups like thugs, prostitutes and gamblers are members of this register while in Jargons; the language is a bit technical and is designed to work well with professional groups like doctors, lawyers, military and engineers. Slangs are common in city streets, slums, and workplaces. They do not have an established language grammar and structures.

Sheng begun here with a limited number of vocabularies, it covered a limited geographical space. This amazingly begun to change unexpectedly to the shock and disbelief of many. The

language expanded, despite the spirited resistance from parents and heads of schools who considered it a threat to learning of English and Kiswahili flourished and has become so popular and prestigious attracting the attention of all and sundry. It has become a key research in linguistic department within Kenyan Universities and abroad as in this case.

Sheng is highly associated with the youth of Kenya but not limited to the youth or Kenya in terms of usage. Today Sheng language is being used in the neighboring countries of Kenya and Uganda (jowal 2013).

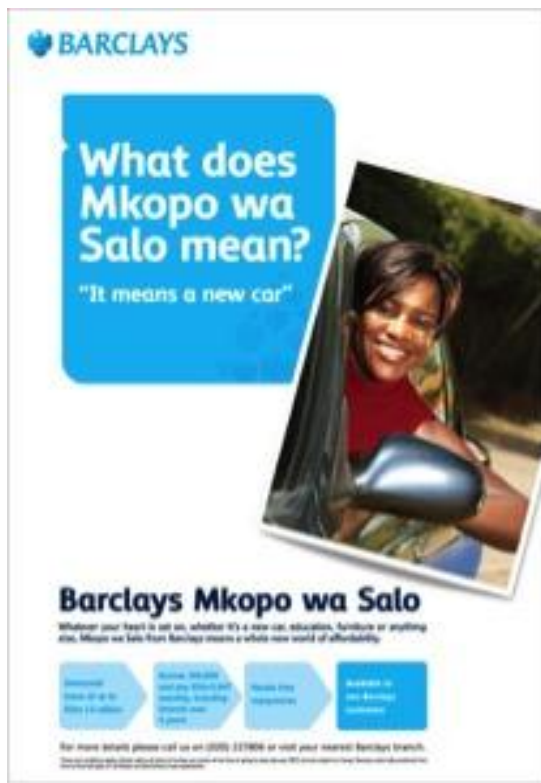
The youths play a great role in formulating grammar and structure of this language. Both young and old use the language. In business world in Kenya, today Sheng has become a major language in advertisement ranging from key institutions like banks, mobile phone companies like Safaricom and Airtel, insurance companies, motor industries among others. In a nutshell we confidently lay the claim that sheng has been assigned the communication role of advertisement.

As a matter of proof, we drew the following evidence to show that Sheng is a preferred language of advertisement in Kenya today. The evidence comprises of tables and pictures bearing Sheng words, phrases, and their English interpretation. The data was gathered from billboards in the city, radio, television adverts and various newspapers (Daily Nation, The East African Standard, The People's Daily and the Star newspaper), some of the materials were sourced from the individual scholars on Sheng (Annah, Kanana and Kebeya 2015) as a language of advertisement. This was done through library research (university of Nairobi and Kenyatta University)

*Selected cases to showing that Sheng is gaining momentum in Kenya.*

Sheng as a business language

A Barclays Bank advertisement for “*mkopowasalo*” which is Sheng for a loaned salary.



What does?  
*mkopowasalo* mean?  
“It means a new car”

### *A condom advertise in Sheng*

The following Shows situations that are deemed taboos in society, in this case sexuality where Africans were not supposed to express them openly. .but Sheng seem to posses the magic.. where the message is passed on to the target audience without embarrassment.



Demonstrates an advertisement for a condom for ‘*Nakufeeel*’ in Sheng for “*I care for you*”

A Sheng advert urging the public on dangers of unprotected sex

The Sheng Phrase *kuchil* in this context refers to abstinence

A poster promoting sexual abstinence targeted at the youths.



“Ni poa ku-chill” is Sheng word for it is cool to abstain from sex. Another advantage brought by sheng is that taboo topics like sex can be discussed freely without the ire associated with it. This has been extremely useful in government campaigns promoting use of contraceptives and educating the masses about HIV/AIDS.



A family bank sheng advert urging customers to continue saving with family bank. The advert was extracted from Kenyatta University library (Annah, Kanana and Kebeya 2013)

**Kunacha Acre  
na Milli Tatu Pap!**

**Transform your life now with Family Bank.**  
Win great prizes! To participate, top up your existing Family Bank current or savings account with a minimum of Ksh. 5,000 or open a new account and wait for the draws.  
The more you save the more your chances of winning.

**GRAND DRAW PRIZES**  
1st prize: 1 acre of land plus Ksh. 3M  
2nd prize: 1/2 acre of land plus Ksh. 1M  
3rd prize: 1/4 acre of land plus Ksh. 500,000

**MINI DRAW PRIZES (5 draws)**  
a) 1/4 acre of land per draw  
b) Ksh. 100,000 per draw  
c) Ksh. 50,000 per draw  
d) One TVS Motorcycle per draw  
e) Five prizes of Samsung Galaxy Pocket phones per draw

**WIN 1 ACRE Plus**  
Ksh. 3M CASH  
1/2 acre and 1/4 acre  
in the Grand Draw

**Plus Five 1/4 acres in the Mini Draws**

The land to be won is in Kitengela (Ololoitikoshi)  
BCLB NO: 001902  
**Act now!**

www.familybank.co.ke

**Family Bank**  
With you, for life

A Kenya premier league Sheng advert spotted on a past Daily Nation (1/10/2012). The game was played on 3/8/2012

A standard chartered bank advert in Sheng spotted on a student's bag at Cyber world techies in Meru on 28/5/2016



Sheng language acts as a symbol of unity among the youths and a language of identity for the digital generation. New technology and mainstream media has also played a great role in spread and acceptability of Sheng language. In the early 90's and with the liberalization of the communication sector in Kenya, a KBC radio program "*yours for the asking how*" used sheng as a way of trying to connect to the youth. The presenters of the program were John Karani and Jeff Mwangemi (1995- 1999). Later on, Ghetto radio (2008- a radio station whose broadcast language is Sheng was established with presenters such as Mbusii and Bonoko) this was a big success and other radio stations followed suite where a number of programs were redesigned and Sheng incorporated as a media language. As a result of this success, Radio Jambo poached Mbusii who would help start a similar program in their radio with co-host the

Lionna. K.A Lionndah. Due to this Radio Maisha has remained popular among Kenyan listeners. Kubamba TV show, Machachari (Citizen TV), Hapakule news, tukuza, Junior (KTN TV) Cross-over 101, sebuleni are among popular Kenyan Tv shows whose cast is based on Sheng language.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp equally have contributed to the spread and growth of Sheng language in Kenya. New words are transmitted and online sheng dictionaries were created (Okoth 2013). It has also become an ideal language in short message services because sheng uses economy of words like '*utado*' short for "*what will you do*".



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

Sheng which is a Kenyan, urban language (Abdulaziz 1987) and which is a hybrid language of Swahili, English and local languages like *Dholuo* and *Gikuyu* is commonly being used by the Kenyan youths but not limited to them as was in the case when Sheng emerged. This study has shown that Sheng is a complex language, and has aroused many questions than answers. This explains why the subject (sheng has aroused the interest of many scholars both locally and abroad (osinde 1986, Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997, Spyopoulous 1987, Mbaabu 1996, ogechi 2002, samper 2002, Fink 2005, Bosire 1996, Girthiora 2002) among others

Sheng is one of the of the most dynamic language in Kenya and is rapidly evolving. This has caught the attention of many scholars both locally and abroad, several studies have been done all with an aim of trying to give Sheng a more clear picture or a definition that will be understood by all. Several arguments have been raised with some scholars terming sheng as either argot, Jargon or slang, all depending on facts presented by their academic research. The fact that most of the studies on Sheng differ in many aspects such as origin, Sheng usage, Sheng structure, speakers, communication roles among others is enough proof that sheng is a complex subject.

We need to note that none of these scholarly works done prior to this study which has a final position on the language of Sheng, much is welcome and much need to be done in order to clear all myths and mysteries that underlie Sheng as a language. However credit need to be given to any existing research in Sheng because the works laid a foundation for the current study and the future studies in the field all will be essential. Arguably it is true to say that the subject has elicited a lot of research, much has been done but at the same time this does not mean that everything about sheng has been exhausted because Sheng is a changing phenomenon and the situation is likely to remain because all human languages change.

In order to give the language clear description much need to be done. This together with what has been documented about sheng will go a long way in removing the mysteries that have not

been expounded considering the fact that knowledge is not static, and the fact that all natural languages do change, and that the innovators(youths) creativity is unmatched

Looking at changes in this case, we realize from documented researches that when the code emerged in the early 1950's it began as a language of the underclass (less privileged) within the slums (informal setting) of Nairobi. Abdulaziz (1997). The code then was meant to be a language of secrecy(an argot).criminal gangs needed a code language that would help them communicate so as to be able to execute their affairs but at the same time keep their authorities(outer group). Some of the criminal activities involved drug peddling, prostitution and robbery within urban estates.

At the time those speaking the code would be viewed negatively, perhaps as criminals if not social deviants. This meant that Sheng was highly stigmatized ,a characteristic that many Kenyans grew up with, where those in formal jobs wanted less or no association with the code. On the contrary this study has proved that currently Sheng is one of the most vibrant languages in Kenya today. The language is also gaining popularity and prestige as days go by with key institutions in Kenya opting to use Sheng to market its products, This has proved very successful(see chapter 3 Of this study) However, interestingly this situation did not last for a long time, to many at the time Sheng was born thought that Sheng will be short lived just like any other contact language in Africa, the language that had begun as an underground language spread like bushfire prompting a lot of research then to date, something that had not been experienced in other Kenyan languages within the Kenyan linguistic context at the time and to date.

With such a robust coverage in research , many questions are being raised in every research on Sheng, for instance why has the code not been adopted as one of the Kenyan official languages despite its popularity and being felt all over Kenya. All this tells us that the subject is a complex one ,and that much need to be done to unravel the true face and position that Sheng holds in Kenyan linguistic scene . In learning institutions sheng was not received well by the education managers as it was considered a threat to existing languages like Kiswahili and English which were reserved as being the medium of instructions and which government had injected a lot of resources in their adoption. Sheng was then considered as interfering with their existence, growth and development. In Kenya English and Kiswahili are official languages and are considered

vital for national development. Despite this strong resistance Sheng has stood the taste of the time and the language Sheng seems to be doing well in every aspect of a human language. What begun as the language of the underclass is now gaining prestige with everybody struggling to learn it now that it has become a mark of cosmopolitan, Kenya not only restricted to the youths of course who are the majority of the speaker, a fact based attributed to the fact that the Kenyans youths constitute 60% of the Kenyan population according to Kenya bureau of statistics.

In this research we found out that Sheng is being used in government offices while conducting official government offices where most of the attendants in this offices happen to be youths while addressing clients within the same age bracket. The older ones between the ages of 36-50 also would speak in the same language to their junior counterparts perhaps as sign to show that they are in compliance with the digital savvy generation (not old fashioned). Most of the urban modern Christian especially in Nairobi and other major urban centers conducts their Sunday services in a mixture of English and Sheng. Examples of such churches include Jubilee Christian Centre of Bishop and Rev cathyKiuna in Nairobi. Most Gospel Artists have followed suits as their music is entirely composed and sung in sheng. We drew our evidence in Kubamba of Citizen TV, Tukuza of KTN, cross over ,HapakuleNews, of NTV –both of which are local TV programs where Sheng language dominates.

Today Sheng is no longer restricted to the Eastland's which earlier studies indicate as source of origin(Osinde !986,). It has grown in leaps and bounds and has become a lingua franca among the youths in Kenya because of its popularity that has become a rude shock to many. In Kenya today this established that other than urban cities Sheng is equally being spoken in rural areas by the youths who consider it prestigious. Most of the youths we interviewed were fluent in Sheng as opposed to their first language (Kimeru). A rural setting selected for this study. Going by the findings of this research we realize that , Sheng is indeed a complex linguistic code as opposed to other existing Kenyan languages whose structures ,history ,speech communities are clearly spelt out. If we closely examine most of earlier studies in Sheng we note that there has been a lot of developments in Sheng. The fact that there has been differing opinions as to whether Sheng is an argot, jargon, or slang, about its birth period in Kenya, its domain of usage, its technical structure(not set As a result of grammatical rules ) is a clear

indicator that, the language is a complicated issue and thus there is need for continued research to be adopted so as to shed more light and propose a common ground that will seek to address all the myths and theories that has existed in Sheng for about four decades now.

Going by s data presented in this research, The modern sheng cannot be a Para lingual code (argot, jargon and slang) in Kenyan linguistic situation. looking at the definitions of Argot, Jargon and slang as given in chapter one of this paper, we realize in both cases they serve as registers where a certain language developed and restricted to a certain group with a purpose of serving a certain communication is purpose. Looking at the historical development of sheng at one point in history this might have been true especially going by the facts presented by the earlier scholars (Osinde1986, Abdulaziz and Osinde1997).

Their definitions tend to lean towards argot, jargon, or Slang but going by the definition of a slang we all get to know that a slang is a substandard language used in informal communication by the wider community. An in depth analysis of whether Sheng is one of this) Para lingual codes(argot,, jargon ,slang) was dealt with ,where the results findings in this research showed that the code has developed into the level of a full status language. Because of acceptability and usage in and outside the Kenyan cities. Such as Nairobi which is believed to be the home of Sheng.

Looking at the ground covered in Sheng as shown in the literature review (chapter 1 of this study) ,and compare research findings with the current study investigation, we noted a lot of changes in Sheng,their arguments cannot be wished away as what we are observing of Sheng today is a journey that begun at that point in history(1960 onwards).Such works were basic and became a corner stone for this current study without which such a research would not have been possible. We consider the fact that sheng like any English and Swahili has also been assigned communication roles and its rapidly gaining prestige as it is with English and Kiswahili.

Some of the language roles which Sheng has been assigned includes advertisement, a lingua franca among the youths(language of socio identity in Kenya ,politics, media(print and mainstream media) among others. When we moved around the city streets of Nairobi we found that most of the adverts on billboard were creatively crafted in Sheng even in cases

where the products being advertised cut across socio factors like age , gender and culture. (on Sheng as a language of advertisement see chapter 3 of this paper) A substandard language will have limited in terms of language roles and in its domains of use, but this is no longer the case with Sheng today as our research observed.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

When we embarked on this research our sole aim was able to answer the following research questions and objectives. As a matter of fact we can only argue that this paper has done so as presented in our conclusion remarks below: *Is Sheng a, argot, jargon or slang in Kenyan linguistic context?*

In response to the above question, we had to observe the current face of Sheng being spoken in the Kenya today and compare it to argot , jargon slang in many aspects such ,definition, origin, structures, lexicalization, speech population ,language roles ,and influence to other languages. Argot, jargons and slangs are synonyms which are used to refer to informal languages used by a specific group of people, that is in a general sense. In this context the terms, argot, jargon and slang were dealt with separately although they appeared similar in many ways. This was essential as it helped in drawing the distinction that exists between them and Sheng. An argot is as a specialized idiomatic expression, peculiar to a group of people especially that of an underworld group, devised for private communication and identification: a restoration play rich in thieves(web star dictionary).

Sheng begun as an argot (Osinde and Abdulaziz 1997)where the youths wanted to maintain their criminal activities such drug and substance abuse ,sexual matters ,it was also a language of criminal gangs operating in city estates and Nairobi CBD. At that point in time most the language was only known and understood by this minority group(the inner group),this made the outsiders develop a negative attitude towards Sheng and it was highly disregarded especially working class especially those working in the informal sector unlike currently as our research found it .In Kenya today Sheng has been widely accepted and is spoken not only informal setting but as well as formal setting where it is used alongside Kiswahili and English(Kenyan official languages).The element of secrecy and an outlawed group usage that characterize argots

has declined to a greater extent because Sheng in Kenya today is spoken by all (young and old).

Looking at Slangs in relation to Sheng, a Slang is defined as a language that consists of words and phrases that are very informal and particularly restricted to a particular context or a group of people, synonyms argot, patois, cant, jargon (Oxford dictionary).

Scholars like (Githiora 2002, Ogechi 2005, Mokaya 2006, Mukhwana 2008) view Sheng as a slang, however this study is of the different view based on the argument that such studies might have been influenced by the traditional notion hybrid language especially in Africa that arose as a result language contact situation where makeshift languages had to be created.

In such a situation the degree of formality in structures and lexicalization of such languages was of little or no concern to the people who spoke them. In my observation this might have been true of Sheng at some point in time but with the acceptance of Sheng as language in print (newspapers, journals, internet, magazines), mainstream media (ghetto radio 2008, local television), politics and advertisement industry, might have triggered a transition of such a notion considering human languages change. The fact that slangs are more common in speech than writing was also used to refute this claim considering there is a lot of available prints that have been done in Sheng ranging from Sheng dictionaries to literature books.

So argument in this study is that Sheng is neither an argot, jargon or slang but has been a development of the latter. The process has been a robust one and is still ongoing. This informs the voice of reason why there has been many conflicting opinions in the description of Sheng in earlier studies on Sheng. Such a move in my findings is very normal considering that all human languages exhibit a characteristic of change and no language is static. The earlier studies in my finding still remains relevant as they give the language of Sheng a history which is critical for any further research in the subject as was in this present case.

In conclusion, Sheng is beyond an argot, jargon or slang, as things stand now study data analysis presented in chapter 3 of this paper, Sheng can only be described as a language which is still in the process of growth and a development. This situation can

best compared to teenage in human life which is characterized by a lot of confusion before someone settles down, without underscoring the fact that this period is also essential, and it is during this period that a lot of positive developments in psychological, physical and social occurs and resultant is a defined being in character and personal attributes. Sheng is in a such transition period which is characterized by all the complexities which range from definition, structure, usage, acceptability, speakers to its spread among other issues. my observation is that Sheng is not only a language because of its widespread usage established structure just like other languages, the Sheng structure resembles that of Kiswahili as outlined in chapter 3 of this paper.

The fact that sheng has also been assigned communication roles such as advertisement, language of politics, a cosmopolitan language among the youths (a unifying language) also indicates that the language has grown from being just as a mere register to a full status language like English and Kiswahili . Sheng has developed gradually into almost a full status language and is now an accepted language within Kenyan society without any stigmatization, as was the case before. We also foresee the future of this language in Kenya considering its rapid growth and development .A study of this nature is significant and might be of use to the language planners of this country(Kenya).

#### *On role assignment*

Today sheng boasts of a good space in terms of usage and acceptability within the Kenyan linguistic context. As a result it has been selected by business fraternity in Kenya as an effective language in products advertisement, road show adverts and entertainments. Most of the city modern churches whose congregation is majorly the youth use Sheng for instance Jesus celebration center which is owned by Bishop and Reverend Cathy Kiuna(Nairobi),consecutive sermons seen on Television. Politicians too in their attempt to tap on the youth prowess and consolidate their votes have similarly not been left out. statements such as *Tunawesmake, Rao, Unye, Weta, Stevo*, were vibrant in 2013 elections campaigns Sheng featured also in many political gatherings organized by Jubilee and CORD(the two major political outfits in 2013 National election period.

Sheng is a dynamic language that keeps changing in terms of structure for instance and vocabulary. New words are invented and incorporated to the language every time. When you go and come back after 3-5 months you will be shocked to see how much the Sheng you

knew has changed .This explains why it has been difficult to come up with lasting Sheng dictionaries. This is a unique feature found only in sheng language. (Mbaabu1996)

#### *The role of technology in promotion of Sheng*

Technology and mainstream media has greatly helped in the spread and acceptability of sheng as a language. Radio stations like ghetto radio (2008) which purely broadcasts in Sheng has greatly helped in acceptability of Sheng as a language of communication. Local televisions business adverts which are mainly done in sheng too have had a major impact in the growth of Sheng as a language. Local music program like East Africa show hosted by *mzazi. M. Tuva, Kubamba, Tukuza* among others has played a great role in promotion of this language. Social media like *Facebook, twitter, whats Apptoo* have helped grow the language where most of the sheng words are transmitted and popularized.

Lastly we cannot underscore the fact that this research work was useful and timely since it has helped remove the linguistic confusion that has existed over time as to whether Sheng is a jargon, argot or slang in Kenyan linguistic context and explain why the Sheng phenomenon has been on the upward trend despite all the serious attempt to resist it over with time. Resisting. Sheng in modern Kenya is an effort in futility ,this energy wasted to kill the language should for instance be re directed on further research in Sheng in order to establish to how well can the language be adopted through continued investigation of language aspect such as structure and its domain of usage. This research sought to clarify many issues that were deemed of concern all in an effort aimed towards rediscovering Sheng and give it a description that will aid Kenyans and the global speech community in understanding Sheng.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

When we set to out to undertake this research, we had the following hypothesis

- i) Sheng is neither argot, jargon, slang and, that Sheng is a development from argot jargon and slang.
- ii) Sheng as a linguistic code is limited to the youths of Kenya.
- iii) Sheng has undergone development in structure usage and spread overtime.
- iv) New technology and mainstream media has helped in the spread acceptance of Sheng as a linguistic code in Kenya



However not all the hypotheses tested were true for example the hypothesis number (4) was found not to be valid as Sheng spoken in Kenya today has gone beyond the youth in terms of usage. We therefore recommend the following as areas of further research on the topic:

- i) Sheng is not a an argot, jargon or slang in Kenyan linguistic scene but a development that has gradually been occurring over the years. It is the recommendation of this research that a further research be conducted on another selected language in Kenya based on the topic language development in order to establish if indeed this is a common trend to all languages or if is language specific(only unique to Sheng)
- ii) It is the recommendation of this research that ,instead of stigmatizing Sheng as has been the case in Kenyan learning institutions, it should be incorporated in the Kenyan curriculum and be adopted to teach English which most of the learners have been found to have challenges because Sheng is already a language of interest to them.
- iii) This study also recommends more future studies on Sheng which should seek to establish the strategies and ideologies that have led and sustained Sheng rapid growth and development, a situation that has not been experienced Sheng related languages like *Engsh* (Mukhwana 2008)
- iv) Future studies need to do more on the specifics of Sheng such as structure of Sheng which was narrowly dealt with here in order to give a robust description on structural hybridity and the constraints that are involved .For instance why are two languages mostly involved in a mix and not others?
- v) Looking at the roles assigned to languages earlier scholars namely:(Ferguson 1959, Abdulaziz 1973, and Bat Ivo2004, 2005) who have come up with the language labels of: *Diglosia*, *Triglossia* and *Quadriglosia* respectively. It is the recommendation of this present study that further research on Sheng, looks at roles assigned to languages in Kenya to see whether, there exist a language situation that can be described as *Pentaglosia* after now the emergence and acceptance of Sheng in the Kenyan linguistic scene.
- vi) It is the recommendation of this research that further research be done to establish why Sheng has been the upfront trend in terms of growth and usage and why the language has spread beyond the youth in Kenya and it would be impact on Kenyan other languages like Kiswahili and English.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1 showing age variables of respondents used for the study**

*Table 1*

<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 20 yrs.	15	27.73	16	23.18
20-35 yrs.	20	28.98	27	39.13
36-50yrs.	20	28.98	12	17.39
Over 50 yrs.	14	20.29	14	23.18
Total	43	105.98	69	123.17

**Table2: Showing occupation of respondents involved in the study**

Occupation	Number of Respondents
Lawyers	3
Teachers	15
Politicians	5
Civil servants	6
University Lecturers	8
High school students	6
University students	10
Others	10
Total	69

**Table 3 and 4 Showing Truncation –a word formation process in Sheng. Kariuki et al.(2008)**

Form in source language	Form after truncation	English gloss
Toklezeza (Kisw)	Toklezeza	Shine/be smart
Hause (Eng)	Hao	House
Tunaweza make/tunaweza wait (Kisw/Eng)	Tunawesmake/ tunaweswait	We can make it/we can wait
katizia <sup>a</sup> (Kisw, Causative)	Katsia	Disrupt
Business wise (Eng)	Bis wize	Business wise
Millioni	Milli	Million
Mobile-Pesa, Mobile-Kodi, Mobile- Kanisa (Eng/Kisw)	M-Pesa, M- Kodi, M- Kanisa	Mobile money, mobile rent, mobile church

<sup>a</sup>This form is derived from the Kiswahili verb Katiza (interject, interrupt, postpone). Hence, the meaning generated in this advert is 'call rate interrupts life'.

**Table 4: Truncation method continued...source- Kariuki et-al.(2008)**

Truncated form	Full form	Gloss
M-Pesa	Mobile-Pesa	Mobile-Money
M- Kodi	Mobile-Kodi	Mobile-Rent
M-Kanisa	Mobile-Kanisa	Mobile-Church
M-Shwari	Mobile-Shwari	Mobile-??
M-Banking	Mobile-Banking	Mobile-banking