Language Change and Social Networks among Somali Refugee Teenagers

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

University of Witwatersrand, 2009.
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University.

Phylis Jepkemboi Bartoo
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to look at the linguistic social integration of Somali refugee teenagers in Eastleigh, a Kenyan suburb, within Nairobi, the capital city. The study gives a descriptive account of the social networks along with domain analysis in order to discuss language change by the teenagers having moved from a monolingual Somali to multilingual Kenya. Most studies in Kenya on refugees are centered on the welfare and livelihoods of refugees excluding language. The thesis delineates the social networks of the Somali teenage refugees in Kenya to establish how they are coping linguistically. The Somalis were chosen because they are the majority amongst all the refugees.

The main research question is: Do the social networks the teenagers make affect their linguistic choices in Kenya and result in language change? The research is based on interviews, questionnaires and observations of thirty (30) research respondents who were selected using snow ball sampling. Social Network theory (Milroy, 1980), Domain analysis (Fishman, 1980) and ideas from the Postructuralists (Woolard, 1985; Heller, 1991 and Norton, 2000) are used to understand and analyze data in relation to: language change, social identity, ethnicity, language and gender and power.

The analysis of the data indicates that the teenagers have dense and multiplex social networks in Eastleigh. The social networks are Kenyan and Somalian based. Such networks have enabled them to retain the Somali language to a large extent and have also acquired other languages which are used in Kenya: English, Kiswahili and in few cases Sheng. Having established that Somali community is patriarchal; such a set-up has not hindered the different genders to use their language in a similar way. The teenagers have devised ways of using language in order to ‘fit in’ the Kenyan linguistic social set. Such strategies include code-switching and multiplicity of identities. The linguistic market, (Bourdieu, 1990) empowers various languages in different domains. It is also clear that the vulnerability of the teenagers as refugees has curtailed their participation in the mainstream teenage subcultures in Kenya.

Based on the findings, the research contributes to the deeper understanding of the refugee linguistic orientations in Kenya. This could inform language policy makers and the government of Kenya on the predicament of the refugees. It could also make known the language problems the teenagers have while in school. Finally, the research is hoped to make an original contribution to the general sociolinguistic theory.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the following:

My husband Sergon, who sacrificed a lot to put me through the programme.

My parents John and Veronica, the pioneers of my education.

My sister Rose, for putting everything on hold and devoted all her time to my children.

My children Sandra, Christian and Loren, who at this stage I pass the mantle to move on. May this study become a path-finder in their careers.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One: Introduction, Historical Background and the Rationale of the Study</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Sociolinguistic Profiles of Kenya and Somalia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Kenya</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1.1 English</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1.2 Kiswahili</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1.3 Sheng</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1.4 Indigenous Languages</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2 Somalia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2.1 The Somali Language</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2.2 Other Languages in Somalia</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The Refugee Question</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 The Kenyan Constitution in Relation to Linguistic Rights</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.1 Aims and Objectives</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.2 Research Questions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Rationale of the Study</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 The Context of the Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Definition of Terms</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Chapter Organization of the Study</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 Social Network Theory</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Domain Analysis</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 Poststructural Approaches</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Literature Review</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Social Network Studies</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.5 Major Themes in the Studies..............................................................................48
  2.5.1 Language Change.......................................................................................56
  2.5.2 Social Identity..........................................................................................49
  2.5.3 Ethnicity....................................................................................................50
  2.5.4 Language and Gender..................................................................................55
  2.5.5 Language and Power....................................................................................60
  2.5.6 Language and Identity..................................................................................65
2.6 Conclusion.........................................................................................................72

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology.................................74
  3.1 Introduction.....................................................................................................74
  3.2 Research site: Eastleigh..................................................................................74
  3.3 Population and Sampling..............................................................................75
  3.4 Methods of Data Collection...........................................................................80
    3.4.1 Questionnaires..........................................................................................80
    3.4.2 Interviews..................................................................................................83
    3.4.3 Observation..............................................................................................84
  3.5 Data Collection Process..................................................................................85
  3.6 Methods of Data Analysis.............................................................................86
  3.7 Ethical Considerations...................................................................................88
  3.8 Methodological Limitations..........................................................................90
  3.9 Conclusion.....................................................................................................94

Chapter Four: Somali Teenager’s Social Networks.................................96
  4.1 Introduction.....................................................................................................96
  4.2 The Social Networks......................................................................................96
  4.3 Characteristics of Social Networks.................................................................129
    4.3.1 Network Density.......................................................................................139
    4.3.2 Multiplexity..............................................................................................130
  4.4 The Somali Teenagers and Social Integration.................................................134
  4.5 Chapter Conclusion.......................................................................................139

Chapter Five: Somali Teenagers and Language Use in Kenya..............143
  5.1 Introduction.....................................................................................................141
  5.2 Domain Analysis...........................................................................................141
    5.2.1 Family and Home Domains.....................................................................144
    5.2.2 Friendship Domain..................................................................................148
    5.2.3 School Domain.........................................................................................151
    5.2.4 Neighbourhood Domain.........................................................................154
    5.2.5 Religious Domain....................................................................................156
  5.3 Social Networks and Language Use...............................................................161
  5.4 Social Network Index and Language Choices among the Somali Teenagers....163
### 5.5 Language Usage by the Teenagers in Kenya

- 5.5 Language Usage by the Teenagers in Kenya .................................................. 163
- 5.6 Language Proficiency among the Teenagers .................................................. 164
  - 5.6.1 Performance in Spoken Language .......................................................... 166
  - 5.6.2 Performance in Written Language .......................................................... 167
  - 5.6.3 Some of the Errors noted in the Use of Languages .................................. 167
  - 5.6.4 Language in Order of Preference by the Teenagers ............................... 171
- 5.7 Motivation for Learning the Languages in Kenya ........................................ 172
  - 5.7.1 Economic Incentives ............................................................................. 173
  - 5.7.2 Exposure ................................................................................................. 173
  - 5.7.3 Individual Effectiveness ......................................................................... 174
  - 5.7.4 Religion .................................................................................................. 174
- 5.8 Role Relations ............................................................................................... 175
- 5.9 Is it Diglossia or Truncated Multilingualism? .............................................. 176
- 6.0 Second Language Acquisition and the Adolescent ....................................... 179
- 6.1 Language Shift and Maintenance ................................................................. 180
- 6.2 Conclusion .................................................................................................... 182

### Chapter Six: Language Change and Gender .................................................. 184

- 6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 184
- 6.2 Somali Culture ............................................................................................. 186
- 6.3 Gender and Domains .................................................................................. 188
  - 6.3.1 Home and Family Domain ..................................................................... 188
  - 6.3.2 Neighborhood Domain .......................................................................... 190
  - 6.3.3 School Domain ...................................................................................... 190
  - 6.3.4 Friendship Domain ................................................................................ 193
  - 6.3.5 Religious Domain .................................................................................. 195
- 6.4 Social Networks and Gender Language Use ............................................... 196
- 6.5 Statistical Correlation of Language and Gender in Each Domain .............. 199
- 6.6 Factors Contributing to Gender Language Difference by the Teenagers .... 201
- 6.7 Language Behavior among the Teenagers ................................................. 202
- 6.8 Gender as a Social Construct ..................................................................... 204
- 6.9 Teenage Subcultures and the Somali Teenagers ........................................ 205
- 7.0 The Teenagers and Agency ......................................................................... 206
- 7.1 Conclusion .................................................................................................. 213

### Chapter 7: Linguistic Strategies by the teenagers in a multilingual set up .......... 214

- 7.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 214
- 7.2 Linguistic Market ......................................................................................... 215
- 7.3 Domain Language Allocation ..................................................................... 219
- 7.4 Code Switching ........................................................................................... 225
  - 7.4.1 Excerpt 1: Solidarity ............................................................................. 228
Chapter 8: A Summary of the Main Research Findings and Directions for Further Research

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Findings in relation to the research questions

8.2.1 What are the Linguistic Characteristics and Complexities of the Teenagers Social Networks of the Refugee Teenagers?

8.2.2 To what extent are the teenagers social networks oriented towards the Speakers linguistic/and or ethnic group?

8.2.3 To what extent have the refugee teenagers lost or retained their mother tongue?

8.2.4 Is there a Linguistic Gender Difference among the Refugee Teenagers?

8.2.5 What Linguistic decisions have the Teenagers made in Kenya?

8.3 Findings in relation to theory

8.4 Directions for further research

8.5 Conclusion

REFERENCES

APPENDICES
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A Map of Eastleigh: Research site
Figure 2: Social Network Structure
Figure 3: Data Analysis Model
Figure 4: A Bar Chart Showing Language Use at Home and Family Domain
Figure 5: Bar Chart Showing Language Use in School Domain
Figure 6: Bar Chart Showing Language Use in the Friendship Domain
Figure 7: Bar Chart Showing Language Use in the Neighborhood Domain
Figure 8: Bar Chart Showing Language Use in the Religious Domain
Figure 9: Language Preference
Figure 10: Gender Language Use in the Home and Family Domain
Figure 11: Gender Language Use in the Neighborhood Domain
Figure 12: Gender Language Use in the School Domain
Figure 13: Gender Language Use in the Friendship Domain
Figure 14: Gender Language Use in the Mosque
Figure 15: Social Networks and Language Choice
Figure 16: Social Ties of a Respondent in the Friendship Domain
Figure 17: Social Ties of a Respondent in the School Domain
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Refugee Population in Kenya.
Table 2: Socio-demographic Profile of Refugees
Table 3: Refugee Population in Eastleigh
Table 4: Respondents Level of Integration
Table 5: Relationship between Social Networks and Language Use
Table 6: Language Preference in the Informal Domains
Table 7: National Language Preference in the Informal Domains
Table 8: Language Speaking Proficiency
Table 9: Performance in Writing
Table 10: Percentage Language Use according to Sex Split by Network
Table 11: Correlation of Language and Gender
Table 12: Domain Distribution of Languages
Table 13: Language Domain Switch.
**List of Acronyms**

[ ]: Blank Category.

*Arab*: Arabic Language.


*CRO*: Centre for Refugee Studies (Moi University)

*CS*: Code Switching.

*Eng*: English Language.

*FMSP*: Forced Migration Studies Programme.

*Kis*: Kiswahili Language.

*L1*: First Language

*L2*: Second Language

*SL*: Second Language.

*Som*: Somali language.

*UN*: United Nation.

*UNHCR*: United Nation Higher Commissions for Refugees.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Subject Information sheet
Appendix 2: Informed consent for questionnaire
Appendix 3: Consent for interviews
Appendix 4: Consent for recording
Appendix 5: Parental consent
Appendix 6: Questionnaire
Appendix 7: Interview Schedule
Appendix 8: Social Network Scores.
Appendix 9: Language Distribution Table