Indigenising Facebook language: Use of local languages in Facebook communication among a selected group of Kenyan internet users

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Abstract

This paper interrogates how Facebook use in Kenya is being localised to serve everyone: Local people and the elite. With approximately three billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2023, Facebook is the most used online social network globally. In the second quarter of 2017, the platform surpassed two billion active users, a feat accomplished in just over 13 years. Facebook (FB) has permeated the lives of millions of people and the way they relate to one another and share information. This article examines how selected Kenyans are indigenising Facebook by using local languages. The article recognises the utility of FB as a novel tool to examine and interpret linguistic features for a selected group of Kenyan FB users. The article uses Herring's Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) theoretical framework. The research design used was both qualitative and quantitative. A purposive sampling procedure was used to arrive at eight FB friends in the 22-35 age bracket. This is the age that was found to use FB most in Kenya. The findings showed that Kenyans localised Facebook use in Kiswahili, vernacular, and Sheng.

Key words: CMDA, Facebook, indigenous language, Kiswahili, Sheng.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to examine how selected Kenyans are indigenising Facebook by using local languages. Before embarking on this, it is necessary to present an impression of the language situation in Kenya. This section, therefore, offers the necessary background to the language situation of Kenya. Language is seminal to human communication, interaction, collaboration, education, unity and development. Article 7 of the Kenyan Constitution states that the national language of the Republic is Kiswahili, and the official languages of the Republic are Kiswahili and English. Kenya is a multilingual country embodying linguistic and cultural diversity. It is a nation with over 53 indigenous languages, including Kenyan Sign Language (KSL). These languages are carriers of rich and diverse cultures. The Kenyan languages fall into three linguistic families: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic groups. The largest group comprises the Bantu, with about 65 per cent of Kenyans speaking a Bantu language, for example, Meru, Luhyia, Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii and Mijikenda. (Marhoum & Samper, 2003). Speakers of the Kenyan vernacular languages interact freely, leading to language contact and multilingualism.

Kiswahili and English are widely used in official and unofficial interactions, whereas other languages of Kenya are primarily used in intra-ethnic communication and interaction. As a result, Kiswahili in Kenya has become the medium of communication between various ethnic groups or speech communities. However, English still enjoys superiority over all other dialects due to the several shifts in government education policies since independence. In addition to English, Kiswahili and indigenous vernacular languages, there is also Sheng, popularly defined as an acronym for "Swahili-English Slang" (Mazrui, 1995). Sheng emerged in the 1960s in the multicultural environment of Nairobi. It is an urban language which combines mainly Kiswahili and English but also other Kenyan languages such as Kikuyu, Luhyia, Dholuo and Kikamba.

For this article, the terms indigenous vernacular and local languages will be used interchangeably. All indigenous vernacular languages will be taken to function at the same sociolinguistic level for research purposes. Kenyan vernacular languages are used in similar ways in relationships between people from the same ethnic group. These languages are mainly used for interethnic communication in rural areas and homes in urban areas. In addition, they are typically used in the daily lives of members of the speech community. Barasa (2010) says that the use of these vernacular languages generally may be triggered by various contexts, for example, for communication amongst friends and relations sharing a similar vernacular language group; to exclude others, for instance, in secret agendas; to show allegiance/solidarity to one's ethnicity for example, in politics; to avoid inaccurate translations by using vernacular language words or phrases that capture the exact meaning intended. This research intends to discover and describe the general degree and style of (vernacular) language use in FB in Kenya, given its status and roles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper locates itself within Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) framework. Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) is the communication produced when human beings interact by transmitting messages via networked computers. CMD is a specialisation within the broader interdisciplinary article of Computer-Mediated Communication, distinguished by its focus on language and language use in networked computer environments and by its use of discourse analysis methods to address that focus (Herring, 2000). Most CMD currently in use is text-based; messages are typed on a computer keyboard and viewed as text on a computer screen, generally by a person or people at a different location from the message sender. Herring (2000) continues to say that text-based CMD takes a variety of forms (e.g., email, discussion groups, virtual reality role-playing games, real-time chat) whose linguistic properties differ depending on the type of messaging system utilised and the social and cultural context embedding particular instances of use.

The majority of linguistic features of CMD are deliberate choices made by users to economise on typing effort, express themselves creatively, or mimic spoken language features. The economy of action seems to be the motivating force behind Murray's (1989, p. 43-44) observation that computer science professionals using synchronous CMD in a workplace environment "delete subject pronouns, determiners, and auxiliaries; use abbreviations; do not correct typos, and do not use mixed case". Another deliberate practice that results in unconventional orthography is the textual representation of auditory information such as prosody,

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laughter and other non-language sounds. Strategies such as these, rather than reflecting poor or simplified communication, demonstrate the user's ability to adapt the computer medium to express their needs. Significantly, this results in a linguistic variety that frequently contains features of orality despite being produced by written-like means. The current research concurs with Herring's (1998a) observations about language use on computer-mediated platforms. Kenyan Facebook users adapt to their expressive needs just like most sites. They follow the "conventions of Facebook language" that include non-standard orthography, code-switching, and the use of acronyms, smileys and emoticons. These linguistic choices are deliberate and not errors by inattention or lack of standard forms. Facebook users are to be applauded as being creative and innovative in their use of language so that they can adapt to their expressive needs, economise on data bundles on mobile phones and computers and mimic spoken language features.

Human-to-human contact using computer networks, or interactive networking, was initially designed in the United States in the late 1960s to simplify the transfer of computer programmes and data between remote computers in the interests of national defence (Levy, 1984). However, computer networks caught on almost immediately as a means of interpersonal communication, initially among computer scientists in the early 1970s (Hafner & Lyon, 1996) and then among academic and business users in elite universities and organisations in the 1980s. Finally, the rise of commercial Internet service providers in the 1990s facilitated the widespread adoption of computer networks.

The first wide-area network, the U.S. defence department-sponsored ARPANET, was replaced in the early 1980s by the global network Internet, which, as of January 1999, comprised more than 58,000 networks supporting an estimated 150 million users (Petrazzini & Kibati, 1999). In discussing the development of CMD, Herring (2000) notes that CMD developed alongside interactive networking itself as researchers became exposed to and intrigued by communication in the new medium. Herring further notes that as early as 1984, linguist Baron published an article speculating on the effects of *"Computer-Mediated Communication as a Force in Language Change"*. The first detailed description of CMD was soon followed by Murray's

(1985) research on a real-time messaging system at IBM and Eklundh's (1986) article on the Swedish COM conferencing system. However, it was not until 1991, with the publication of Ferrara et al. (1991) *"Interactive Written Discourse as an Emergent Genre",* that linguists and language scholars began to take serious notice of CMD.

In the years afterwards, a wave of CMD researchers has emerged, working independently on what has since developed as a more or less coherent agenda: the empirical description of Computer Mediated language and varieties of Computer Mediated Discourse. Since the mid-1990s, CMD research has continued to expand rapidly, staking out new inquiry areas and resulting in an ever-growing array of published resources. In part, as Herring (2000) would put it, the initial wave of CMD scholarship was a reaction to previous misunderstandings concerning CMD. Popular claims, some supported by published research, held that Computer Mediated Communication was "anonymous", "impersonal", "fragmented", "egalitarian", and "spoken-like", attributing these traits to the nature of the medium itself and failing to differentiate between different types and uses of CMD. Ferrara et al. (1991), although contributing practical observations on one form of real-time experimental CMD, also overgeneralised, characterising what they termed "interactive written discourse" as a single genre. Subsequent research has revealed Computer-Mediated language and interaction to be sensitive to various technical and situational elements, making it far more complex and variable than envisioned by early descriptions. To this end, Herring gives two classifications of CMD: Medium and Channel.

Computer networks are often considered a communication medium distinct from writing and speaking. Thus, CMD researchers say of electronic 'medium effects' on CMD, rather than viewing CMD as a form of 'writing' (typing) that is disseminated electronically. (Murray, 1988). The justification for this is that while the means of production is similar between CMD and other forms of typing, including the ability to edit and format text in asynchronous modes, other computer-mediated communication aspects preclude easy classification with either speaking or writing. Written exchanges are typically faster than CMD exchanges (e.g., letters or published essays that respond to each other) yet still significantly slower than spoken

exchanges. Typing is slower than speaking, even in "real-time" modes.

Furthermore, due to cognitive limitations on participants' ability to attend to more than one interaction at a time, CMD allows several participants to communicate simultaneously in a difficult way, if not impossible, to achieve in other media. (Herring, 1999a). In addition, computer-mediated message dissemination entails distribution to an unseen (and often unknown) audience while creating an impression of direct and even "private" exchanges at the same time (King, 1996). For these and other reasons, participants often experience CMD differently from either writing or speaking, sometimes as a blend of the two, but subject to its own constraints and potentialities in any event.

Media may differ in the number of channels or sources of communication they comprise. For example, face-to-face (FtF) communication is a "rich" medium in that information is available through numerous channels: auditory, visual, gestural, etc. In contrast, CMD is a "lean" medium (Daft & Lengel, 1984) in that information is available only through the visual channel and that information is limited to typed text. This has led some to posit that the computer medium is "impoverished" and unsuitable for social interaction (Baron, 1984). However, Herring (2000) notes ample evidence that users compensate textually for missing auditory and gestural cues and that CMD can be richly expressive. This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the popularity of emoticons in which acts of physical emotions are enacted. This research seeks to establish whether there is evidence that Kenyan users compensate textually for missing auditory and gestural cues and, if they do, what linguistic features are favoured.

While the evidence for the computer medium's deterministic influence on language use is frequently exaggerated, computer messaging system properties do have a substantial role in shaping CMD. One crucial distinction relates to the synchronicity of participation (Kiesler et al., 1984). Asynchronous CMD systems do not require that users be logged on simultaneously to send and receive messages; instead, messages are stored at the addressee's site until they can be read. Electronic mail is an example of this type. In contrast, in synchronous CMD, the sender and addressee(s) must be logged on simultaneously, and messages are more ephemeral, scrolling up and off participants' computer screens as new messages replace them. "Real-time" chat, such as takes place in the chatrooms of commercial service providers and via Internet Relay Chat (IRC), is a famous form of synchronous CMD (Herring, 2000).

Another technological dimension has to do with whether or not simultaneous feedback is available whether the message transmission is one-way or two-way (Cherny, 1999). In *one-way* communication, a message is transmitted in its entirety as a single unit. The result is that recipients do not know that a notice is being addressed to them until it arrives, thereby precluding the possibility of simultaneous feedback. Most CMD in current use uses one-way transmission (for instance, Email, Facebook posts, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others). In contrast, oral modes of communication (such as face-to-face and telephone conversations) are two-way, with the speaker and addressee both able to hear the message as it is produced. There are also two-way CMD systems, in which participants' screens are split into two or more sections, and the words of each participant appear keystroke-by-keystroke in their respective sections as they are typed. An example of a two-way synchronous CMD on the Internet is the currently popular ICQ ('I seek you') protocol (Cherny, 1999).

Other physical messaging systems properties that shape language use include limits on message size (what Cherny, 1999, calls message "granularity"), the "persistence" of the text (whether and for how long previous messages remain accessible to participants), what categories of communication commands a system makes available (Cherny, 1995), the ease with which a system enables users to incorporate portions of previous messages in their responses, whether a system allows messages to be sent anonymously (Selfe & Meyer, 1991), and whether it allows users to filter out or 'ignore' messages from others selectively (Reid, 1996 in Herring 1999a). Finally, the availability of channels of communication in addition to text, such as audio, video, or graphics, can have consequences for language use (Yates & David, 1996). In discussing Facebook in the Kenyan context, the two features, medium and channel, as exemplified by Herring (2000), will be considered in categorising this form of CMD.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kenyan languages fall into three linguistic families: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic groups. About 65 per cent of Kenyans speak a Bantu language: Meru, Luhyia, Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii and Mijikenda. Thirty per cent are Nilotic, including Turkana, Kalenjin, Luo, Maasai and Samburu. The Cushitic family, mainly composed of Somali and Rendile speakers, represents about 3 per cent. The remaining 2 per cent are European, Indian or other languages (Marhoum & Samper, 2003). Speakers of the Kenyan vernacular languages interact freely, leading to language contact and multilingualism.

Kiswahili and English are widely used in official and unofficial interactions, whereas other languages of Kenya are primarily used in intra-ethnic communication and interaction. As a result, Kiswahili in Kenya has become the communication medium between different ethnic groups or speech communities. However, English still enjoys superiority over all other dialects due to the several shifts in government education policies since independence. Commissions mainly tied to education and the Ministry of Education were set up to address the language situation in Kenya. For instance, in 1964, the Kenya Education Commission conducted a survey to offer insight into the citizens' interest in language use. The survey results showed that most Kenyans wanted a trilingual system in education where their mother tongue was preferred for non-formal communication, particularly in the rural areas, and Kiswahili and English were preferred for education beginning at lower primary classes through to the university. The survey also noted that Kiswahili was widely favoured in education to enhance unity both nationally and in the region. However, unlike English, Kiswahili was not permanently attached to the education curriculum and remained an optional subject for many years (Ireri, 1996).

The Ominde Commission also made similar recommendations to those of the Education Commission in 1964 after its survey showed that many Kenyans favoured English as the principle language of instruction starting from the primary school level to the university. The commission offered reasons for this recommendation, citing that the English language had intrinsic resources. Consequently, English was introduced in beginners' classes, and its learning was emphasised. Vernacular (Mother tongue) and Kiswahili were also emphasised in the education system, though this was at different levels and at different localities as well. In indigenising the Facebook language in Kenya, this paper will deal with the Kenyan indigenous vernacular languages, Kiswahili, English and Sheng.

Kiswahili functions as a lingua franca both nationally and regionally in parts of East and Central Africa. Ogechi (2003) says that Kiswahili is the endoglossic national language that is also used for casual inter-ethnic conversation and government administration. It is important to note that Kiswahili is not popular among most of the rural folk, as is the situation with English since only a small proportion of Kenyans in the rural areas are fluent enough in it even though many will claim to speak it. It is mostly used as a lingua franca for interethnic communication. According to Nurse and Spear (1985), Kiswahili is a language that originated on the coast of East Africa. The Kiswahili language reached far-off locations like the islands of Comoro and Madagascar, as well as regions well beyond Oman and the United Arab Emirates, thanks to long-term interactions with people living along the Indian Ocean coast. Trade and migration from the Kiswahili coast during the nineteenth century helped spread the language to the interior of Tanzania. It also reached Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Congo, and Central African Republic.

Kibui (2014) points out that the Kenyan education system received an overhaul after recommendations by the Mackay Commission in 1981 that led to the change of the system into one with eight years of primary education, four years of secondary school and finally, four years of university education. English remained the principal medium of instruction, while Kiswahili was made compulsory and examinable at primary and secondary levels. This recommendation changed the situation for the Kiswahili language for the better by allocating more time, that is, five periods per week, as compared to English, which had six periods in a week. What this meant is that students had more opportunities to learn and appreciate Kiswahili more than they had earlier done.

The most commonly spoken language in Eastern Africa is Kiswahili, and several world institutions have responded to its spread. It is among the languages that feature in some world radio stations such as the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), Radio Cairo (Egypt), the Voice of America (U.S.A.), Radio Deutsche Welle

(Germany), Radio Moscow International (Russia), Radio Japan International, Radio China International, Radio Sudan, and Radio South Africa. Barasa (2010) adds that the Kiswahili language has also made its presence in the art world in songs, theatres, movies and television programs. The Kiswahili language promotion is not only in its use but also deliberate efforts have been made throughout the world to include it in the curriculum for higher education institutions in many parts of the world, including the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, the U.S.A, Japan and China. Additionally, it is now used on websites such as Google, Facebook and Wikipedia. With the expanding growth of Kiswahili both nationally and internationally, this paper hopes to provide insight into the frequency and style of its usage in Facebook posts by the selected group in Kenya.

The Following Texts are used to Provide Data that was Analysed
For ease of understanding of the data presentation and analysis, male FB users are recognised as **M** and females as **F**.
Where a numeral is used together with the letter **M** or **F**, it means the first Male, as in **M1**, or the first Female, as in **F1**. In total, there were 8 FB users, four males and 4 females.

Text 1
M1: *<LAZANIA- at the panari hotel>*
                    (Lasagnia at the panari hotel)
M1:*<akiau? Uka mwa boss umelost, njia ya kwenda machakos ndio hii….panda juu kidogo fika cabanas…..dave ,nko area sasa, kesho vipi!>*
(Swearing, just come, boss, you are so lost, the road to Machakos is this…go up a little, reach Cabanas….dave, I am around now, how about tomorrow!)

M1 is posting that he is having a Lasagna at Panari Hotel, which is situated along Mombasa Road in Nairobi. He also is giving directions to a friend (Dave) on how to get to Machakos, and he tells the friend to go in the general direction of where he is and go ahead, confirming that he is just in the vicinity. In his post, **MI** manages to create an impression of a person who likes travelling and enjoying the fine things in life, if the places and food he mentions in his posts are anything to go by. Panari Hotel and Cabanas are upscale institutions, and Lasagnia is not an everyday affordable dish in Kenya.

M1 uses English, Kiswahili and Kamba to communicate. The assumption is that whomever he is addressing understands the three codes well. His identity, as presented in his profile, is that he is educated up to the post-secondary level. This can be authenticated by his use of English and Kiswahili. The fact that he mixes Kamba in his conversation identifies him with the Kamba vernacular group. The use of Sheng identifies with his youthfulness and urban set-up.

Text 2
M1: *[Shared a photo of a local TV. Star (mama Baha, of Machachari) then says this below the photo]*
< wah! I'll never 4gt the day I said she cute, na nilikuwa kwa nyumba,
since then I watch from the bedroom wengine wakiwa sito!!He he he>
(Expression of disbelief: I will never forget the day I said she is cute, and I was in the house since then I watch from the bedroom while others are in the sitting room! Expression of laughter).

This post corroborates **MI**'s identity as a family man who, by fault of complementing another woman other than the wife, suffers embarrassment and has to watch the local programme alone in the bedroom lest he messes up again. Once again, an amalgamation of Kiswahili, English and Sheng can be observed. Just like in offline speech, the Kenyan language situation of multilingualism appears on online FB posts. In addition, a characteristic of FB language is the use of shortening conventions like the use of 4gt for the word forget. **MI** is also humorous, going by some of his posts like:

Text 3
M1: *<so the rain might have crossed (mbua niyiingie e!)*
The joke is in the word 'crossed'; the direct translation from vernacular to English makes the expression becomes funny and awkward. Perhaps to underscore the joke, he repeats the same sentence he has written in English in Kamba or consider the next post:

Text 4
M1: *<Kizungu ni noma...>* (English is hard…)

(exclamation, I know your teacher, stop denying it)
Visual 1

M1 makes fun of one of his friends by alleging that the teacher who has difficulties speaking English taught his friend (Alluding to visual 1). He uses prosodic spelling to indicate his laughter and insists that he actually knows the friend's teacher. This post is meant to evoke humour about the difficulties of spoken English and perhaps underscore the utility of Kiswahili, Kamba and Sheng that are in his repertoire.

Text 5

M1:<*jameni naomba serikali iingilie kati..safaricom mnaninyanyasa....nanunua bundles ata kabla nilog in...ati zimeisha....kwani bluetooth inatumia bundles..!!!!!>*
(Really, I pray that the Government intervenes….Safaricom, you are mistreating me…i buy bundles and even before I log in….they are over….does Bluetooth use bundles…!!!!!)
M1 <*Hii jua na njaa...haileti shangwe.....jua inapiga mpaka kona bana ikifuata msee...!!!!*
(This sunshine and hunger…..there is nothing worth celebrating or being happy about…the sun is going round a corner trying to follow someone!!!)
M1 <*xxx sua yii yilikite nginya muvuko mwa!*>
(xxx- name of a person withheld, this sun has reached even the pockets (exclamation mark).

MI: < *Hehhehe...mwalimu wa xxx* >
(expression of laughter,… xxxx's teacher)
<…………….. *Akii nuvungu Muthei ...* >
(really, it is all a lie)
M1: <*weh...ninisi mwalimu waku we....eka ulea......*>

Visual 2
<*ukiangusha 5 bob January*>
(when you drop five shillings in January)

M1 comes off as funny too when he posts about financial difficulties. Although lack of money is serious business, his posts are funny. He uses the word 'sun' as a metaphor for financial difficulty. He personifies the sun and says it can turn a corner just to follow an individual and that it has reached the pockets of someone. In visual 2, he posts a photo about the lack of money in the month of January. The caption explains what the two men are doing; searching for a five shilling coin that fell. Five shillings is a small denomination to bother looking for if it happens to fall. However, **M1** makes fun of that in January (a month perceived by many to be financially strenuous), people would actually search for such a coin if it fell given the assumption that during the December festivities, people would have overspent, leaving many without much to spend in January. As is the case of this FB user, he indigenises FB language by use of Kamba vernacular language, Kiswahili and Sheng.

M2

Is a Nakuru dweller who is also a university student and belongs to only four FB groups. He is obviously not interested in belonging to many groups like the rest of the group. He has fewer groups he is interested in joining, perhaps because of the constraints of academic engagements and also because, at his young age (he is

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the youngest in the group), he would rather be socialising than contributing to 'boring' group discussions. He has 649 friends, eleven of whom he shares with the rest of the group. In the entire group, he, together with F1, is the only one who loves 'Apps' (Computer Technology applications such as the Play Store for games). The reason is that he is relatively young as opposed to the rest of the group, and as such, technology appeals to young computer users like him more. He also likes animations, which are appropriate for his young age. He is a 'mama's boy, and this comes out in his posts like:

Text 5
M2:<*Spending my Friday evening with my mom I luv u mom u the best*> (Spending my Friday evening with my mum I love you mum you are the best)
M2: <*grt day the whole family is going to be together dad mum sis bro and young me*>
(Great day, the whole family is going to be together, dad, mum, sister and brother, and young me)

These posts confirm the identity that **M2** gives of himself; that of a young single guy who adores his family and is attached to them. His posts use to a large extent English language reflecting his educated, urban set up. However, the posts are free of punctuations, perhaps reflecting his carefree and relaxed, non-conservative nature of young people. His posts have contracted forms like "luv, sis and grt". In reflecting his youthfulness and innovativeness with language, **M2** indigenises English language by deviating from the conventional.

M3
This participant lives in Nairobi, is married, and, like **MI**, puts his daughter's photo as his profile picture. This identifies him as a doting father, proud of his child. He belongs to fifteen FB groups and has 665 FB friends, twenty-six of whom he shares with the rest of the group. He is a university graduate as well as a Kenya Defence Officer (KDF). So far, his identity, as given in the profile, is true, and there are times in his posts when the same identity is given unconsciously. For instance, the information about his profession and the fact that he is married and has a daughter is corroborated for example, in texts that follow:

Text 6
M3: *photos that he has uploaded*

Visual 3

Visual 4

M3: <*Pongezi to all airforce guys on this big day....*>
(Congratulations to all airforce guys on this big day…….)
M3: < MAB....>
(Moi Air Base- This is one of the Airforce units in Kenya)
M3:< *He who salutes the flag, serves the flag and whose coffin is draped by the   flag,   is the true hero. RIP our uniformed patriots.*>

M3: < *Daddy duties…..*> — at The Nairobi Hospital
(posted a picture of his daughter near a slide dressed in hospital clothes and a bandage on her hand)
…………………………….
M3: <*iko poa sasa, fever za wajunior tu. cheers for asking.*>
(it is okay now, it is just fever that affects small children, cheers for asking)

M3: <Fatherhood stress.....> — at Getrudes childrens Hospital

…………………………….
M3: <Building the future for my daughters... Mwanaume ni effort...>
(Building future for my daughters……..A man is defined by his effort….)

…………………………….
M3: <Mwanaume ni mfuko..effort peleka kwa mjengo....he he he> (A man is measured by his pocket……take the effort to construction….expression of laughter)

M3's identity as a military officer is "given off" much the same way as Goffman (1969) posits about identity presentation. The photo he uses in the first post, and what he writes places him within the context of the military, more specifically, the Airforce. The Airforce regalia in the photo and the mention of the Airforce in his second photo place him within the context of the Airforce. His knowledge of military procedure, as he posts what happens during the burial of a fallen soldier, confirms his occupation as true and authentic, as stated in his profile. His identity as a doting, responsible father emerges in the posts that he makes. He updates his status twice when his children get sick. In the first instance, one of his daughters is admitted to the Nairobi hospital for a broken arm. His next status update is at Gertrude's children's hospital when another of his daughters falls ill with a case of fever, as he aptly puts it in the post. This shows him as a responsible and loving father.

He also posts that he is building the future of his daughters by putting in effort. When a user who is not part of this article makes a joke of what he has posted, **M3** posts again that a man is a man because of the money he has in his pocket and not for his effort. This means that a man should be financially stable, and that is what he meant when he said he was building his daughters' future: looking for money to sustain them. The phrase *"mwanaume ni mfuko effort peleka kwa mjengo"* is a catchy contemporary phrase that is used to epitomise the essence of masculinity in the Kenyan context; a man is judged by his financial status, not his physical strength. This phrase is understood from a Kenyan context, no wonder it is rendered in the Kiswahili language. Although **M3** posts most of his status in English, in this instance, he has reverted to Kiswahili because English would not have carried the implicature as he had intended it. In fact, in translation, the meaning of the phrase is lost. This explains indigenising FB language. That he is a graduate comes across in his posts. He uses Standard English mostly and is careful in his spelling. His military training and discipline are displayed (given off) in the choice of his vocabulary, for instance, the use of the phrase 'daddy duties' instead of 'daddy chores or responsibilities'. 'Duty' is a frequent word used in the military.

M4

This participant lives in Nairobi as well, is married and likes music, football and particularly Arsenal. He belongs to thirty-three FB groups and has 1514 FB friends, the second highest in terms of friends. This shows that he is highly sociable online and shares forty mutual friends with the rest of the group. He deliberately opts out of giving information about his educational background but gives KDF (Kenya Defense Force) as his profession. For his profile photo, he uses his own photo with him and a colleague on top of a United Nations (UN) vehicle in military uniform. This image of a military man is reinforced by photos and posts that he makes on his wall. Consider the following:

Text 7
M4: < aki afande tumetoka butchery kunywa supu (truly sir, we from the butchery to drink soup).

Visual 5

………………
………………
M4: <I had to set them free enyewe walikuwa wananuka butchery he very innocent>

(I had to set them free they had the smell of a butchery, expression of laughter, very innocent)

Visual 5 is a photo of two soldiers who are drunk and late for work and who seem to be offering an excuse to their superiors about their whereabouts. They claim to be coming from a butchery where they drunk soup. This information is creatively given in the caption using the Kiswahili language. The joke is, how can soup make people drunk? To the bloodshot eyes betray the two soldiers; surely, they must have drunk some intoxicating drink, not just soup! **M4** comments that he had to let them off. This might not be a true occurrence. He might just be highlighting some of the excuses soldiers give to their superiors when caught drunk and late for work. The picture could also be analysed as reinforcing one stereotype that people have of military personnel: that they love to drink alcohol. The military joke is appropriate and familiar to someone in the military. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that **M4**'s identity as a military man is indeed true. His identity is often "given off" also by the choice of the word 'afande' (sir), which is a title given to someone of a superior rank in the army. This word is used by uniformed people or people familiar with military codes in Kenya.

Text 8
……………
F3: *<wanasemanga vunja mifupa kama bado meno ikoooooooo!!!>* (they say, crush bones while the teeth are still there (famous expression for having fun) exclamation mark (lengthening practice).

……………
F3: *<heek yes gurl, NO APOLOGIES!! Wacha nijipe raha mwenyewe.>*
(heck (swearing) yes girl, NO APOLOGIES (capitalisation for stress, exclamation mark)let me give myself fun)

……………
F3:*< Ndivyo ninavyo fanya sasa hizi coz I ONLY LIVE ONES Y.O.L.O>*
(that is what I am doing this time because I ONLY LIVE ONCE (capitalisation for emphasis) Y.O.L.O (abbreviation for 'you only live once')

………………
F3: *<hehehehehe!guys today I feel generous mwenye anataka gej leo nitafute nitakuwa tao saa mbili unusu lol* (expression of laughter, exclamation mark guys today I feel generous. Whoever wants alcohol today should look

for me. I will be in town at half past eight, lol (laugh out loud*…………….. <Exactly nyabo we only live ones n I got 1life to live. So am living my life to the fullest @sifa>*
(Exactly nyabo (word for girl in Kiganda) we only live once and I got one life to live. So, I am living my life to the fullest)
…………
F3: *< I am a grown ass woman. I know my limits, thank u>*
(I am a grown-ass (swearing) woman; I know my limits, thank you)
F1: *< I am who I am. I like what I like. I love what I love. I do what I want.>*

From the posts, it is evident that the identity that F3 presents is of an assertive lady who is bold, enjoys life, fun-loving and unabashedly unapologetic. She says that she loves herself the way she is. In the second post, **F3** uses a Kiswahili idiom, which implies that one should have fun and enjoy life when they are still able to, meaning she will have as much fun as long as she is able to. In her fourth post, she adds that she will make herself happy and has no apologies as she does that. In her subsequent post, **F3** uses the acronym "*YOLO" (you only live once)* to justify her fun-filled life. The acronym also makes her identify with the young generation who use that acronym to describe their fun-seeking lifestyles. **F3** also adheres to the language of CMC, which is characterised by unconventional spelling, acronyms and code-switching. Her next post uses code-switching of Kiswahili and Sheng. In using these two languages, other than English, **F3** is, in a way, contesting the English hegemony (Nabea, 2009) just as much as she is defying people's definitions of how she should live her life. Indeed, in her fifteenth post for that day, she states categorically that she is a grown woman and that she is entitled to do what she does: take alcohol because she knows her limits. Another identity of **F3** that is "given off."

Sheng and English
Sheng is a peer language developed by the youth in Kenya, which continuously seeks recognition. Sheng is a hybrid linguistic code that defies the classification categories of pidgin, creole, slang, or jargon. The language has its origins in the African neighbourhoods of Nairobi's Eastlands during the 1960s, but exploration into the language only began in the 1990s (Muaka,

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2009). The evolution and use of Sheng have been attributed to various factors ranging from non-linguistic factors to language contact and amalgamation of various languages, inadequate knowledge of standard Kiswahili and English and so on (Osinde, 1986; Mazrui, 1995; Samper 2002, among others in Barasa 2010). Ogechi (2005) in Barasa (2010) points out that word/morpheme order in Sheng largely conforms to the Kiswahili word/morpheme order. The positions of grammatical morphemes on inflected Sheng words also appear to be identical to those in Kiswahili words. In addition, there appears to be a shared surface form of some of the inflectional affixes on both Sheng and Kiswahili words. In spite of this, these affixes do not always follow the type of concord required by Kiswahili syntax when they are used in Sheng constructions. Furthermore, the affixes are used on Sheng lexemes regardless of whether they are sourced from Kiswahili, English, other Kenyan indigenous languages or the coined ones. Ogechi states that this implies that it is possible to identify Sheng lexemes, but it is difficult to posit a Sheng morphosyntax, and as such, Sheng participates in code-switching as a code largely identifiable through its lexemes.

Sheng has been embraced greatly by the youth and has spread throughout Kenya. It has found a liking in the rural areas and has even gone beyond borders to find popularity in the East African region, particularly in Tanzania. Sheng has had momentous times in its history; for instance, in 2002, during the country's general use, Sheng was used to good effect. An ideal example to highlight this is when the NARC political party used the word *'unbwogable'* ('Bwog' is the word for fear in Dholuo and the addition of the prefix 'un-' and the suffix '–able' (unbwogable) brings out the meaning of being unbeatable) which was also subsequently used in the succeeding president's speeches. The then president would also use the word *'kuji-enjoy'* (Sheng for relaxation, feel good) when ending his speeches. Sheng use by Kenyan politicians is continually used as a ruse to win votes from the significant youth and young adult electorate. Political advertisements and statements are currently widely filled with Sheng vocabulary, and this has been viewed as a marketing opportunity by commercial advertisers who have turned to using Sheng in marketing products to lure the youth. For instance, in the 2012 general elections, one Nairobi Women Representative candidate hyped her campaigns by referring to herself as *"manzi wa nai"* (meaning a lady hailing from Nairobi). This was perhaps to identify herself to the young electorates as a lady who was born and raised in Nairobi and, therefore, one who could articulate the needs of the Nairobi populace better. Corporate organisations have also embraced Sheng, especially for their advertisement and marketing campaigns. For instance, Safaricom, the leading communications service provider in Kenya, has continually used Sheng in its advertisements as well as in naming its products. For example, *"dosika na Safaricom"* (get rich through Safaricom) *"bamba mbao"* (referring to airtime scratch card worth twenty shillings).

A mirror image of Sheng is Engsh, which can be described as a code within Sheng. According to Kießling and Mous (2004) in Barasa (2010), Engsh developed as an antilanguage in the richer neighbourhoods of Nairobi (Westlands) in reaction to Sheng. It consists of an English base with insertions from Kiswahili and other languages. It is a kind of Sheng used in the more affluent neighbourhoods by the elite. On the syntactic level, Mazrui (1995) explains that Sheng exhibits a Kiswahili syntactic base form while Engsh takes on an English base. For Sheng, the Kiswahili word order is prevalent while the English word order is prevalent for Engsh. This article views English as a code within the code Sheng. Sheng is the source of English. The participants for the article consisted of young professionals who used the two language varieties not only interchangeably but also in the same constructions such that they overlapped.

CONCLUSIONS

Facebook language in Kenya is not as conventionalised to fit CMC usage as in other studies carried out elsewhere. Nonetheless, the language is informal and mostly uses non-standard orthography but fails to emulate the large use of emoticons, smileys and abbreviations that have been observed in other research findings. These are important and unique variations. The article found out that:

    a)   The respondents used English predominantly on FB.

    b)   Indigenous languages used in FB in Kenya were Kiswahili, Sheng and Vernacular or a mixture of these languages (code-switching).

The two findings point to an interesting language situation in Kenya, especially as regards the use of FB

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as a form of CMC. The data for this article was collected from a group of young, literate, working-class people. This population has embraced the use of new forms of Computer-Mediated Communication with zeal. Additionally, this group possesses knowledge of other languages besides English, like Kiswahili, Sheng and their vernacular language, which they use for communication on Facebook. All these languages are used for specific reasons: to meet the communicative needs of the users. Where a concept has different meanings in the mind of the user when said in English, Kiswahili, Vernacular or Sheng, the appropriate language to carry the intended meaning is chosen and used. Sheng is a carrier for in-group identity, and unconventional spellings identify closely with CMC language norms. The FB users in this article used their repertoire of languages (Sheng, Kiswahili, English and Vernacular) in texting CMC just as they would use them verbally. Similarly, they creatively engaged their different languages to enable them to get past some CMC barriers like the limitation of time and space. English to a large extent continues in its hegemony as the language of literacy and communication among the educated and professionals as seen from the chosen FB group under study. It has also been demonstrated that the selected internet users indegenise facebook in their communication by using Kiswahili, Sheng and vernacular languages.

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