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2010-08-10
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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.

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Phylis Jepkemboi Bartoo

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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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To begin with, I thank the almighty father who has given strength to my supervisor and me throughout the study at the University of Witwatersrand.

Secondly, I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Andrew van Der Spuy, who has dedicated his time, strength and expertise to guide me through this process of the doctoral research. His professional advice, willingness and understanding are highly appreciated. To him I say 'Asante Sana'.

Thirdly, I am highly indebted to the respondents who willingly agreed to participate in this research. In addition, are the parents of the teenagers who accepted their children to be part of the study without expecting anything in return despite their vulnerability as refugees in a foreign land. Without their willingness, this research could never have taken off. May Allah bless you in a mighty way. To you all, 'Wadmahadsantihin'

Fourthly, a number of scholars have contributed in various ways to this research and to my academic writing, namely; Prof. Susan Van Zyl (Director, Humanities Graduate Center), Prof. Loren Landau (Director, Forced Migration Studies Programme), Dr. Arista Da Silva, Dr. Mwaniki Munene, Dr. Ben Afful, Dr. Godfrey Chesang, Dr. Maina Mutonya, Beverly Achieng and Tara Polzer. All contributed immensely in the various stages of the proposal and thesis writing. To all, I wholeheartedly thank them.

I wish to express my gratitude to all those researchers whose works have greatly inspired me such as Milroy (1980), Norton (2000), Mesthrie (2000), Wiklund (2002), Chesang 2006 and Dyers (2000, 2007).

Fifth, I appreciate the financial support from the Tothill Prestige Scholarships, CODESRIA and Egerton University awards which made proposal writing, data collection, data analysis and final write-up possible.

Finally, I also want to extend my gratitude to my husband, J. K. Sergon; my children; Sandra, Christian and little Loren; my parents, all my brothers and sisters and my dear friends, Li'Tsepiso, Bev (roommate), Nelly and Jacinta for their love, patience, encouragement, support of various kinds and at times, distraction. All of them have made the academic journey worthwhile.

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List of Acronyms

[ ]: Blank Category.

Arab: Arabic Language.

CKRC: Constitution of Kenya Review Commission.

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.

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