

Communication Challenges in The Language Use of Business Transactions between Traders and Their Clients in Nakuru Town Open Air Market in Kenya.

Authors:

Augustina C. Akaze¹; Eliud K. Kirigia²; Felicia Yieke³
(1,2,3) **Laikipia University, Kenya.**

Main author's Email: okwumuonso@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

This study aimed to evaluate the communication challenges between traders and their clients in their business transactions in a multilingual speech community and give insight into communication challenges that people in the business community face when they are in multi-ethnic business transactions situations. The study used a descriptive research design and was guided by the Speech Theory by Austin, which was further advanced by Searle and the Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles. The size of the sample population was twenty (20) encounters of the business transactions drawn from the open-air market in Nakuru Central Business District (CBD). Stratified random sampling was the sampling technique used. The twenty encounters of the business transactions were randomly selected from traders who sell different goods in the open-air market. The data collection method was interviews of the traders and their clients where possible. The study found that the basic communication challenges the traders and their clients faced were noise, the inability of the traders to communicate with both the speech and hearing-impaired clients, and also clients who were foreigners who could not speak any of the languages in Kenya. These challenges have a practical implication on the number of goods the traders sell as the clients would go without buying the goods when there are any communication challenges. The study recommended that strategies be put in place that will enable the general public to communicate better with the population in society, those who have both speech and hearing impairment.

Key terms: Business transactions, clients, communication challenges, multilingualism, traders.

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INTRODUCTION

In every speech community, there are communication challenges when the individuals of that community are interacting. An open-air market is an example of a speech community or even what would be called a 'community of practice'. The language and the code used in the business transactions in an open-air market are important sociolinguistics. Hence the study of language use in business transactions between traders and their clients in the Nakuru Town Open Air Market. Aaron (2020, p.1) says the following about transactions, 'Transactions represent the most direct way that international business gets done'. It is evident that transactions equally play the same role that Aaron points out in international business in national and local businesses. In the world of business, where there is an international, national or local set-up, transactions between the seller and buyer are unavoidable. Transaction of any form cannot be achieved without using language, which may be verbal, nonverbal or written.

Every group of people has their language distinct from another language (s). Whether language can be used wisely is a task for every human being since language is an essential tool that enables human beings to live the kind of life they do (Kashima, 2021). If using language wisely is not carried out successfully, communication challenges will set in, and interlocutors will find it difficult to understand one another. In the use of language, interlocutors should use language to facilitate interpersonal relationships and promote the peaceful coexistence of those who make use of a given language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature has given several reasons for the communication challenges different speech groups face in their daily interaction. Every form of communication has its challenges as no two people use linguistic items in the same way; communication challenges can occur both in

verbal and nonverbal communication. These challenges (barriers) can be experienced in a conversation between trader-client, teacher-student, co-workers, spouses, and any social group. According to Usha (2016, p. 74), a communication barrier is anything that prevents a listener from receiving and understanding the messages others use in conveying their information, ideas and thoughts. Wondu (2017, p. 47) reports that market transactions among an intercultural group in a multilingual society can create a communication gap, and interpersonal conflict might occur between those who try to communicate or interact with their respective languages. Venter (2019, p. 3) points out that computer-mediated communication lacks the richness of tone, body movement, gestures or facial expressions to convey messages. Therefore, the lack of nonverbal cues makes computer-mediated communication more impersonal.

Usha (2016, p.75) outlines different types of communication barriers as follows: attitudinal barrier, which occurs when interlocutors hold on to different attitudes and values; the language barrier is experienced when people speak different languages or when they speak the same language, but they do not have the same ability in the language; environmental barrier happens when physical setting or situation where the communication takes place is not conducive. Based on Usha's view on the physical setting or situation where the communication takes place not being conducive, a noisy environment can never allow for effective communication, no matter the effort the interlocutors make.

Blanka and Ilona (2012, p. 208) report that communication barriers come from overall life temperament, personal disposition and character, type of thinking, the paradigm of rationality, professional difference, age difference, experimental and knowledge difference and language

barriers. According to Malawina and Skalny (2019, p.116), sign language, which is a set of gestures, cannot express abstract ideas because the sign language does not have grammar. It is noticeable from this point of view that different languages have universal rules that govern the way the languages are used and, as such, can express abstract ideas; for instance, a language such as English has universal syntax and semantics, while the expressions in sign languages and their symbols are not all universal. Since sign language does not have grammar, as it has been said (Malawina & Skalny, 2019), the meaning of each sign may differ from one speech group to another. Moreover, the deaf and dumb sign language is entirely different from the sign language of those who use verbal-linguistic items.

Communication challenges affect the speech group that faces any of the challenges. Adinyira et al. (2015, p. 404) report that in face-to-face meetings and discussions, a significant challenge in communication comes from 'excessive' information beyond what is needed for a set task to function. In any given interaction, excessive information can be confusing; for a speaker to communicate effectively, he or she has to select only the linguistic items needed in that given context that will pass on the intending message to the listener(s). In an open-air market, for instance, when either the trader or the client gives excessive information, the decoder in the context gets confused; on the part of the client, they may leave and go to another trader for the goods that they need. Cultures bring communication challenges to people from different cultures, such as students; these challenges negatively affect people's interpersonal relationships (Quatro & Osunkunle, 2020, pp. 40-41). It is certain that people from different cultures who stay together are likely to face communication challenges, but what may differ is the magnitude of the challenges.

Coming from different cultural speech backgrounds to form a speech group obviously can be one of the reasons for communication challenges as people have their language(s) and how to use the language(s). Notwithstanding that Nakuru Town has people from different cultures and languages, the communication challenges the traders and their clients have do not affect the interpersonal relationship of both parties because most of the clients are not regular customers. As such, the traders and most customers do not meet regularly. The communication challenges that the traders and their customers face affect the sale and buying of the goods. Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018, p.14) say that there will be no management function without effective and efficient communication. Everything about the group that does not have effective communication will be disjointed in a disorderly manner. In practical life in an informal setting, when interlocutors face communication challenges, the tendency is for some to move away from the communication situation. Once there is a communication challenge, there is no communication. Yuliandri (2018, p.7) reports that when some speakers experience a breakdown in communication, they tend to abandon the message. Like any other speech group, an open-air market has its communication challenges and the effects those challenges have on the group.

For the fact that every social speech group faces communication challenges and the effects, there is a need for each speech group to look for ways to work for effective communication. According to Kapur (2018, p.16), some of the causes of the barriers to effective communication are avoidable; it is thus essential to overcome the barriers by identifying the causes that give rise to them. Communication aids socialisation; for any social group to function properly, it has to work to improve its communication. Since a communication challenge is anything that prevents the hearer from interpreting the

speaker's message correctly, there is a great necessity for effective communication.

Effective communication is vital as people who live together cannot do without communication; through communication, people can socialise. Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018, p. 13) look at communication as the act of sending a message through different media; it can be verbal, nonverbal, formal or non-formal so long as it transmits a thought-provoking idea, gesture, and action. In other words, no matter the means of communication, the important thing is that the means used must transmit a message that will be decoded by the listener. In communication, interlocutors have different linguistic items at their disposal, and when those items are not properly used, there will be a communication breakdown, thereby rendering that communication ineffective. Fatimayin (2018, p.16) also reports on how communication is carried out, using codes that are done with eyes, body movement, or sounds made with voice. Whichever means communication is done; there is always a process by which the speaker initiates a meaningful intent that is passed to the receiver. When the receiver of the message does not get the intended meaning is not obtained, effective communication has not taken place.

According to Parupalli (2019, p. 75), for one to travel to a foreign country, one must know the language of the host country's people to communicate with the people of that country. A foreigner who does not understand the host country's language cannot communicate effectively with the people of the host country. Effective communication is essential for the success of any establishment (Obaji & Saganuwan, 2018, p.8). Effective communication is not only essential to the success of the establishment; it is equally important in any interpersonal interaction for the successful coexistence of people in their speech communities. Communication is effective in every

interaction when the initiator of the message passes the message clearly, and the receiver interprets the meaning of the message correctly. Therefore, how the speaker passes on their message to the listener(s), the way the message is received, interpreted, and what the receiver does would show if the communication is effective. Open-air market speech group needs effective communication for the smooth flow of their business transactions.

Theory and Methodology

The study was guided by the Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962) which was further advanced by Searle; and the Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (1973). Whereas the Speech Act Theory was used to look at the illocutionary act, which form the speech acts (direct and indirect) as well as the effects of these acts (perlocutionary act), the Communication Accommodation Theory was used to show how traders and their clients converged towards each other or diverge from each other in the process of their business transactions and interactions.

The study adopted a descriptive research design of qualitative nature. The data was gathered from the sampling population of twenty participants of ten (10) men and ten (10) women who sell various goods during different interactions with their clients. The sampling population was selected from the target population (the traders and their clients in Nakuru Town Open Air Market). The instrument used for data collection in this case were in-depth interviews. For easier identification and discussion of data, colours were used to code every stratum although the participants are in strata of five by nature of the goods they sell. Those who sell fish were coded the Brown Group. Those who sell second hand clothes were coded Blue Group while those who sell vegetables were coded Green Group. At the same time, those who sell grains and cereals were coded Pink Group while those who sell chickens were coded Red Group.

The data drawn from the business interactions between traders and their customers were transcribed and then translated. The study looked at transcription as the changing of a recorded conversation (raw data) from one language to another into text for easier understanding of the raw data. According to Russell and Gery (2011, pp.48-49), transcription is listening to a recording and converting what is recorded to text (words) as audio recordings of interviews or interactions in research give raw data. When text is made out of the data collected from recordings, the text is used as a substitute for the reality under study (p. 75). According to Uwe (2011, p. 302), recording the data, making additional notes, and transcribing the recordings transforms the realities into text or words. It was at the end of the transcription of the raw data that the reality of the data for this study became evident.

The data after transcription were translated. Translation is a phenomenon used when a text is being changed from its original language to another language. Firdausyiah et al. (2021, p. 645) define translation as the process of transferring a text from a source language to a target language. In the present study, the text in Kiswahili and other ethnic group's languages were translated into English, the target language. Firdausyiah et al., discuss techniques used in translation among those techniques as 'literal translation'; literal translation technique is a technique used in translating a source text into the target text word by word (p.648). The present study used literal techniques in the translation. According to Al Khotaba and Al Tarawneh (2015, p.106), translation makes a significant contribution in the process of converting meaning from one language to another; it assists international communities in communication. Translation contributed immensely to the success of this study as most of the data were not in the target language.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

To ascertain if the traders and their clients (customers) faced communication challenges while transacting business, all the groups were asked to explain what challenges they faced when transacting business with their customers. The following are some of the responses that were captured and discussed.

Pink Group:

Female Trader: (1)

1. Yes; sometimes

Brown Group

Female trader: (1)

2. Yes, there are times when one gets blocked. It is complicated to talk with Sudanese women because they do not understand English or Kiswahili.

Green Group

Female Trader: (1)

3. Yes, there are cases.

Client (1)

4. I experience language barrier, especially with Kikuyu and Luhya.

Blue Group

Male Trader (1)

5. Yes, when there is noise from preachers or political campaigners around.

Red Group

Female Trader (2)

6. Yes.

These responses from the interviewees presented in the various groups show that the traders and their clients in Nakuru Town Open Air Market faced challenges. Then it

was very vital to ascertain what caused the communication challenges. Therefore, the traders and their clients were asked to explain what they thought caused the communication challenges they experienced. In most interpersonal communication and many group interactions, communication challenges are eminent, as the traders and their clients have reported above.

From the traders and their clients, it was found that the causes of communication challenges included too much noise around the business encounter within the open-air market, the fact that there were customers who were foreigners and did not understand the local language, and that some of the customers were persons living with hearing and speech impairment. These are discussed and illustrated in the next section.

Noise as an Impediment

Noise is any unpleasant or unwanted sound. When exhibited in any form during interpersonal or group interaction, it can cause some form of distraction and even a breakdown in that particular interaction that is on at that time of the noise. The trader below acknowledges the cause of the communication challenges he faces but seems helpless in the situation as far as the market is in the town. He equally felt that the noise caused by the beggars will always be in the market since the beggars are always in the market, and they intrude into a business transaction at will.

Pink Group

Male Trader (2)

7. *We are in town- noise is inevitable. Invariably, there will be people begging for money, especially drug addicts.*

Blue Group

Female Trader (2)

8. Noise

Brown Group

Male Trader (2)

9. *Yes; noise and yet some people speak in a low voice.*

Client (2)

10. *When the trader talks too much.*

For the above trader, noise and people speaking in a low voice caused communication challenges for him. As for the client, she experiences communication breakdown when the trader talks too much. In a situation where there is noise, it would be expected that the speaker should be audible enough for the listener to get the message that is being communicated. In interpersonal communication, such as an interaction in an open-air market, it is expected that both the trader and the client would be brief in their interaction. When talking becomes too much to the extent that it is not wanted, it may be considered noise.

Noise can come from the interlocutors themselves when some of the utterances are not needed at the point of the communication. Noise can equally come from the environment where the interaction takes place. According to Usha (2016, p.75), when the physical setting or situation where communication takes place is not conducive, the interlocutors would experience communication challenges. In face-to-face meetings and discussions, a major challenge in communication comes from 'excessive' information that is beyond what is needed for a set task to function (Adinyira et al., 2015, p. 404). In an open-air market, it is expected that the traders and their clients do not need excessive information for their business transactions. In addition to the communication challenges caused by noise, the traders and their clients also experienced communication challenges due to foreign languages.

Foreigners who do not Understand Local Languages

According to Blanka and Ilona (2012, p. 208), there are communication barriers that come from language barriers as well as national and cultural differences. The responses from the traders and their clients on foreign language as a factor of communication challenges are provided in this segment below:

Green Group

Female Trader (1)

11. *The use of Sheng; I don't understand Sheng. When foreigners from Rwanda and Burundi come, there's a language barrier or communication breakdown.*

Client (1)

12. *Language barrier, when I don't understand the language*

Green Group

Male Trader (2)

13. *When we can't understand each other because of our inability to speak Kiswahili or English*

Pink Group

Female Trader (1)

14. *People coming from other nations*

Language is essential in communication, and once interlocutors do not understand and speak a common language, there would be a communication breakdown. This has been seen in the examples just provided by the traders and their clients. To overcome the challenges language imposes on effective communication, Parupalli (2019, p.75) reports that for one to travel to a foreign country, it is vital that one must understand the language of the host people to communicate with the people of the host country. Finally, the traders reported the inability to

communicate with the hearing impaired and speech impaired persons as a communication challenge.

People Living with Hearing and Speech Impairment

The hearing impaired and speech impaired persons have unique communication challenges as they can neither hear nor speak. This means that they would have to use sign language to communicate, yet not everyone knows sign language. Communicating with them, therefore, posed communication challenges to the traders. Considering why sign language cannot be understood easily by people, Malawina and Skalny (2019, p. 116) report that sign language, which is a set of gestures, cannot express abstract ideas because it does not have grammar. While different languages have universal rules in the way they are used, the expressions of sign language and their symbols are not all universally the same. As such, sign language may not be able to express abstract ideas.

In response to the factors that cause communication challenges in transacting business with their clients, the traders pointed out that communicating with people living with hearing and speech impairment is a great challenge for them. The following were the responses from the traders concerning their challenges in transacting business with the hearing and speech impaired persons.

Red Group

Female Trader (1)

15. *People who have hearing and speech disabilities*

Blue Group

Female Trader (2)

16. *Deafness; Dumbness*

Green Group

Male Trader (2)

17. Hearing and speaking disabilities

Pink Group

Female trader (1)

18. *Those with hearing problems*

Green Group

Female trader (1)

19. *I don't understand the language of the dumb and deaf.*

The causes of communication challenges identified after interviewing the traders and their clients presented above show that both groups experience one form of challenge or the other as they transact their business. Since communication challenge affects effective communication, it has some effects that prevent any given speech group from maximising its potential or carrying out the group activities it planned to achieve. The Nakuru Town Open Air Market traders are not left out of the effects communication challenges have on interlocutors and speech groups.

According to Markovic and Salamzadeh (2018, p.14), when there is a lack of effective and efficient communication, everything would be disjointed in a disorganised manner, thus preventing meaningful functioning of tasks and events. Through the responses from the interviews, it was found that communication challenges have a tremendous negative impact on the business transaction of the traders and their clients. The following are some of the responses received from the Nakuru Town Open Air Market traders.

Brown Group

Female Trader (1)

20. *Sometimes the customers who are in a hurry go away without buying.*

Blue Group

Male Trader (1)

21. *Customers who don't like noise go away, and you cannot do anything about it.*

Green Group

Female Trader (1)

22. *Noise affects my business; some clients are impatient; they go without buying.*

Red Group

Male Trader (2)

23. *When people fail to buy my goods because of communication, I find myself poorly on that day.*

Blue Group

Female Trader (2)

24. *The deaf and dumb customers who don't know how to write and have nobody to interpret for them go away, so they don't buy.*

Pink group

Male Trader

25. *My business has no problem because the buyers are many.*

The responses from the interviews show that the traders and their clients in Nakuru Town Open Air Market are very much aware of the communication challenges that they encounter in the process of their business transactions. The traders equally know the effects the challenges have on their business. Although the male trader in the pink group indicated that his business has no problem, indirectly, he acknowledged that it would be a challenge if his customers became fewer due to the difficulties they encountered. In other words, communication challenges negatively affect the tasks of every speech group. For any speech group to improve on its communication, that group must, in the first

place, acknowledge that the group has some challenges within its communication process; identify what causes the challenges, and then look for ways to work for the improvement of their communication. According to Kapur (2018, p.16), some of the causes of the barriers to effective communication are avoidable, so it is essential to overcome the obstacles by identifying the causes that give rise to them.

Overcoming Communication Challenges

The following responses were obtained from the interview given to the traders to ascertain how the traders managed to cope with the communication challenges.

Brown Group

Male Trader (2)

26. *I use sign language when we do not speak the same language or if the person is deaf and dumb.*

Red group

Female Trader (1)

27. *If the customer is deaf and dumb but can write, we communicate through writing on a piece of paper; we can also use action.*

Blue Group

Female Trader (2)

28. *I use sign language, or I change the language to the one the customer understands if I have the language. I also call out prices loudly without much talking.*

Green Group

Male Trader (2)

29. *I have an idea of customers who come to buy; I try to understand few words from the languages of those who do not communicate in Kiswahili or English. I also shout the prices so that buyers can just come*

and buy without much speaking or asking for explanation.

Pink Group

Female Trader (1)

By learning some of the words of the languages of the customers, one becomes very adaptable to breaking the language barrier.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that the significant causes of communication challenges between the traders and their clients in their use of language in their business transactions were; noise, language barrier and the inability to communicate with the deaf and dumb. At the same time, language can be a common barrier to effective communication; when language is not used correctly. Despite the communication challenges experienced by the traders and their clients, they still found a way of dealing with these challenges to allow the business to continue. Both the traders and their clients worked towards understanding each other to benefit from each other in their business transactions.

Recommendations: The study recommended that strategies be put in place that will enable the general public to communicate better with the population in society, those who have both speech and hearing impairment. This population of people will always be found in the society; when they can communicate with the rest of the public to the extent that they are understood, they would feel better accepted by the public. Since one of the causes of communication challenges that the traders in Nakuru Town Open Air Market faced was communicating with people from other nationalities, there should be a focus on how to help foreigners with their linguistic needs. There is need for a policy to be put in place to ensure that foreigners travelling to another nation strive to at least speak the national language of their host nation.

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