The University of Nairobi Journal of Language and Linguistics

Volume 3 (Oct. 2013)

The University of Nairobi Journal of Language and Linguistics

CONTENTS

CONTEXTUAL VARIABILITY IN THE ACCEPTABILITY OF KENYAN ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL FEATURES[1]

Alfred BUREGEYA
University of Nairobi

The present study set out to find out whether a number of grammatical features assumed to be characteristic of Kenyan English would be accepted at different levels depending on three parameters of linguistic context: the lexical item used in the feature[2] under study, the position of the feature in the sentence, and the type of sentence which the feature appears in. A two-part questionnaire consisting of a series of sentences containing "mistakes" to be corrected was administered to an overall sample (composed of eight sub-samples) of 218 educated Kenyan English speakers. The results, based on chi-square statistics, show that a structure like *Type for me this letter* was significantly more accepted (that is less often corrected) than *Buy for me lunch*, that when the feature under study was placed within the sentence it tended to be more accepted than when it was placed at the beginning or at the end of the sentence, and that question structures were more accepted than declarative and negative ones.

1. INTRODUCTION

A study by Buregeya (2006) investigated the acceptability of a number of lexical, grammatical, spelling and punctuation features of Kenyan English. Rates of acceptability for the different features were calculated (see p. 216) which showed how large the difference was in the acceptability of those features in writing, while they could all be claimed to be quite frequent in speaking. A feature like the marking of the progressive aspect on stative verbs, as in *Are you understanding me?*, was accepted by 51% per cent of the respondents (and ranked eleventh out of the twenty morphological, syntactic and lexical structures that were tested). This

---

percentage was interpreted to mean that the feature in question was fairly accepted in written Kenyan English, irrespective of the verb used to test it.

That study did not go far enough, however, to test the possibility that the percentage of acceptability would have been higher or lower depending on whether the same feature had been tested using a different stative verb, such as *see*. I have come to realize that while verbs like *understand* and *see* (*I'm seeing a problem here*) were frequently used in progressive, verbs like *remember* (as in *I'm now remembering you now*) were less frequently used in the same way, while verbs like *know* (as in *I'm knowing you*) were extremely rare. (Actually, I have not yet heard anyone say *I'm knowing you*.) However, on closer observation, what is "extremely rare" seems to be, not the use of the verb *know* in the progressive aspect *per se*, but the type of sentence in which the verb would be used. The use of the verb *know* in a *question* structure like *Would you be knowing when he will arrive?* is not uncommon at all. Here is indeed an SMS message I received from a Master-in-Linguistics student on 4 July 2011: "Hi Dr, **would u b knowing** Prof [X's] schedule 2dy? I was to meet him but cant find him."

It appears that there is variability in the use of the various features of Kenyan English depending on which lexical item is involved. This led me to use the same features tested in Buregeya (2006) and test the variability in how they would be accepted (once again in the written mode) depending not only on which lexical item was involved, but also on which syntactic position where the feature being tested occurred in the sentence, and even on the type of sentence (or its communicative intent) in which the feature in question was involved. As Towell et al. (1993) put it, "Systematic variability may also be attributable to linguistic factors such as sentence structure complexity and lexical selection" (p. 441).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The respondents

I sought judgments of grammaticality from a total sample of 218 respondents selected, through convenience sampling, from students at the University of Nairobi from February 2005 to September 2011. 165 of them were fourth-year undergraduate students of Language and Communication from five different classes, while the other 53 were first-year MA-in-Linguistics students from three different classes. The latter had almost all been English language teachers. The total sample thus comprised people who had been exposed to English in the educational system and in the environment for at least fifteen years, during which English was the language of instruction for at least twelve years. These are people I can confidently label "educated Kenyan English speakers".

2.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire reproduced in the Appendix is the final version. The original questionnaire was revised five times, each time to include another interesting variable which I had not thought of previously. For instance, only in the last version of the questionnaire did I think of contrasting types of sentences to test the use of the progressive with stative verbs. To this end, I added Item 17 of Part A (*Could you be knowing someone who has a copy of that book?*) and Item 17 of Part B (*Yes, I am knowing someone with a copy of that book*). Also, some features were dropped at some stage to make room for others (and thus keep either part of the questionnaire to one page). For those dropped, it was clear what the general picture would be in the end, even if they had been kept. That is why the structure "...*what the criteria is*" at item 18 in Table 1 does not appear in the final version. The denominators in the raw totals in the tables below give an indication of how often each feature being tested appeared in the different versions of the

question: for example, where the denominator is 218, this means that the feature appeared in all the five versions of the questionnaire.

As shown in the Appendix, the questionnaire had two parts. The two tested the same features, but on three different variables: lexical item used, position in the sentence, and type of sentence.[3] The respondents did Part A first, which was collected on completion, before they were given Part B. Each one of them received a Part-B sheet of paper carrying the same serial number as the Part-A one he or she had just completed. This was done for ease of identification and pairing of the respondents' answers at the time of data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Variability according to lexical item

The results are first summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Variability according to lexical item

	Feature	Accepted= Not corrected.	
		Total	%
1	*Be coming to check...*	141/218	64.7
2	*Be going while I finish...*	96/218	44
3	*Are you **understanding** me?*	73/218	33.5
4	*Are you **having** money...?*	42/218	19.3
5	***Type for me** this letter.*	137/218	62.8
6	***Buy for her** lunch.*	62/188	33
7	***Send to me** the bill.*	15/188	8

[3] The questionnaire contains some other mistakes included just as distractors. Those under focus in this paper are highlighted in the appendix, but were not on the questionnaire.

8	*Them, they* were lucky...	40/218	18.3
9	*Us, we* will contribute...	21/218	9.6
10	*Me, I* don't know...	7/123	5.7
11	... words *which* are easy to find the meaning	135/218	61.9
12	The parents *who* the children will...	41/218	18.8
13	*Primary* is now free...	54/218	24.8
14	... but *secondary* remains expensive.	89/218	40.8
15	*Secretarial* may begin...	122/218	57
16	The *equipments* have cost...	61/105	58.1
17	*Furnitures* have cost...	39/113	34.5
18	... what the *criteria* is.	15/15	100
19	... what the *phenomena* is.	88/113	77.9
20	*Anyhowly*, they managed...	67/123	54.3%
21	*Oftenly*, we forget...	42/123	34.1%

Items 1 and 2 tested the use of a special imperative structure in the form of *be + a verb*, in *Be coming* and *Be going*; items 3 and 4 the use of the progressive aspect on the stative verbs *understand* and *have*; items 5, 6 and 7 the placement of a prepositional phrase before a noun phrase with the verbs *type*, *buy* and *send*; items 8, 9 and 10 the use of three sequences of object + subject personal pronouns in subject position; items 11 and 12 the relative pronouns *which* and *who* used instead of the relative determiner *whose*; items 13, 14 and 15 the use of the adjectives *primary*, *secondary* and *secretarial*, on their own, as if they were nouns; items 16 and 17 the use of the nouns *furniture* and *equipment* in the plural; items 18 and 19 the use of the plural forms *criteria* and *phenomena* as if they were singular; items 20 and 21 the use of *oftenly* and *anyhowly* for *often* and *anyhow*. So,

each pair (or set) of structures tested the same feature by contrasting two (or more) lexical items.

The percentages of the frequencies for the different lexical items for each feature (i.e. *be*-imperatives, stative verbs, PPs placed before NPs, etc.) are clearly different for all the nine pairs and sets contrasted. Chi-square statistics were calculated to check whether the differences in these frequencies were statistically significant[4]. They were found to be significant at the p<.01 level in all the nine cases.[5] This level of significance can justify the conclusion that it indeed matters which lexical item is used in those various Kenyan English structures.

It is not readily obvious why the choice of the lexical item is significant. However, I feel that the most likely reason for the differing rates of their acceptability is the frequency with which the different items occur in the language. In this connection, it would be appropriate to look for inspiration from Bybee (2006: 727-8). She reports, from a study of acceptability judgments by forty-eight native speakers of Spanish of a set of Spanish "verb + adjective combinations" that "... [their] frequency ... influenced the subjects' judgments of acceptability" and concludes that "frequent word sequences and word sequences similar to frequent ones will be judged more acceptable than low-frequency ... sequences". Now, based on Bybee's conclusion, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the more frequently a given lexical item appears in Standard International English (StIntE), the more likely the Kenyan English structure involving it will be accepted. This hypothesis is based on the reasoning that if a set of StIntE forms were the target of acceptability judgments, it is likely that the more frequently a given form was, the more likely it would be recognized as the correct one.

One reference source of information about the frequency of lexical items in the English language is the Oxford 3000™. This, according to the

---

[4] My use of chi-square statistics was an attempt to meet Ellis's (1999) recommendation in the following quotation: "[Labov 1971: 454] points out, quite rightly, that the amount of systematicity must be determined empirically. This requires the use of rigorous quantitative analyses" (p. 462).

[5] Because these calculations involved 2 x 2 tables, the chi-square value taken into account was the one based on Yates' Correction for Continuity.

Oxford Advanced Lerner's Dictionary (8th ed., 2010), contains a list of words "which occur most frequently in English ... based on the information in the British National Corpus and the Oxford Corpus Collection" (p. R43).[6] Now, it happens that the lexical items contrasted in Table 1 (namely *go* vs. *come*, *understand* vs. *have*, *type* vs. *buy* vs. *send*, *us/we* vs. *me/I* vs. *them/they*, *which* vs. *who*, *equipment* vs. *furniture*, *phenomenon* vs. *criterion*, and *primary* vs. *secondary* vs. *secretarial*) are all among the 3,000 most frequently used words in English, except for only one: *phenomenon*. So, the "mystery" remains as to why the respondents accepted the use of certain words at a higher rate of frequency than that for the others.

It can be taken for granted that the words being contrasted do not appear equally frequently in the language, which makes the frequency criterion still a relevant one. In relation to this, useful information is available in Biber et al. (1999). The *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus*[7] (or the LSWE Corpus for short) shows (see p. 373) that, although the verbs *go* and *come* appear among the twelve most used verbs in English across various registers, *go* (which appears around 3,300 times per million words) is used almost twice as much as *come* (around 1,750 times per million words). In the conversation register alone, *go* occurs "around 7,000 times per million words". As for *come*, while it is "also very common", it appears more than twice less frequently than *go* (about 3,000 times per million words) (see pp. 374-5). Note that the much smaller (and only) existing corpus of Kenyan English, which is a sub-corpus of the East African

---

[6] For a quick glance at the Oxford 3000[TM] list of words, see pp. R 99-113 of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (7th ed., 2005).

[7] "The LSWE Corpus contains over 40 million words of text ... focusing on the four registers of conversation, fiction, news, and academic prose" (p. 24). The conversation register will be the reference in this study because the Kenyan English features under discussion are more typical of spoken than written English. In the LSWE Corpus, the conversation register contains a little over 6.4 million words (of which 3.9 are from BrE and 2.5 from AmE) (see p. 25).

component of the International Corpus of English[8], shows also that *go* is more frequent (though not significantly so) than *come*. In its 56,100-words long conversation component, *come* in its all possible forms appears 210 times, while *go* in its all possible forms appears 217 times.

In relating the frequency factor to the differential acceptance of *Be going...* and *Be coming...*, it is quite interesting to note that *come*, which is significantly <u>less</u> frequent than *go* in the LWSE, turns out to be significantly <u>more</u> accepted in the Kenyan English structure *be coming...* (64.7%) than *go* in *be going...* (44%). This observation goes against the hypothesis stated earlier, which makes it necessary to look at the frequency and acceptability rates for the other structures contrasted.

The frequency information for *understand* and *have* corroborates the above observation. On the one hand, Table 1 shows that *Are you having money...?* was significantly less accepted (19.3%) than *"Are you understanding me?* (33.5%) while, on the other hand, the LSWE suggests that *understand* is less common in conversation (see Biber et al., p. 369) than *have* (see p. 429). This is what Biber et al. say about *have*: "As a transitive verb, *have* is as common as the most frequent lexical verbs in English.... Across the four registers, *have* is most common in conversation and least common in academic prose" (p. 429). The picture is the reverse for the verb *understand*; it is reported (p. 369) as uncommon in conversation but common in fiction and academic prose.

Regarding the contrast involving the verbs *type, buy* and *send*, the LSWE shows (p. 367) that in the conversation register *buy* is more than two times more common than *send*, both of which are more frequent than *type*, which is not mentioned at all[9]. In the Kenyan English sub-corpus, *buy* occurs slightly more often than *send*: 19 times vs. 17 times; *type* appears only 5 times. The contrast between *type* and *buy* follows the trend observed so

---

[8] The Corpus of East African English was compiled in the early 1990s by linguists from the Research in English and Applied Linguistics Centre at the Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany.

[9] Commenting on this infrequency of the verb *type*, one reader of the draft version of this paper (James Rumford), wrote: "... I would wager to say that *type* will soon disappear. Who types anything for anyone anymore? I rarely hear the word anymore here [in Hawaii, USA]".

far, in the sense that while *buy* is by far more frequent than *type*, the structure in which it was tested, namely *Buy for her lunch,* was significantly less accepted (33%) than *Type for me this letter* (62.8%).

However, the contrast *buy* vs. *send* seems to go against the trend: *buy* is more frequent than *send* and at the same time the structure *Buy for her lunch* was by far more accepted (33%) than *Send to me the bill* (8%). Here the overriding factor seems to be the preposition involved. While the verb *send* is listed (in Biber et al., p. 367) among the top fifteen "activity" verbs most common in the pattern "verb + NP + preposition + NP", *buy* is not. So, viewed from this angle, the fact that the structure *Send to me the bill* was less accepted than *Buy for her lunch* while the pattern "send + NP + to + NP" is more frequent than the pattern "buy + NP + for + NP", corroborates our now recurrent observation, namely that the more frequent the lexical item in StIntE, the less accepted the Kenyan English structure in which it is used. It also happens that when it comes to the frequency of occurrence of the two prepositions involved, *to* is more frequent than *for* (see Biber et al., p. 423).

Further evidence of the same trend comes from the other contrasts: the pair *Me, I* (in *Me, I don't know...*) was less accepted (5.7%) than the pair *Us, we* (in *Us, we will contribute...*) (9.6%), even though the difference between these two frequencies is not statistically significant, with a chi-square value of only 1.62. Still, *me* and *I* are much more frequent than *Us* and *we* in the LSWE corpus, where *I* is more than five times more frequent than *we* and *me* four times more frequent than *us* (see Biber et al., p. 334). In the Kenyan English sub-corpus, *I* and *me* together appear 44 times in the 56,100 words of conversation, while *we* and *us* together appear only five times (and so do *they* and *them*).

The only exception to the now prevailing observation comes from the contrast between *Us, we...* and *Them, they....* The latter was more accepted (18.3%) than the former (9.6%). At the same time both *them* (4000 times per million words) and *they* (10,000 times per million words) are reported in the LSWE to be more common in the conversation register in StIntE than *us* (1,000 times) and *we* (7,000 times), respectively. As for the contrast

between *Me, I* and *Them, they*, the frequencies reported in Biber et al. (p. 334) show that the pronoun *I* is more than three times more frequent than *they* in conversation, while the pronouns *me* and *them* occur almost equally frequently. So, this latter contrast *(Me, I* vs. *Them, they)* is not an exception to our prevailing observation.

Regarding the contrast between the relative pronouns *who* and *which*, the frequency figures reported in Biber et al. (p. 610) show that in the conversation register *who* is slightly more common than *which* (while *which* is by far more common than *who* in the academic register). In the 56,100-word Kenyan English sub-corpus, *who* appears 184 times while *which* appears only 80 times. So, since the sentence *The parents who the children will not have paid school fee after a month will be surcharged* was by far less accepted (18.8%) than *Both texts have quite a number of words which are easy to find the meaning* (61.9%), the *who-which* contrast corroborates our observation. (However, one could also argue that the latter structure was much more accepted because the segment *which are easy to find* reads like a correct syntactic unit, while *who the children will* does not.)

Let us now turn to the contrast between *primary, secondary* and *secretarial*. Unfortunately, there are no frequency figures reported in Biber et al. (1999) about any of the three adjectives. Nevertheless, both *primary* and *secondary* are mentioned on p. 515, and there is a hint there that they are among the common adjectives. It is said about them that "As in the other registers", they are among "the most common attributive adjectives in academic prose". In the Kenyan English sub-corpus, *primary* appears seven times in the 56,100 words of conversation register while *secondary* appears three times. *Secretarial* does not appear a single time. It would thus appear that *primary* is more frequent than *secondary,* and that both are more frequent than *secretarial*. Quite tellingly, this order is the inverse of that of the rates of acceptability for structures involving the three adjectives: 24.8% for *primary,* 40.8% for *secondary* and 56% for *secretarial*. So, once more, this provides yet further support for our prevailing observation.

Finally, we come to the contrast between *oftenly* and *anyhowly*.[10] Since these two words do not exist in the dictionary of StIntE, I checked the frequency of occurrence of *often* and *anyhow*, the two words in lieu of which *oftenly* and *anyhowly* are sometimes used in Kenyan English. I found that *often* was more common than *anyhow*. Actually, while *often* appears in the Oxford 3000™ and is listed in Biber et al. (1999: 797) among the "most common circumstance adverbials", *anyhow* is not even mentioned once in either group. If we relate this to the acceptability rates for *anyhowly* and *oftenly*, we get further support for our now familiar observation: the rate for *anyhowly* (54.3%) is significantly higher than that for *oftenly* (34.1%).

To summarize the discussion of the results reported in Table 1, this is the picture that has emerged: with the exception of the contrast between the pairs of personal pronouns *Us we* and *Them they*, and those between the nouns *equipments* and *furnitures* on the one hand and *phenomena* and *criteria* on the other, for any other two pairs or sets of words contrasted in terms of acceptability rates, the higher the frequency of a given lexical item is in Standard International English, the less likely the Kenyan English structure associated with it will be accepted as grammatical. At first sight this finding may sound counterintuitive, because one would expect that if a given lexical item was very frequent in the language, a non-standard form associated with it would be as frequent, and would be expected to be more acceptable. But this turns out to be the opposite of the prevailing observation made from the results in Table 1. One way of making sense of this observation is to reverse the argument and argue that the more frequent the lexical item is in Standard English, the more likely the speakers of it will be aware of what the standard structure involving the very lexical item should be, and, consequently, the more likely they will reject the variant of it that is not standard usage. The Standard English I am talking about here may be Standard International English or "Standard

---

[10] Regarding the other lexical items contrasted in Table 1 (viz. *equipments vs. furnitures* and *phenomena vs. criteria*), there is no indication whatsoever of frequency given in the LWSE corpus and they do not appear in the Kenyan English sub-corpus at all.

Kenyan English", though the contours of the latter are yet to be defined (as remarked by Schneider 2007, p. 197 and hinted at by Skandera, 2003, p. 211).

But there is another possible explanation, which will take us back to Bybee (2006). The author offers us an empirically-based argument based on evidence from a number of research studies that looked at the effect of frequency on linguistic change over time. From this evidence, she concludes that "Exemplars of morphosyntactic constructions, like morphologically complex words, are resistant to change if they are highly frequent" (p. 728). It is clear that the research Bybee is referring to was done from a diachronic perspective, while the present study was done from a synchronic one. Still, we can exploit the "resistance-to-change" argument in the following way: since Kenyan English is an emerging language variety, when we deal with its current linguistic features we are dealing with the outcome of the process of them changing from their "parent" structures. In this way of thinking, if the Kenyan English features involving highly frequent lexical items are less accepted, this could mean that their parent structures have resisted change.

3.2 Variability according to position in a sentence

The results are first summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Variability according to position in a sentence

	Feature	Accepted= Not corrected	
		Total	%
1	*... is studying in **primary**...*	141/218	64.7
2	*... one must have finished **primary**.*	61/113	54
3	***Primary** is now free...*	54/218	24.8
4	*... is doing **secretarial**.*	177/218	81.2
5	***Secretarial** may begin...*	122/218	56
6	***Her second born** is studying...*	206/218	94.5
7	*... speak to **his second born**.*	109/117	93.2

8	*Majority* of people...	189/218	86.7
9	... to *majority of people*...	156/218	71.6
10	*Ministry of Education* got worried...	34/178	19.1
11	... by *Ministry of Education*.	25/138	18.1
12	*Furnitures* have cost...	39/113	34.5
13	... spent on *furnitures. Isn't that...?*	11/113	9.7
14	... people in Nairobi *oftenly* mix ...	80/218	36.7%
15	*Oftenly*, we forget...	42/123	34.1%
16	If you do that *anyhowly*, you...	72/123	58.5%
17	*Anyhowly*, they managed...	67/123	54.5%
18	... union leaders, *e.t.c.*, all have...	187/218	85.7
19	... students, workers, *e.t.c.*	171/218	78.4
20	... will contribute **upto** ten thousand...	193/218	88.5
21	*Upto* five million shillings...	184/218	84.4

Items 1 to 7 in Table 2 tested the adjectives *primary*, *secretarial* and *second born* used on their own, without no accompanying noun; items 8 to 11 the absence of an article before the phrases *Majority of people* and *Ministry of Education*; items 12 and 13 the marking of the plural on the word *furnitures*; items 14 to 17 the use of *oftenly* and *anyhowly* for *often* and *anyhow*; items 18 to 21 the possibility of noticing the misspellings in *e.t.c.* and *upto*.

On the assumption that elements placed at the beginning and the end of sentences would be easily noticed, and that those placed in the middle would not, I wanted to test the extent to which the saliency of the position would make the features being tested more easily noticed and, as a consequence, more likely to be corrected. Table 2 presents the contrasts where the same feature appeared in two different positions—with the exception of the adjective *primary* which was tested in all three positions (items 1 to 3).

The percentages in Table 2 show that in the majority of cases it is indeed in the salient position (mostly the initial) where the respondents corrected the relevant feature more often, hence the lower rates of acceptability in both the initial and end positions. Only in two contrasts (those involving the words *majority* at item 9 and *furnitures* at item 13) out of the seven medial positions targeted was the rate of acceptability lower in the medial position than in either the initial or the end one.

Of greater interest here are the cases where the chi-square statistics showed the difference in frequencies to be significant. In these cases, the picture is mixed: in only half of the ten contrasts was the difference statistically significant. The five are those involving the adjectives *primary* (items 1 to 3) and *secretarial* (items 4 and 5), the nouns *majority* (items 8 and 9) and *furnitures* (items 12 and 13), and the misspelling *e.t.c.* (items 18 and 19). In the two cases involving the two adjectives, the difference in their rates of acceptability was found to be significant even at $p<.01$. But beyond this statistical significance, what is particularly interesting is the fact that for both adjectives the feature under analysis (i.e. their being used as if they were nouns) was by far more accepted in the final position than in the initial. This is somewhat intriguing because the two positions are known to be both prominent. This is how Biber et al. (1999) put it: "In general, it seems accurate to identify two major potential points of prominence in the clause: the beginning and the end" (p. 897). A plausible explanation for the difference may lie in the fact that in the initial position the two adjectives appeared as subject, while in the final position they appeared as direct object. Thus, the function of the adjective in question might be a determining factor.

However, this might not be all, because neither the function nor the position was found to be a significant factor in the case of the adjective *second born*: the difference between the acceptability rates reported in Table 2 was not found to be statistically significant. Of course it can be argued that *second born* was used differently in the data, that is, with the possessive determiner *her/his*, on the analogy of the correct structure

her/his first-born.[11] So, it seems that beyond the position in a sentence, the nature of the lexical item is a determining factor, here, too. (My hunch is that the use of determiners with the adjectives *primary* and *secretarial*, as in these hypothetical examples: **His primary is now free* and **Her secretarial will begin next year*, would most likely make them less acceptable.)

The statistics for the items that involved the lack of an article are even more puzzling. This is because the phrase *majority of people* (items 8 and 9) was significantly less accepted in the medial position than in the initial. As for the phrase *Ministry of Education* (items 10 and 11), although the difference in frequencies was not statistically significant, the percentages (19.1% vs. 18.1%) show a slightly lower rate of acceptance for the final position than the initial one. Now, what the medial and the final positions have in common in these two particular cases is that both are directly introduced by a preposition. This makes the results all the more surprising because there are a number of cases in English where the non-use of an article is actually caused by the presence of a preposition. (See "fixed expressions", like *by car* and *from top to bottom*, in Swan, 2005, p. 62.)

Puzzling though the role of the preposition might be in the preceding case, it appears that, together with the position of the feature in the sentence, it might also be a determining factor in the case involving *furnitures* (items 12 and 13), where the issue was not the absence of the article but the use of the plural morpheme *-s*. *Furnitures* was less accepted medially (9.7%), where it came after a preposition, than initially (34.5%).

Concerning *anyhowly* and *oftenly*, the feature was less accepted in the initial position (54.5% for the former and 34.1% for the latter) than in the medial (58.5% and 36.7% respectively). This which would seem to conform to our working hypothesis, namely that the saliency of the position would make the feature under analysis more easily noticed and possibly corrected. However, neither the difference in the 54.5% vs. 58.5% rates for *anyhowly*

---

[11] It is precisely this analogy that can explain the much higher rates of acceptability of it (94.5% and 93.2%) than those of either *primary* or *secretarial* in any sentence position.

nor that in the 34.1% vs. 36.7% ones for *oftenly* was found to be statistically significant.

Turning finally to cases related to correcting misspellings (items 18 to 21), the results seem to bear out the working hypothesis: first, in the case of *e.t.c.*, this misspelling was less accepted where it occurred at the end of the sentence (78.4%) than in the middle (85.7%), with the difference being statistically significant. As for *upto*, it was also less accepted in a prominent position, the initial (84.4%), than in the medial (88.5%), though the difference in these frequencies was not found to be significant (with a chi-square value of only 1.59).

In summary, the overall picture emerging from Table 2 is that the acceptability rates are lower in salient positions in eight out of the ten cases contrasted, even though the differences in frequencies were found to be statistically significant in only five of them. All the same, it can be concluded that the prominence of a position, i.e. whether it is the initial or the end position, appears to be a determining factor, to the extent that it tends to lead to the feature under study being more often noticed and, as a result, more often corrected.

3.3 Variability according to type of sentence and/or communicative intent

The results are first summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Variability according to type of sentence or communicative intent

	Feature	Not corrected = Accepted	
		Total	%
1	*Could you be knowing someone...*	11/38	28.9
2	*Yes, I am knowing someone...*	1/38	2.6
3	*Can you be able to type this...*	72/218	33
4	*... you cannot be able to succeed.*	26/133	19.5
5	*The management and the staff congratulates...*	114/218	52.3
6	*The management and the staff was*	111/218	50.9

congratulated...

| 7 | *... all had one demand; that he should be sacked...* | 96/105 | 91.4 |
| 8 | *... from many people; students, workers, e.t.c.* | 119/144 | 82.6 |

Items 1 to 4 in Table 3 contrast the marking of the progressive aspect on stative verbs in an interrogative sentence and a declarative one (in 1 and 2) on the one hand, and in an interrogative and a negative one (in 3 and 4) on the other. Items 5 and 6 contrast the lack of number agreement in an active and a passive sentence. Items 7 and 8 contrast the use of the semi-colon wrongly used for the colon to introduce an explanatory clause in (7) and a list in (8).

The overall picture is that the type of sentence (or its communicative intent) seems to be a determining factor in accepting specific Kenyan English structures: the difference in the respective rates of acceptability was found to be statistically significant in three of the four contrasts. Only in the case contrasting the active and the passive structures (items 5 & 6) was it not significant.

A particularly interesting observation is that in the first two pairs of contrasts (items 1 to 4), the question structure was more accepted than either the declarative or the negative one. Why this should be the case is difficult to tell. It will be recalled that for the variables in the preceding two sections (namely type of lexical item and position in a sentence) the frequency of specific lexical items in StIntE and the saliency of the position tended to be associated with lower rates of acceptability of the features tested. Apparently, these two elements would be irrelevant in the present case because the question structure, which recorded higher rates of acceptability (see items 1 and 3 in Table 3), seems to be more frequent than at least the negative structure in conversation (if we compute the

frequencies reported in Biber et al., 1999; see p.211 for questions and pp. 170-1 for negatives).[12]

But it seems that an additional line of argumentation needs to be explored. From results from two recent MA student research assignments (in May 2013) two interesting observations were made: first, apparently it is the string of words *Could ... + be + knowing...* that sounds like a "correct" set phrase. This statement is based on findings from Mary Magwa's research assignment. She asked a sample of thirty Form-three students to fill in the gap in the sentence *Could you _____ the way to Kitengela?* with one of the following three choices: *a) know, b) be knowing,* and *c) have knowledge of.* The vast majority of them, 22/30 (i.e. 73%), chose *be knowing.* Second, in her own research assignment, Diana Gatumu asked a sample of thirty Form-two students (from a different school) to indicate whether the following sentences were correct or incorrect: *a) Could you be knowing the principal?* and *b) Are you knowing the principal?* While 20/30 (i.e. 67%) "wrongly" said that sentence (a) was correct, not a single one said that sentence (b) was. Yet, it, too, is a question structure. So, there must be more to justify the greater rate of acceptability of the *Could you be knowing...* structure than just it being a question.

4. BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS THE TYPE OF VARIABILITY AT PLAY IN THE PRESENT STUDY?

As earlier suggested in the Introduction and Methodology sections, the kind of variability that the present study aimed to examine is dependent upon the linguistic context, that is, "the elements that precede and follow the variable structure in question" (Ellis, 2008, p. 130). In the jargon of second language acquisition, context-dependent variability is referred to as *systematic* and is contrasted with *non-systematic* (also called *free*)

---

[12] I was not able to find a clear indication in Biber at al. (1999) about the frequency of declarative structures.

variability.[13] The following definition of free variation gives a good idea of what both systematic and non-systematic variability mean:

> Free variation can be held to exist when two or more variants of the same linguistic variable are seen to be used randomly by individuals with regard to *all* of the following:
> 1. the same situational context(s)
> 2. the same illocutionary meanings
> 3. the same linguistic context(s)
> 4. the same discourse context(s)
> 5. the same planning conditions.
> This definition ... refers to those variables that have been demonstrated to induce systematic variability in learner language. (Ellis, 1999, p. 464)

Conversely, "[s]ystematic variation is conditioned by both sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors" (Ellis, 2008, p. 130). In other words, "[it] occurs when it is possible to identify some factor that predisposes a learner to select one specific linguistic form over another" (ibid.). Linguistic context, which is the independent variable in the present study, is one of the sociolinguistic factors.

The systematic vs. non-systematic distinction has characterized the debate on variability in interlanguage development (see e.g. Ellis, 1985, 1994, 1999, 2008, etc.; Tarone 1988; Towell et al., 1993). Rod Ellis, undoubtedly one of the most prolific authors on variability in interlanguage, observes that "learner language, like the language of native speakers, appears to be inherently variable" and that "a key issue is the extent to which this variability is systematic" (1994: 22). On this latter point, he comments that much of this variability "undoubtedly is" systematic, in that "learners frequently use one structure on one occasion and a different structure on another according to *linguistic context*" (ibid.).

It should be stressed, however, that the variability that will be analysed in the present study is not, in my opinion, of exactly the same kind as that in interlanguage development. In the latter, the kind that Ellis and other researchers on interlanguage have described, language forms produced by the second language learner are compared with target forms, that is, those

---

[13] Note, in passing, that the term *variation* has been used interchangeably with that of *variability,* as in e.g. the title of Ellis's (1999) article and that of Tarone's (1988) book.

he or she is aiming to learn ultimately. In this regard, there is variability when the learner shifts from a non-target form (i.e. the interlanguage form) to a target one, or even to another non-target one, and vice versa, depending on some sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic factor. And, in the end, this variability will, in theory at least, disappear when the learner has mastered the rule(s) of what form(s) should be used in what context(s). In the present study, the variability at play concerns forms which I assume to be permanent, whether they have stabilized as a result of fossilization in the learning of Standard International English forms, or whether they were already part of the English the respondents were exposed to in the first place.

In relation to this latter point, we would tend to think that the features of Kenyan English were fossilized forms that resulted from imperfect learning of Standard English forms. However, it would not be convincing to link some of the typical features of Kenyan English to a rule that was imperfectly learnt. For instance, one would have to stretch one's imagination to speculate about how the imperative structure *be + V-ing* (as in *be coming*) had resulted from a putative imperfect learning of the Standard English imperative rule, or how a small set of adjectives, which all seem to be related to education, can be used as if they were nouns (as in *she is still in primary*). While I have no idea how such features got into the language, I would contend that they get picked up by learners of English in Kenya from the English they are exposed to from their teachers and the general public. I would, therefore, argue that, however deviant some Kenyan English structures look from Standard International English ones, they were picked up just like that as part of their naturalistic acquisition of English, and thus, should not be regarded as fossilized "errors", but as "correct" forms of the English the learners were exposed to.

Anecdotally, it would not be uncommon to hear some of the forms under study being used in the English of the minority of Kenyans (mostly

living in the City of Nairobi) for whom English is the first language.[14] After all, as indicated in Buregeya (2006), some of the features under study were already in use (some proof for this being the fact that were reported in Hocking's 1974 book) before a considerable proportion of the Kenyan-English speaking population went to school (and were taught English). So, if one wanted to stick to the idea that they resulted from fossilization at some stage, this must have been before the majority of the current Kenyan English speakers were even born.

Because of that, I consider the variability in this study to be of the same nature as that observed in language use in general and reported in sociolinguistics studies in general or those on corpus linguistics. In this connection, here is what one sociolinguist says:

> *Inherent variability* means that the variation is not due to the mixture of two or more varieties but is an integral part of the variety itself. ... Linguistic varieties appear to be inherently variable as a rule rather than as an exception.... (Trudgill, 2000, pp. 34-35)

And the following is a view from corpus linguists:

> Our studies show that much of the variation among features is highly systematic: speakers of language make choices in morphology, lexicon, and grammar depending on a number of linguistic and non-linguistic contextual factors. (Biber et al., 1999, p. 5)

Still, the variability analysed in the resent study is "unique" in another respect: the study of variability alluded to so far, whether in interlanguage studies or in sociolinguistic or corpus linguistics studies, has essentially been in language *production*, i.e. in speaking or writing, while the variability in the present study is that involving (indirect) *grammaticality judgements*.

In connection to the use of grammaticality judgments, Ellis (1999) made the following comment: "It should be noted, however, that L2 variability has generally been examined in production data and that uncertainty exists regarding the validity of grammatical judgement data in SLA..." (p. 466). One can thus hope that the findings of the present research have somewhat

---

[14] The focus of my research is Black Kenyan English, taught and used by the vast majority of Kenyan schools and public. For useful information on White Kenyan English, which is more of a regional dialect of British English, see Hoffmann (2010).

contributed to reducing this uncertainty, even though in the preceding paragraphs I have argued that some of the Kenyan English structures studied should not be considered as typical Second Language Acquisition (i.e. interlanguage) data.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate whether a set of grammatical features assumed, mostly from Buregeya's (2006) study, to be characteristic of Kenyan English would be accepted at significantly variable degrees in a questionnaire that asked the respondents to correct various grammatical mistakes in thirty-five sentences. The questionnaire was designed to test this variability in acceptability rates on three variables: the type of the lexical item involved, the position occupied by the feature in the sentence, and the type of sentence it occurs in.

The key findings are the following: first, with regard to type of lexical item, the higher the frequency of a given lexical item is in Standard International English, the less likely the Kenyan English structure associated with it will be accepted as grammatical. Second, in relation to the position of the Kenyan English feature in the sentence, it was found that when placed in a salient position (i.e. either initial or end) the feature tended to be noticed and corrected. In other words, the saliency of the position tended to make the feature less accepted. I am using the verb *tend* because there were cases were other factors seemed to override the saliency of the position. One such factor is the function (i.e. whether subject, direct object or object of a preposition) which the lexical item, if a noun, played in the specific position. Third, regarding the type-of-sentence variable, this indeed seems to be a determining factor. But what was found to be particularly interesting is the fact that the structure of a question (*Can you be able to do it?*) was more acceptable than both its declarative and negative counterparts (*Yes, I can be able to do it* and *No, I cannot be able to do it*).

The findings summarized above were obtained from indirect grammaticality judgments that asked the respondents to correct whatever structure they thought was ungrammatical; they were not obtained from production data. Therefore, one obvious, and two-fold, question arises as to whether the type, and the amount, of contextual variability that was observed would be observed in the same respondents' spoken language. I stress "spoken language" because the features studied typically belong to spoken Kenyan English. (At least that is where they can be easily observed.) In relation to "type" of variability, the answer is, "Yes", since it is my noticing it that motivated this study in the first place. However, concerning "amount", the answer is clearly, "No". This is because some of the features which recorded very low rates of acceptability, that is, which were actually corrected as mistakes by quite a large majority of respondents, are definitely frequent in spoken Kenyan English. Any meticulous student of this English will for instance agree that the structure that scored the second lowest rate of acceptability (5.7% only), namely the use of the sequence *Me, I...* (as in *Me I don't know...*), is doubtless one of the most frequent structures tested, if not simply the most frequent of them all. Similarly, one would accept that a structure like *can able* is heard everyday on TV and radio in the speech of even highly educated people in Kenya. Actually, I can assert that most of the structures tested occur much more frequently in spoken Kenyan English than the acceptability rates reported in this study would suggest. (One exception would be the structure *I am knowing* ....) Unfortunately, it would be practically impossible to prove this assertion empirically for the simple reason that there would not be enough time to collect conversational data from the same sample used for the grammaticality judgments exercise.

Now, irrespective of whether those percentages of acceptability would reflect rates of use in production or not, they have brought to light variability that cannot be ignored when making generalizations about what grammatical features are *really* typical of Kenyan English. And this is an

issue which will have to be borne in mind when the time to codify Kenyan English has come.[15]

And, finally, it is worth repeating that the present study deliberately targeted contextual, (i.e. *systematic*) variability in the acceptability of given features of Kenyan English. Since, as was noted earlier, free variability (i.e. *non-systematic*) is part and parcel of variability-in-language studies, further research on variability in Kenyan English should also look at free variability.

REFERENCES

Biber, D., S. Johansson, G. Leech, S. Conrad, and E. Finegan. 1999. *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.

Buregeya, A. 2006. "Grammatical features of Kenyan English and the extent of their acceptability". *English World-Wide*, 26: 199-216.

Bybee, J. 2006. "From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition". *Language* 82: 711-33.

Ellis, R. 1985. "Sources of variability in interlanguage". *Applied Linguistics*, 6: 118-31.

Ellis, R. 1994. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. 1999. "Item versus system learning: Explaining free variation". *Applied Linguistics* 20/4: 460-480.

Ellis, R. 2008. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hocking, B. D. W. 1974. *Common Errors in English: A Handbook for East Africa* (first published as *All What I Was Taught and Other Mistakes: A Handbook of Common Errors in English*) Nairobi: Oxfo. d University Press.

---

[15] Six years ago, Schneider suggested that this time had not come yet: "Descriptive work on properties of Kenyan English is increasingly done, but codification cannot really be envisaged at this point" (2007: 197).

Hoffmann, T. 2010. "White Kenyan English". In Daniel Schreier, Peter Trudgill, Edgar Schneider and Jeffrey P. Williams, eds. *The Lesser-known Varieties of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 286-312.

Schneider, E. W. 2007. *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Skandera, P. 2003. *Drawing a Map of Africa: Idiom in Kenyan English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Swan, M. 2005. *Practical English Usage*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tarone, E. 1988. *Variation in Interlanguage*. London: Edward Arnold.

Towell, R., R. Hawkins, and N. Bazergui. 1993. "Systematic and nonsystematic variability in advanced language learning". *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15: 439-460.

Trudgill, P. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. 4th ed. London: Penguin Books.

Author's address:

Department of Linguistics and Languages
University of Nairobi
PO Box 30197-00100
Nairobi, Kenya
Email: aburegeya@uonbi.ac.ke

APPENDIX: THE TWO PARTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART A

CORRECT ANY MISTAKES OF GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY, SPELLING OR PUNCTUATION IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES, WHERE APPLICABLE.

1. They are waiting for us. **Be going** while I finish writting the letter.
2. The teacher asked, "**Are you understanding me**?"
3. Please, **type for me this letter**. I will collect it in the afternoon.
4. **Majority of people** in Nairobi **oftenly** mix up to three languages.
5. **Us we** will contribute **upto** ten thousand shillings each.
6. The course will **enable them improve** their language skills.
7. Both texts have quite **a number of words which are easy to find the meaning**.
8. **Her second born** is studying **in primary**, while she herself is **doing secretarial**.
9. The demand he should be sacked came from many people; students, workers, **e.t.c.**
10. **Furnitures** have cost alot of money, isn't it?
11. The Management and the staff **congratulates** the President on this auspicious day.
12. **Me, I** don't know what **the phenomena is**.
13. If you do that **anyhowly**, you **cannot be able** to succeed.
14. Most people blame ECK for what happened.
15. **Ministry of Education** got worried when strike begun.
16. Particular attention has to be paid to women groups.
17. **Could you be knowing** someone who has a copy of that book?

PART B

CORRECT ANY MISTAKES OF GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY, SPELLING OR PUNCTUATION IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES, WHERE APPLICABLE.

1. We don't stock the book you want for the moment, but we expect it any time from next week. So, **be coming to check** if it has arrived.
2. I am very broke. **Are you having** any money with you?
3. Please, **buy for her lunch** and **send to me the bill**.
4. I have already spoken **to majority of people** and they are all agreed on the new proposal.
5. **Them, they** were lucky: they had started writting their theses when the strike occured.
6. In the end that **enabled the company reduce costs**.
7. **The parents who the children will not have paid** school fee after a month will be surcharged.
8. **Can you be able** to type this few lines for me in ten minutes' time?
9. **Primary is now free,** but **secondary remains very expensive**.
10. **Upto** five million shillings has already been spent on **furnitures**. Isn't that a lot of money?
11. **Secretarial may begin** only after the main course is finished.
12. Students, teachers, union leaders, **e.t.c.,** all have began their strike now.
13. **The criteria is** that one must have finished primary.
14. Then **the Minister said they will look** into the issue of raising lecturers' salaries.
15. **Anyhowly,** they also managed to speak to **his second born**.
16. The Management and the staff **was** congratulated **by Ministry of Education**.
17. Yes, **I am knowing** someone with a copy of that book.
18. **Oftenly,** we forget that there is a problem of children soldiers as well.
19. They concluded that the ECK should have done a better job.

STRATEGIES OF CONTROLLING THE LINGUISTIC RESPONSE FROM CROSS-EXAMINED WITNESSES: LAY DEFENDANTS AS CROSS-EXAMINERS IN A KENYAN RESIDENT MAGISTRATE'S COURT[1]

Emmanuel SATIA
Moi University

This paper analyzes strategies of controlling the linguistic responses of prosecution witnesses that were employed by two accused persons in a grievous-bodily-harm case involving family members at a magistrate's court in Kenya. The accused persons were ordinary rural women. The first one was a middle aged woman while the second was a young lady in her twenties. Prosecution witnesses, on the other hand, were two young children aged 12 and 14. The study analysed audio-recorded court proceedings lasting about 1¾ hours using a discourse analytic approach and found that the range of controlling strategies used by the defendants included aggressive questioning styles, the use of multiple questions, formulaic questions, epistemological challenges and accusatory remarks against the witnesses. Although the lay defendants demonstrated an unusual level of awareness of cross-examination strategies, the paper questions where they would have learnt such strategies and proposes further research on this area.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya's legal system, like that of most other former British colonies, is founded on the common law system. Accordingly, court proceedings are adversarial and each of the parties involved in a trial "fights for their own case" by "presenting a version of facts that will be challenged by the other party" (Hale 2004: 31). In this situation, linguistic control may be regarded as the means by which a litigant presents his/her version of events in a manner that suggests that that version is the accurate one as opposed to the version of events presented by the defendant.

Studies on courtroom discourse show that control is exercised through a number of linguistic strategies. For example, Walker (1987), Conley and O'Barr (1998), Cotterill (2003), Hale (2004), and Gibbons (2003 & 2008) have found the manipulation of the question form to be a critical tool of control. For Walker (1987: 64), "the form of the question" is "the most powerful weapon an attorney has in the war of words with the witness". Conley and O'Barr (1998: 24), on the other hand, argue that "the WH question is the least controlling and coercive" ... and that "the tag question ... is the most controlling". Such views have, however, come under criticism. Harris (1984) for example, suggests that "context is important in determining the function of questions", while Bulow-Moller (1991: 39) argues that coercion "is more pronounced in pragmatic conversation rules" than in syntactic choices. In spite of these rather contradictory positions, Hale's (2004: 35) argument that "lawyers deliberately employ certain types of questions to achieve their purposes" and that "as a general rule, they are successful," underscores the importance of manipulation of the question form as a tool of linguistic control. At times, as Cotterill (2003: 144) observes, a lawyer may ask a question and then define the response boundaries. This type of question constrains the witness to give a response within the limits provided by the lawyer. Similarly, the lawyer may ask a question and then constrain the form of the response from the witness by indicating "prescriptively the linguistic form that the response should take". The witness's response will therefore be provided within the type of response suggested by the lawyer and, hence, provide only the type of information required by the lawyer.

In addition, lawyers may also control witnesses' responses through topic management. Conley and O'Barr (1998: 26) argue that "by posing a particular question, one might assume, the lawyer determines the topic of the answer". This, together with the fact that lawyers can execute shifts during cross-examination, places topic control firmly in their hands. In executing this strategy, lawyers may secure what Walker (1987: 62) refers to as "damaging admissions".

Furthermore, through linguistic devices known as "epistemological filters" (Matoesian 1993, p. 184), lawyers have the power to directly challenge the knowledge claimed by a witness, "the specific facts the witness claims to know, ... the sources of the claimed knowledge, and ultimately whether the witness is capable of knowing anything at all" (O'Barr & Conley, 1998, p. 29) An example of an epistemological filter would be a question such as the following: *How do you know what you say that you know?* Conley and O'Barr (1998: 29-30) see these filters "as a strategy that lawyers use to achieve and maintain domination". They argue that epistemological filters, together with the lawyers' control over turn-taking and their ability to manipulate the form of questions, "make it very difficult for the witness to contest the epistemological challenge".

For Drew (1990: 49-55), the subtle strategies that lawyers may employ in order to control witnesses' responses include "contrast devices" and "three-part descriptions". In contrast devices, a lawyer juxtaposes two versions of a suspect's or a witness's version of events and leaves the matter to the court to decide. For example, as Drew 1992 (506-7) shows, a complainant in rape case claims not have had any relationship with her attacker. But the accused person's lawyer suggests that they, in fact, had an intimate relationship. He does so by implying that the manner of his greeting suggested the relationship. He asks her how his client had greeted her. Upon stating that the accused asked her how she had been, 'J-just stuff like that,' which would suggest that the two had no intimate relationship, the lawyer provides a contrast by juxtaposing that answer with his client's action of kissing her: "Just asked you how you'd been but kissed you goodnight...". The contrast here is in the complainant's suggestion that there was no relationship between the accused person and herself yet she allows him to kiss her goodnight.

Drew (1990) argues that a contrast device offers the lawyer "the opportunity to bring together facts from prior testimony [and] to juxtapose them to make a point". He adds that by being "available only to the questioner in courtroom examinations," the device "gives the questioner an important means of control". Drew notes that "such contrasts generate

inferences that are damaging to the witness's testimony and these are entirely explicit" (p. 51). As for three-part descriptions, they are used to describe some action, scene or other element of the testimony. The oath taken in court best exemplifies a three-part list since the person taking the oath swears to 'tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'. So, three-part descriptions may be used as a strategy to lure the witness into agreeing with the lawyer's version of events.[2]

It should be stressed here that most of the studies mentioned above have focused on the cross-examination strategies employed by lawyers in court. As Tkačuková (2010: 334) remarks, studies on lay persons performing the role of cross-examiners have "been neglected". The absence of such studies may be attributed to the fact that in the United Kingdom and America, where most of the studies have been conducted, it is rare for accused persons to appear in court unrepresented. This is in contrast to the situation in Kenya where self-representation appears to be the norm. Under the Kenyan law, Article 50(1)(h) of the Constitution grants the accused persons the right "to have an advocate assigned to the accused person by the State and at State expense" only "if substantial injustice would otherwise result..." (Republic of Kenya, p. 36). One such instance is when accused persons are charged with capital offences. In all other cases, defendants are left to their own means. Inevitably, this means that accused lay persons find themselves on their own defence which, at times, involves cross-examining their accusers. So, it would be interesting to investigate the extent to which even lay defendants make recourse to the kind of strategies mentioned above and which involve using specific linguistic devices to control the linguistic contribution of their accusers. And this is what this paper set out to do.

---

[2] For Gibbons (2003), other strategies for linguistic control in the courtroom are "intonation and tone of voice and various elements of the existing situation..." (p. 101).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The participants

The participants in the case were labelled using the following abbreviations for ease of reference and for the preservation of anonymity: ACCP1 refers to "First Accused Person", ACCP2 to "Second Accused Person", CW1 to "First Child Witness", and CW2 to "Second Child witness". In all cases, the names of the participants, places and the respective court have been anonymised.[3] The defendants in the case were two ordinary women. The first accused person (ACCP1) was a middle-aged woman and the second accused person (ACCP2) was a young lady in her twenties. The prosecution witnesses, on the other hand, were two children: one aged 12, and the other 14. The two defendants had been charged with assaulting and causing grievous bodily harm (GBH) to a family member, Chumba. The facts of the case showed that the complainant had apparently been assaulted by ACCP1 and ACCP2, following a dispute over Chumba's role in apprehending members of a community from a neighbouring country. This had arisen from allegations that a member of the targeted community had eloped with a school girl from the locality.

2.2 The data

The data used in this study are part of a 1:45-minute audio-recording of court proceedings in a Magistrate's court in Kenya. They were collected between July and October 2004 at the Kimelil District Court[4] within the Elgon County located in what was previously the Western Province of Kenya. Both the defendants and the prosecution witnesses spoke the same dialect of Kalenjin as their first language. Their Swahili, which was the language they chose to use during the court proceedings, is non-standard. In

---

[3] This followed an understanding reached between the court's executive officer and the magistrate on the one hand, and the researcher on the other.
[4] This is a pseudonym, as are the names of all persons, dates, places and time used in the present paper.

addition, the Swahili used in the excerpts from the two witnesses' accounts contains a fair amount of code switching and mixing.

After the audio-recording, the data were transcribed in conformity with Dörnyei's (2007: 248-9) "tape analysis" and "partial transcription" approach. This entailed listening to the recordings, marking and taking notes on significant parts, and later transcribing the selected parts fully. The level of detail of the transcription were, however, minimised in conformity with Ochs's (2000: 168) observation that a transcript "should not have too much information". The following transcription symbols[5] were used:

: [i.e.] colon(s): extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word.

(( )) [i.e.] double parentheses: scenic details.

° ° [i.e.] degree signs: a passage of talk noticeably softer than the surrounding talk.

OKAY [i.e.] CAPITAL LETTERS: extreme loudness compared with the surrounding talk.

(...) [i.e.] three dots: a significant pause

The verbatim recordings were thereafter freely translated into English.

3. DISCUSSION

As pointed out in the Introduction, a number of strategies of linguistic control have been reported in the literature to be used in the courtroom. The two lay defendants in the case under analysis employed the following strategies of control: questioning strategies, epistemological challenges and accusatory remarks. Each of these strategies is discussed in the following paragraphs with excerpts from the language of the lay defendants in question.

---

[5] These symbols were adopted from Gail Jefferson's transcription symbols, except for the last one (...), which has been coined for convenience. In Jefferson's transcription symbols, a pause is usually marked as (.).

3.1 Questioning strategies

Lay defendants in the case used questioning strategies: multiple questions and formulaic questions. The former refer to cases where a lawyer or an accused person asks a series of questions without giving the respondent time to answer the questions, while the latter refer to questions that use legal question-like formulas such as "I put it to you that ...?" and "Is it not the case that...?".

3.1.1 Multiple questions

The lay defendants in the present case used this strategy in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1

1. PROSECUTOR:

Eh, unaeleza.	Yes, explain.
Ukiulizwa hivyo,	When you are asked questions in that manner,
jibu.	Answer them.

2. ACCP1:

Mimi nauliza	I am asking
hiyo silaha ilipatikana wapi?	where was that weapon recovered?
Kama mimi nilikuwa [na yo]	if I had it
Ilipatikana wapi?	where was it recovered?
Iko alinisika na silaha?	Did anyone find me with a weapon?
Nikaenda polis station	(...) Did I go to the police station
na hiyo silaha?	with that weapon?

3. PROSECUTOR:

Unajua hiyo? Umeelewa?	Do you know that? Have you understood?

4. CW2: ((Silence))   ((Silence))

5. PROSECUTOR:

Anauliza	She's asking where
Hiyo silaha ilipatikana wapi?	that weapon was recovered
Unajua mahali ilipatikana? (...)	Do you know where it was found?
Unajua?	Do you know?

6. CW2:

°*Ndiyo*°	°Yes°.

7. ACCP1: ((Loudly))

SASA GANI NI YA UKWELI?	NOW WHAT IS TRUTHFUL?
RANDICH AMESEMA	RANDICH HAS SAID
ilipatikana kiosk ingine	it was found in some kiosk
na we unasema ilipatikana	while you are saying that it was found
mstuni. Nani likuwa napata?	in a bush. Who found it?
Mkajuaje ni yangu	How did you know it was mine
kama ilipatikana kwa mstuni?	if it was found in a bush?
Hata hiyo foresti, mapanga wengi	In any case, there are many machetes
watu wanatembea huko kukata miti	in that forest as people go there to cut trees
miti watoto wanawesa sahau HUKO.	Children may forget them THERE
Ni nini inaonyesha ilikuwa ni yangu?	(...)what shows that it was mine?
Kwa sababu ilipatikana mstuni?	Is it because it was found in a bush?
Uko mstuni ilikuwa ni nyumba yangu	Was that forest my house
ama ni ilikuwa wapi? (...)	or where was it / was I

8. PROSECUTOR:

Uliza swali moja moja	Ask one question at a time
ndio aweze kujibu.	so that she may answer

The excerpt illustrates ACCP1's preponderant use of multiple questions. In her first turn of speech (see turn 2 above), she asks four 4 questions in succession without giving the respondent time to respond to any of them. Similarly, in her second turn (see turn 7) she asks six questions in

succession. It is not surprising, therefore, that the witness responds to them with silence. Such a barrage of questions could only confuse the witness, as she would not know which of them she should answer. As a consequence, the witness, who was still a child, remained silent.

An examination of the defendant's questions in turn 7 also shows that a number of propositions are embedded in them. They are, (in their English translations):

(i)   RANDICH has said [that] it was found in a kiosk.

(ii)   You are saying [that] it was found in a bush.

(iii) There are many matchettes in that forest

(iv)   [Many] people go there to cut trees.

(v)   Children may forget their matchetes.

These five propositions, together with the six questions asked in turn 7 above, raise the number of ideas that the witnesses, both children, need to focus on to eleven. This is too complex for them to understand. As Walker (1999: 13) has observed, "Young children in particular have difficulty attending to more than one or two things at once".

Although the confusion experienced by the witness (CW2) may be attributed to the use of multiple questions and their complex structure, it is likely that he faced other psycholinguistic difficulties as well. First, the witness's silence (in turn 4 and elsewhere in the proceedings) and his constant use of short answers and low voice (in turn 6 and elsewhere in the proceedings) may be indicative of his communication difficulty. Roy (1990: 74), for example, has found that "those who do not fully comprehend a conversation assent weakly when they do not understand".

Second, the witness also appears to be fearful. Whereas the courtroom itself can be a source of intimidation because of the strangeness of the setting (Coulthard, M. & A. Johnson 2007: 95), the boy's fear may be attributed to two things. First, this may be a result of the metapragmatic directives directed at him (see 2.2). But above all, the accused person's insistence to have the witness respond to her multiple questions without giving the witness time to respond to them may be reflective of her desire to depict the witness as unreliable.

3.1.2 Formulaic questions

In the data under analysis, the following type of question will be regarded as formulaic because it repeatedly begins with a conditional clause which creates a predictable pattern. The first one, illustrated in excerpt 2, begins with a conditional clause, followed by one or more propositions, and then ends with a Yes/No question as was the case with all other formulaic questions in the data. Unlike multiple questions, a formulaic question contains only one question.

Excerpt 2

9. ACCP1:

Nikielesa maakama	If I tell the court (that)
sikusika panga kupika Chumba	I did not pick up a machete to hit Chumba (that)
nilitoa kuni yenye ilikuwa iko	I pulled out a piece of burning firewood from the hearth
kwa moto na kupiga Chumba naye	and hit Chumba with it,
nitakuwa nimedanganya maakama? (...)	will I have lied to the court?

10. ACCP2:

Nikielesa hii maakama ha -tuli-	If I tell this court we didn't ...we...
hakuna mtu alitupata mahali pale	no one found us at the scene of crime
nitakuwa nimesema uongo?	will I have lied?

The structure of the formulaic question (used by ACCP1 in [9] and ACCP2 in [10]) is reducible to the following formula : If-clause + propositon [n...] + Yes/No question, where [n...] refers to the number of times propositions may occur. The propositions in these questions contain the accused person's alternative version of the events. In the Example 9 above, the defendant's version is that she struck the complainant with a piece of firewood, and not with a matchete as suggested by her accuser. Similarly, in Example 10, the

defendant's version is that neither of the accused persons was found at the scene of crime. By suggesting that she had used a piece of firewood to assault Chumba instead of a matchete (Example 9), the defendant attempts to minimize the severity of the assault, while in Example 10 the suspect is essentially denying culpability given that she was not at the scene of the crime. The problem with the defendant's question is that it presupposes that the accused persons were at the scene of crime. This negates her denial.

Having examined how lay defendants manipulate the question form to exert control over witnesses, let us now turn our attention to how the defendants use of metapragmatic directives.

3.2 Metapragmatic directives

Cavalieri (2011: 85) defines metadiscourse as "discourse about discourse" and later explains that in metadiscourse, "*I*" tends to co-occur with, among other things, "verbs in the progressive forms" (p. 98). In the data under analysis, interpersonal metadiscourse or metapragmatic directives are used by ACCP1 to control the contributions of her accusers. These are exemplified in the accused person's use of "*I am asking you ...*" in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 3
ACCP1:

Mimi nauliza	I am asking [my emphasis]
hiyo silaha ilipatikana wapi?	where was that weapon found?
Kama mimi nilikuwa (?)	If I was (?)
Ilipatikana wapi?	Where was it found?
Iko alinisika na silaha	Did anybody arrest me with a weapon?
nikaenda polis station na hiyo silaha?	(...) and then I went to the police station with it?

11. ACCP1:

Mi naulisa wewe...	*I am asking you...* [my emphasis]
hiyo panga ilipatikana mstuni,	the machete that was found in the bush
ilipatikana mstuni	(that) was found in the bush
nani alikuwa anapata kwa mstuni?	(...) who found it in the bush?

12. ACCP1:

Mi naulisa wewe	*I am asking you (my emphasis)*
hiyo panga ni ya nani?	whose machete is it?

The questions in exercpt 3 are preceded by the metapragmatic directive, "*I am asking you*", or "*I am telling you*", which sound intimidating. In fact, Eades (2008: 164), commenting on a similar incident in a case involving three Aboriginal boys in an Australian court, argues that such directives "sound as if they could be used by an authoritarian teacher disciplining a delinquent child". This apparently makes the witness CW2 fearful. In addition, the combination of the personal pronoun *I* and the progressive verb *am asking* in the directive has the effect of turning a potentially non coercive wh-question into a coercive one. But perhaps the boy's fear is accentuated most through prosodic resources. The directive is uttered both loudly and fast. This combination of syntactic and prosodic resources appears to accentuate the threat posed by the defendant ACCP1 and ultimately controls the witness's contribution. The directive tends to suggest that the respondent has not supplied the kind of answer required and is therefore being asked the question again. This has a definite effect on the witness as exemplified in the reactions of the witness. These are exemplified in excerpt 4, turns 13 and 15.

Excerpt 4
ACCP1:

Na tangu mlikata Chumba huyo	And since you cut Chumba
hiyo sila ilipatikana wapi?	where was that weapon found?

13. CW2: ((Inaudible))   ((inaudible))

14. PROSECUTOR:

Unajua mahali ilipatikana?   Do you know where it was found?

15. CW2:

∘*Sijui*∘   I don't know.

16. PROSECUTOR:

Eh, unaeleza.   Yes, explain.

Ukiulizwa hivyo unajibu.   When you're asked such a question,
                                you have to answer.

17. ACCP1:

Mimi nauliza   I am asking

hiyo silaha ilipatikana wapi? where was that weapon found?

Kama mimi nilikuwa (?)   If I was (?)

Ilipatikana wapi?   where was it found?

Iko alinisika na silaha nikaenda Did anybody arrest me and take me

polis station na hiyo silaha? (...) and then I went to the police

station with that weapon?

18. CW2: ((Silence))   ((silence))

19. PROSECUTOR:

Unajua hiyo?   Do you know (the answer) to that (question)?

Umeelewa?   Have you understood?

When the child is asked where the machette used in the attack was found, he responds feebly (as suggested by the inaudible response in turn 13) or by *I don't know* (in turn 15), or simply with a silence (in turns 18 and 20). These responses may be interpreted to mean that CW2 is "less convincing as a witness" (Gibbons 2003: 88). But the repeated use of the metapragmatic directive *"I am asking [you]..."* (in turn 17) may be regarded as intensifying the coersive effect of the question.

Inevitably, these metapragmatic directives instill fear and therefore control the contributins of the witnesses. In the following section, I examine how suspects controll the contributions of witnesses by challenging the witnesses' capacity to know the facts that they claim to know.

3.3 Epistemological filters

The data also shows that the two lay defendants also challenged the capacity of the witnesses to know what they claimed to know, just as lawyers do to control the contributions of witnesses. Three specific challenges were identified in the language of the lay defendants and are discussed below.

In Excerpt 5 that follows the first accused person (ACCP1) has just started cross-examining the witness, CW1. She questions the latter on their kinship ties.

Excerpt 5

20. ACCP1:

... *Umesema mimi ni nyanya yako.*	You've said I am your grandmother
Unasema "grandmother",	you say "grandmother",
Mimi sijui Kiingeresa	I don't understand English
Mimi ni nyanya <u>koko</u> yako	I am your grandmother, [your] *koko*
Mimi ni koko yako	I am your *koko*
nilisaa nani?	[If I am] your *koko*, whom did I give birth to?

21. CW1:

Baba yangu.	My father.

22. ACCP1:

Mimi nilisaa baba yako	Did I give birth to your father?
Ama koko mwingine alisaa	Or did a different grandmother give birth
baba yako?	to your father?

23. CW1:

We ulisaa: mwingine	You gave birth::: someone else
alisaa	[who] gave birth (to my father)
	but we are i::n that family.

24. ACCP1:

Ati nilisaa namna gani?	Whom did you say I give birth to?

25. CW1:

Mwingine alisaa	Someone else gave birth (to my father)

but we are i::n that family.

This first challenge revolves around the kinship ties that exist between ACCP1 and CW1: whereas CW1 knows ACCP1 to be her grandmother by virtue of her being married to her grandfather, ACCP1 challenges her knowledge of this relationship by suggesting that she is, in fact, not her grandmother. This challenge contradicts what knowledge CW1 might have acquired as a child growing up in her Kalenjin community where kinship terms are defined in broad terms. For example, kinship terms such as *father* and *mother* carry a greater semantic depth in the Kalenjin community (and in many other African communities) than what the same words would in English. The term *father*, for example, includes the biological male parent, his immediate brothers and clan members of the same age set. Similarly, *mother* covers the biological female parent, her sisters, and female clan members of her age set. In the case of polygamous families, one's *step-mother* is simply either the 'younger' mother or 'older' one, depending on when she got married to her spouse. In the same logic *grandmother* would include one's paternal or maternal grandparent, her sisters and any women of her age. In fact, Schmied (2012:248) argues that in 'Africa, many English word forms occur in slightly different contexts than in British English, thus usually expanding their referential meaning' adding that 'Kinship terms are expanded as reference and address terms, because they go far beyond core meanings related to the biological features of consanguinity, generation and sex and are related to the social features of seniority (age), solidarity, affection and relations'. So, when CW1 calls ACCP1 her "grandmother", her understanding is defined by her cultural knowledge that she is her grandmother on the basis of ACCP1 being married to her grandfather. That is why CW1 said (in turn 23 above), "Someone else gave birth (to my father) but we are i::n that family" and, later, stated that ACCP1 and her "real" grandmother were "co-wives".

ACCP1's question in turn 22 would therefore be considered to be a challenge to her knowledge about her being the CW1's grandmother.

Interestingly, ACCP1 begins her cross-examination of CW2 with questions about their kinship relationship.

Excerpt 6

26. ACCP 1:

CW2 umesema	CW2, you've said [that] I am,
mimi ni koko yako,	your grandmother,
mimi ni nyanya yako,	your grandmother,
nilisaa baba yako?	Did I give birth to your father?

27. CW2:

((Silence))	((Silence))

28. ACCP 1:

Mimi nilisaa baba yako?	Did I give birth to your father?

29. CW2:

((Weakly)) *La.*	(Weakly)) No.

30. ACCP 1:

Eh?	[What did you say?]

31. CW:

((Silence))	((Silence))

32. PROSECUTOR:

Jibu asikie.	Answer so that she may hear.

33. CW2:

La.	No.

34. *Mimi sikusaa baba yako?*   I did not give birth to your father?

35. PROSECUTOR:

Amejibu hiyo.	He has answered that question.

36. ACCP 1:

Na mbona unasema	Why then do you say that I am your
mimi ni nyanya yako?	grandmother?

37. CW2:

((Silence))	((Silence))

That ACCP 1 begins her cross-examination of CW2 with questions about their kinship relationship strongly suggests that she is using them strategically. Her repeating the question several times suggests that she knows that such a challenge would disorient the witness right from the start and, in the process, give her undue advantage over her accuser. CW2's responses, weakly (turn 29) and in silence (turns 27, 31, and 37) imply that the strategy has worked.

The second epistemological challenge regards the identification of Chumba's voice as a scream. In the following excerpt, ACCP1 questions CW1 on the scream made by Chumba, the victim.

Excerpt 7

38. ACCP1:

Unasema ulisikia Chumba	You say that you heard Chumba
akipiga nduru. Ulisikia sauti yake.	screaming. Did you hear his voice?
Hata mi(mi) nilipiga nduru.	I also screamed.
Ulisikia?	Did you hear my scream?

39. CW1:

Hakuna.	No way.

40. ACCP1:

Ulijuaje sauti	How did you know the sound
ni ya nduru?	was the sound of a scream?

41. CW1:

Nilijua kwa sababu nilikimbia.	I knew because I came [there] running.

42. ACCP1:

Chumba alikuwa amepigako nduru	Had Chumba ever screamed before
siku ingine, halafu ukaelewa kumbe hiyo	for you to know that that
sauti ni ya nduru?	sound was that of a scream?

43. CW1:

Si ni uchungu kwake.	It was the pain he suffered.

44. ACCP1:

Nauliza wewe,	I'm asking you

ulikuwa umesikia	had you ever heard
Chumba akipiga nduru siku ingine	Chumba screaming before
alafu ukasikia kumbe hiyo ni sauti yake?	for you to know that that was his voice?

45. CW1:

Na sindiyo.	Of course, yes.

46. ACCP1:

Alikuwa amepiga nduru siku gani?	When did he ever scream?

In turn 38, ACCP1 strategically sets the stage for her epistemological challenge, by claiming to have also screamed during the assault. When CW1 categorically refutes her claim (by saying *No way*, in turn 39), ACCP1 questions the basis of her knowledge of the voice that she had heard that night as a scream (in turn 39 : *How did you know that the sound was a scream?*) In response, CW1 states that she knew it because she had run to the scene. However, unwilling to let go of the matter, ACCP1 introduces a new twist by raising another epistemological challenge: she questions whether CW1 had ever heard Chumba scream before for her to ascertain that the scream she had heard that night was indeed Chumba's (turns 42 and 44). She seems to imply that one can only identify a voice as belonging to a person X if one has heard the person X make a similar utterance before.

Although the defendant would not be in a position to know what the relevant research on the issue suggests, Watt's (2010: 77) argument that the fact that we can recognize voices of persons we may have met years before "suggests that we store detailed information about the voices of individuals we encounter throughout our lives ... just as we store information about aspects of people's appearance, such as details of faces, hairstyles and clothing". He adds that "the amount of exposure a listener has had to a voice is obviously crucial too". Accordingly, one would imagine that it would have been easy for the witness to identify the scream as being that of Chumba, her father. Indeed, CW1's response that she identified Chumba's voice from the way he speaks (*"Na vile anaongea"* - 'The way he

speaks') tends to support this position. However, other literature on the matter contradict this claim. For example, Jones (1994: 349) argues that "It can be very hard in the absence of other clues to tell a voice, even a well known one, apart from that of an impostor". ACCP1's challenge is therefore also a challenge on the witness's capacity for knowledge.

Witness CW2's knowledge about the facts of the assault was also challenged. From the evidence that the two witnesses gave, it appears that the children, who were within their homestead, rushed to their grandmother's house immediately after hearing the screams from Chumba and may have arrived there within minutes of each other. Therefore, CW2's claim that he witnessed the fight may have been true. However, his inability to express himself clearly, which resulted in his incoherent account of what happened, appears to have invited ACCP2's challenge. She questions CW2's knowledge of matters that happened in his absence. The following excerpt reveals this.

Excerpt 8

47. ACCP1:

Mi naulisa wewe,	I'm asking you
wakati si tulikuwa tunapigana	when we were fighting
kwa hiyo nyumba wewe	in that house
ulikuwa wapi?	where were you?

48. CW2:

Nyumbani.	At home.

49. ACCP1:

Nyumbani wapi?	Which home?

50. CW2:

Kwetu.	Our home.

51. ACCP1:

Kwenu?	Your home?

52. CW2:

Ndivyo.	Yes.

53. ACCP1:

Ukajuaje mi nilikata	How did you know that I cut
Chumba na panga? Uliniona?	Chumba with a machete? Did you see me?

54. CW2:

Ndivyo.	Yes.

55. ACP 1:

Unaniona wapi	How did you see me
na ulikuwa nyumbani?	if you were at home?
Unaniona kwa wapi nikikata?	Where did you see me cutting him?

After establishing that CW2 was at his parents' house during the attack on Chumba, ACCP1 questions the child's capacity for knowledge of matters that happened in his "absence". Even if we were to assume that the boy's account was factual and that his inability to express himself clearly was a result of communication difficulties, the epistemological challenge would still remain. How could he have known details about an incident that he did not witness? Accordingly, this challenge puts the credibility of the witness into question.

3.4 Accusatory remarks

It appears to be part of the defendant's strategy to accuse the witnesses of impropriety. This appears to be the case when ACCP2 claims that the two child witnesses were bribed, presumably by their father, so as to give adverse evidence against her and her co-accused. In turns 58 and 60, ACCP2 alleges that they must have been "bought".

Excerpt 9

56. ACCP2:

Wakati...unaweza kueleza maakama	When...can you tell the
kwa nini tulipigana na Chumba?	court why we fought Chumba?

57. CW1:

Siwezi elewa. Sijui.	I don't understand. I don't know.

58. ACCP2:

Nikieleza hii koti	If I tell this court (that)
wewe ulinunuliwa	you were bought
ndio uweze kuja kutoa ushahidi	so that you may give evidence
hujui mbele ya koti	that you know nothing about
nitakuwa nimedanganya koti?	will I have lied to the court?

59. CW1:

Sijakuelewa.	I haven't understood you.

60. ACCP2:

Nikielza maakama	If I tell this court
wewe ulinunuliwa	that you were bought
uje utoe ushaidi	so that you may give evidence
ambao hujui chochote	which you know nothing about
mbele wala nyuma	at all
nitakuwa nimedanganya maakama?	will I have lied to the court?

The essence of the accusation of bribery is encoded in the metaphoric expression *"umenunuliwa"* ('You have been bought'), which, in the Kenyan context, means 'being bribed'. However, the witness's response *"Sijakuelewa"* ('I have not understood you') (in turn 59), seems to suggest that she was innocent. This accusation appears to be part of the defendant's strategy to discredit both the evidence given by the witness as well as her credibility.

4. CONCLUSION

Although this study has shown that lay defendants are aware of cross-examination strategies used by lawyers, their skill in utilizing these strategies is rather limited. This is seen, for example in instances where the defendants cross-examined witnesses but, in the process, asked self incriminating questions (see Excerpt 8 turn 47). The paper has also shown that while lay defendants were able to control the contribution of the

witnesses through the use of specific types of questions, metapragmatic directives, epistemological challenges and accustaroy remarks, it is not clear how they would have acquired these strategies. The question would arise as to where such defendants learnt these strategies from. In the case under study, the two women were first offenders living in a rural set up and would probably never have been to court before. Would it be that they learnt these skills from other inmates during their detention? Or could it be that they had learnt some of these strategies by watching TV programmes such as *Mashatka* or *Vioja Mahakamani*[6]? Or from watching lawyers and other defendants in similar cases? No definite answer can be given to these questions at the moment; they could be the subject of further investigation in the area.

REFERENCES

Bulow-Moller, A. M. 1991. "Trial evidence: Overt and covert communication in court". *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 1/1*: 38-60.

Cavalieri, S. 2011. "The role of metadiscourse in counsels' questions", in A. G. Wagner and Le Cheng (eds.), *Exploring Courtroom Discourse: The Language of Power and Control*. Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 79-110.

Conley, J. M. and W. M. O'Barr. 1998. *Just Words: Law, Language and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cotterill, J. 2003. *Language and Power in Court*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coulthard, M. and A. Johnson. 2007. *Introduction to Forensic Linguistics: Language in Evidence*. London: Routledge.

Dörnyei, Z. 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

[6] *Mashtaka* and *Vioja Mahakamani* are Kenyan TV programmes based on courtroom drama.

Drew, P. 1990. "Strategies of the contest between lawyer and witness in cross-examination", in J. Levi and A.G. Walker (eds.), *Language in the Judicial Process*. New York: Plenum Press, pp. 34-64.

Drew, P. 1992. "Contested evidence in courtroom cross-examination: The case of a trial for rape", in P. Drew, P. and J. Heritage (eds.), *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 470-520.

Eades, D. 2008. *Courtroom Talk and Neocolonial Control*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Gibbons, J. 2003. *Forensic Linguistics: An Introduction to Language in the Justice and System*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Hale, B. S. 2004. *The Discourse of Court Interpreting*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Harris, S. 1984. "Questions as a mode of control in Magistrates' Courts", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 49: 5-27.

Jones, A. 1994. "The limitations of voice identification", in J. Gibbons (ed.), *Language and the Law*. London: Longman.

Matoesian, G. 1993. *Reproducing Rape: Domination through Talk in the Courtroom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ochs, E. 2000. "Transcription as theory", in A. Jaworski and N. Coupland. *The Discourse Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 167-182.

Republic of Kenya. 2010. *The Constitution of Kenya, 2010*. Nairobi: Kenya National Law Reporting. Available online at: www.kenyalaw.org.

Roy, D. J. 1990. "The difficulties of limited-English-proficient individuals in the legal setting", in W. R. Rieber, W. and W. A. Stewart (eds.), *The Language Scientist as Expert in the Legal Setting: Issues in Forensic Linguistics*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences, pp. 73-83.

Schmied, J. 2012. "Standards of English in East Africa", in H. Raymond (ed.), *Standards of English: Codified Varieties around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 229-255.

Tkačuková, T. 2010. "Cross-examination questioning: Lay people as cross-examiners", in M. Coulthard and A. Johnson (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics*. London: Routledge, pp. 333-346.

Walker, A. G. 1999. *A Handbook on Questioning Children: A Linguistic Perspective*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: ABA Center on Children and the Law.

Walker, A. G. 1987. "Linguistic manipulation, power, and the legal setting", in L. Kedar (ed.) *Power through Discourse*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation, pp. 57-80.

Watt, D. 2010. "The identification of the individual through speech", in C. Llamas and D. Watt (eds.), *Language and Identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Author's Address:

Dept of Linguistics & Foreign Languages
Moi University
PO Box 3900-30100
Eldoret, Kenya
E-mail: emsatia@yahoo.com

ONSANSE'S LANGUAGE: NOT MORE THAN TWO-WORD UTTERANCES AFTER FORTY YEARS OF EXPOSURE TO FOUR LANGUAGES

Anne O. ACHIENG, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
and
Alfred BUREGEYA, University of Nairobi

This paper set out to investigate the amount and nature of language the subject of the study (Onsanse) has learnt for four decades of exposure to several languages after being picked up at the age of 17, when he could produce only one word and one interjection in Ekegusii. The data from conversations and observations audio- and video-recorded for 154 hours show that Onsanse has picked up an amount of vocabulary that enables him to interact with people especially in Dholuo and Kiswahili. However, he has not acquired a grammar that would enable him to produce an utterance longer than two words. In another respect Onsanse's grammar is comparable to that of Specific Language Impairment subjects, since its morphological component is selectively impaired: for instance, in Dholuo, the language he seems to be most "competent" in, Onsanse has greater difficulty in using the singular subject marker prefix than its plural counterpart. At the phonological level, his speech was marked by omissions and substitutions of phonemes, but no typical features stood out as typical of his speech.

1. INTRODUCTION

Onsanse's case is that of an adult man, now aged about sixty, who has not succeeded in acquiring human language beyond just two-word utterances. His language can then be described most relevantly from the point of view of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). This is "the hypothesis that animals, including humans, are genetically programmed to acquire kinds of knowledge and skill at specific times in life" because "[b]eyond those 'critical periods' it is either difficult or impossible to acquire those abilities" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 17). According to Lenneberg (1967), the American psycholinguist who first applied the CPH to first language acquisition, "there is an optimal period and a sensitive time to acquire

language in a linguistically rich environment, after which further language acquisition becomes much more difficult and effortful" (p. 176).

Crystal (1997) points out that "[t]he critical-period hypothesis has been controversial" (p. 265). Nevertheless, there are cases that have been documented in history and put forward in support of the hypothesis. Lightbown & Spada (2006: 17) point out that "Two of the most famous cases are those of Victor and Genie". First, here is what the authors say about the case of Victor:

> In 1799, a boy who became known as Victor was found wandering naked in the woods in France. When he was captured, he was about twelve years old and completely wild, apparently having had no contact with humans. Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a young doctor accustomed to working with deaf children, devoted five years to socializing Victor and trying to teach him language. Although he succeeded to some extent in developing Victor's sociability, memory, and judgement, there was little progress in his language ability. Victor responded only to sounds that had meaning for him in the forest, such as the cracking of a nut, animal sounds, or the sound of rain. He eventually spoke only two words, his favourite food "lait" (milk) and his governess's frequent exclamation "O Dieu" (Oh, God). He said "lait" only when he saw a glass of milk. He never used the word to ask for it. (p. 17)

And here is what they say about the case of Genie:

> Nearly two hundred years [after Victor was discovered], Genie, a thirteen-year-old girl who had been isolated, neglected, and abused, was discovered in California.... Because of the irrational demands of a disturbed father and the submission of an abused mother, Genie had spent more than eleven years tied to a chair or a crib in a small, darkened room. Her father had forbidden his wife and son to speak to Genie and had himself only growled and barked at her. She was beaten when she made any kind of noise, and she had long since resorted to complete silence. Genie was undeveloped physically, emotionally, and intellectually. She had no language.

After she was discovered, Genie was cared for and educated with the participation of many teachers and therapists, including Susan Curtiss (1977). After a brief period in a rehabilitation centre, she lived in a foster home and attended special schools. Genie made remarkable progress in becoming socialized and cognitively aware. She developed deep personal relationships and strong individual tastes and traits. Nevertheless, after five years of exposure to language, Genie's language was not like that of a typical five-year old. There was a larger than normal gap between comprehension and production. She used grammatical forms inconsistently and overused formulaic and routine speech. (Ibid., p. 18)

Curtiss (1977) herself states that "Genie was completely without language, and after seven years of rehabilitation she still lacked linguistic competence" (p. 31). Similarly, Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams (2011: 23) reiterate that "The UCLA linguist Susan Curtiss, who worked with Genie for several years, reported that Genie's utterances were, for the most part, 'the stringing together of content words, often with rich and clear meaning, but with little grammatical structure'". Still with reference to the two cases, Singleton (2011: 408) remarked that "[t]ypically in such instances some post-rescue language development is observed – but of a limited and abnormal kind".

The cases of Victor and Genie served as a good background to a study by Achieng' (2012), which focused on the case of Onsanse, from Homabay County in south-western Kenya, who has failed to develop linguistic competence beyond the "telegraphic speech" reported for child language acquisition.[1]

Onsanse's case is interesting to study in relation to the critical period hypothesis not only because it is another one of those rare cases where human beings have failed to acquire even their first language, but also, and more importantly, because it involves a multilingual setting, unlike the monolingual settings where Victor (with only French being used around him)

---

[1] The full details of his life are given in the next section.

and Genie (with only English being used around her) lived. That is why Achieng's study focused on this multilingual setting which involved four languages: English, Swahili, Ekegusii, and Dholuo. The study found that in all of them, the subject did not produce utterances that were longer than two words, after forty years of exposure to those languages. His first language is supposed to be Ekegusii, a language which he should have been exposed to until he was picked up, at age 17, and taken to be raised in an linguistic environment where Dholuo is the native language of the community around him, but where English and Swahili are also used.

Using the same data collected for Achieng's study, the present one aims to be a deeper analysis of the linguistic patterns that seem to characterize Onsanse's grammar, a term to be understood here as comprising lexical, morphological and syntactic aspects. In this connection, the question arises as to what the study will be looking for in Onsanse's grammar. In terms of possible language acquired by cases (like Victor and Genie) after the critical period, there is little which Onsanse's language would be compared to. After all, it will be remembered that Victor is reported to have produced only a couple of expressions. But since, on the other hand, Genie is reported to have acquired some language, Onsanse's own language could usefully be compared to the latter. Still, there will be an important limitation here: Genie's language was English, the language she was first exposed to, and indeed the only one. On the other hand, although Onsanse's language contains excerpts from English, he was only exposed to English much later than Genie, and much less frequently, given the very different sociolinguistic context he has lived in.

As e.g. Fromkin et al. (2011: 22-25) have done, we will compare Onsanse's language not only with that of other "case[s] of linguistic isolation" (p. 24) like Genie, but also that of cases of Broca's aphasia and specific language impairment (SLI), which are another two types of linguistic deficits. From what is known in the literature on Broca's aphasia, we would expect to find Onsanse's grammar to lack functional categories like articles (in the case of English) and all sorts of inflections (e.g. those marking tense and person). And from what is known about SLI, we would

expect to find that some of those functional categories are more impaired than others. Furthermore, since Onsanse has lived in a multilingual setting for so long, we would expect to see some influence of the languages he has been exposed to on each other.

2. THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH ONSANSE HAS LIVED

2.1 The lack of exposure to language from infancy to age 17

Onsanse was 57 years old when the data were collected from him in 2011. Below is his story as complied by the researcher (Sr. Anne Achieng'), after it was narrated to her by several people: first, Onsanse's uncle, Mondagora; second, the administrative chief of the area, Zebedeo Nyandieka; third, Dr. Sister Dorothy Akoth and Sister Barbara Okuma of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph, based at the Asumbi Convent in Homabay County, who saw him at the very time he was picked up and brought to live at a house next to their convent.

Onsanse was picked up, aged 17, from under a bushy, dirty tunnel near the forest at the Riana market next to the Kisii town of Kisii County in Kenya. That was in 1974. He had been living in isolation, deprived of social interaction from around age 2½. He had no language except for, shrieks, growls and groans. His identifiable human-like language was the sound *mhhmhh*. Those who picked him up later found out that he had no parents. They named him after his late father, Ondoro, for future identification.[2]

When he was picked up, he had a peculiar look and was little in stature, looking like a small boy. He was hairy and could not talk. He had wounds all over his body. He was unable to walk and his legs seemed as if they were deformed. However, he was able to move little with the help of his hands dragging along his legs. Sister Mary Stephen Nkoitoi, who was the superior

---

[2] The name *Onsanse* became known to the researcher during the data collection period from the interview session with his uncle Mondagora.

general of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph at the Asumbi convent–at that time, decided to pick up the boy and adopt him.

Onsanse Ondoro was born in 1957. He was the only child of his parents. He was born of a deaf and dumb mother, called Chetunda Ondoro. Soon after Chetunda was married to Mondagora Ondoro, Onsanse's father, the latter got employed at a farm in Kericho district to pick tea on tea plantations. Onsanse's mother stayed behind at the Riana village in Kisii district. But when she got pregnant, she went to Kericho to live with her husband, and that is where Onsanse was born.

Then the whole family returned to Kisii for the Christmas festival that year. But in the following January the father went back to Kericho, leaving Onsanse under the care of his mother. She was very possessive of her son and feared he would be bewitched. So, she kept him in the house or close to her chest most of the time. The turning point in Onsanse's life came when she unfortunately died, when he was just two. Onsanse's father came home to bury her and did not go back to Kericho, as he had to nurture Onsanse. Due to the frustration of losing his wife at an early age, coupled with the responsibility of nurturing a young child, Onsanse's father took to heavy drinking. Routinely, he would prepare some food for his son, put it beside him, and leave the boy in the house alone the whole day. Onsanse would eat the food at will. Later, he would crawl out of the house to look for the father, and more often than not he would not find him. Many times he had to spend the night in the cold, while his father was still in his drinking dens. The latter died when Onsanse was just learning how to walk. Onsanse was not adopted by anyone. His uncle, who would have taken care of him, just wished for him to die so that he could inherit Onsanse's father's land.

Onsanse was thus left to fend for himself. He would move from bush to bush in the forest, from empty houses to under tunnels and bridges, and even in burrows. He would sometimes be seen at the area's small shopping centre, which had only two small shops at the time. There, people would throw some food at him. And since he had had no toilet training, they had to throw stones at him to force him to eat from not near them, as he would

eat and defecate at the same place. He later learnt to throw stones back at his "attackers". Many of those who threw stones at him saw him as a curse on society. So, they avoided him by any means.

When Onsanse was picked up by the late sister Mary Stephen Nkoitoi from the Riana tunnel in 1974, he had wounds, could not walk, and looked like a five-year old. He was brought to live in a Catholic sisters' convent compound, which was a multilingual environment, as the sisters spoke English, Kiswahili, Dholuo, and Ekegusii. The first word he is reported to have uttered is "*obosondoto*", for the Ekegusii word *obosontoto*, meaning 'chyme'.

2.2 His life in a multilingual environment for four decades

Onsanse grew up in such a multilingual environment. The indigenous community in the midst of which the Asumbi convent is located speaks Dholuo as the native language. However, Onsanse interacts with the community only when he leaves his abode to go to the road or to the nearby shopping centre known as *Sinema*. The Asumbi convent is a complex surrounded by many teaching and training institutions, among which the Asumbi Teachers' Training College, the Asumbi Technical Training College, the Asumbi Girls' National School, the Asumbi Girls' Boarding Primary School, the Asumbi Scheffer Boys' Primary School, the Asumbi Mixed Primary School (among other schools) and the shopping centre. There is also another trading centre, Rangwe, to the north of Asumbi. Onsanse has the chance to visit all these places in the company of the sisters, as he is taken to work on their Kodera and Mirogi farms to the south and east of Asumbi, respectively.

Later, when Onsanse had recovered partially from most of his wounds, Sister Nkoitoi sent him to the Asumbi Mixed Primary School, in the hope that he would not only get formal education but would also be socialized. On this latter front, he was unable to play games with his fellow pupils. He saw them as people ready to pick up a fight with him. So, he would be the first one to start throwing stones at them.

Inside the classroom, he would sit in class and attempt to repeat words during drills. But he could not remember those words the next day. After a year in school, he was unable to write or read anything. And because he was destructive by breaking windows as he threw stones at his fellow pupils who tried to mock him, he was discontinued. The school administration advised the sisters to take him to a special school. They took him to the Joel Omino Special School located in Kisumu town. There he was unable to learn either language or the other cognitive skills such as mathematics. There are no records of any words that he might have picked up when he was there. He was sickly and was in and out of hospital most of the time; his doctors complained that there was poor care at the school at that time. In fact, the wound he had when he was picked up had increased in size and turned gangrenous.

In the end, he was brought back to Asumbi for treatment and advanced care at the Asumbi Mission Hospital. It took twelve years for the wound to heal. During this time he lived with the sisters and picked a few words that were repeated to him. According to Sr. Dorothy, he picked up abusive words faster than the other words. His favourite is *potato*, which he has always used to mean 'dunderhead' address anyone who annoys him.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data were collected by one of the authors (Sr. Anne Achieng'). She made recourse to conversations, interviews and observations. She spent 154 hours of daily interaction with the subject for twenty-two days.

3.1 The conversations

These were one-to-one conversations which the researcher had with Onsanse over a period of six weeks. They started by the researcher first presenting Onsanse with a new T-shirt to create rapport and elicit some verbal response from him, such as *thank you*. On the following days, she would begin by giving him his favourite drink, a cup of tea. These gestures

enabled a conversational atmosphere of friendliness that would otherwise have been most likely impossible.

The conversations took place in an open place next to the entrance to Onsanse's house. He could thus see the people who crossed the road opposite and those who came to greet him. Such a setting prompted a significant amount of vocabulary from him for recording. But in the first days, the conversations did not go as the researcher had expected, as Onsanse produced few words, in the form of responses mainly initiated by the researcher. Eventually, as the days went by, he got more acquainted with the rather new conversational environment for him and became more relaxed, which enabled him to initiate the some of the conversations, answer questions and make comments on what was going on in the surroundings.

3.2 The oral interviews

Sr. Anne visited Onsanse to interview him ten times between 16 December 2011 and 7 January 2012 in his house at the Asumbi compound. The interviews were conducted face to face, in a room at the convent. Only the two were present, except for a few interruptions from visitors and workers who popped in to greet the two. Sr. Anne had a book containing pictures of people and things familiar to Onsanse. She asked to identify the pictures. At times she used probes like *What are the people in the pictures doing*?, in the hope of eliciting longer utterances. The interviews were audio-recorded.

3.3 The observations

For two weeks, daily, from 8.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., Sr. Anne "observed" Onsanse's language as they both walked along the road going to the shopping centre, as she visited him while he was working, as he interacted with his male friends, his fellow workmates, and his superiors (i.e. the sisters in charge of allocating him work). Such encounters were video-

recorded by Sr. Anne, especially with a view to "immortalizing" Onsanse's case for possible future studies, since such cases are extremely rare. All the recordings were supplemented with the notes she took of occasional utterances produced when the recorder was off.

4. THE GRAMMATICAL AND PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF ONSANSE'S SPEECH

The lists of utterances in this section contain all the words and phrases that Onsanse was able to produce in each one of the four languages for all the duration of the recording.[3] They are arranged alphabetically just for ease of reference to them. Where the dots appear between words, they correspond to pauses between utterances. (They are represented by slashes in the appendix.)

4.1 Utterances in Dholuo

Table 1: All the words produced by Onsanse in Dholuo

Onsanse's utterance	Target word[4]	Meaning
1) Aaduogo	abiro duogo	'I will come back'
2) Abolo	saa aboro	at 2.00p.m
3) Abokayi		'I'll bite you'
4) Adhiadhia	dhiadhia	'just go'
5) aa-tho		connoting 'am tired'
6) Bando		'maize'
7) Bedo		'sitting'
8) Beer	b(e)er	'fine'
9) Chai onge	Onge chae	'There is no tea'
10) Cham		'eat'

---

[3] These words have been extracted from the conversational context in which they were produced. The actual conversation, which features a significant amount of codemixing, is given in the Appendix.

[4] This will be given only where Onsanse's utterance was different from the intended one.

11)	Chiro		market
12)	Chano	ochanu	'comb'
13)	Chwade		'cane her'
14)	Dhi adhia		'Just go'
15)	Dhiii	dhi	'go'
16)	Ere?		'where?'
17)	Goi		'beat you'
18)	Idho		'climbing'
19)	Kama		'like this'
20)	Keakela	kel akela	'Just bring'
21)	Kiny		tomorrow
22)	Kodh	koth	'rain'
23)	Koles	kolej	'college'
24)	Koro		'now'
25)	Kucha		'there, visible sight'
26)	Kucho		'there, far away'
27)	Madhi		'Please have a drink'
28)	Maekoles	maekolej	'at the college'
29)	Makochaa		'on the other side'
30)	Maonge		'There is no hope'
31)	Maooketho	okethore	'This is spoiled/dead/out of use'
32)	Mee oting'o ng'o	oting'o diel	'He/she is carrying a goat'[5]
33)	mee	diel	'goat'
34)	Mtoka … ruoko	naaluoko mtoka	'I was washing the vehicle'
35)	Nang'oo?		'How are you?'
36)	Ndhiyo	dhiyo	'go away'
37)	Nee		'see'
38)	Ng'ou		[Note: This is an offensive expression used by children and the youth to distress or enrage their opponent.]'
39)	Ni?		'What?'
40)	Nindo		'sleep'???

---

[5] Onsanse used the onomatopoeic word *mee* to designate a goat.

41)	*Nitie*		'present'
42)	*Nyako ber*		'a beautiful girl'
43)	*Nyamura*	*nyambura*	'a cat'
44)	*Nyingi*		'your name'
45)	*Nyuka onge*	*Onge nyuka*	'There is no porridge'
46)	*Ochamo*		'She is eating'
47)	*Ochungo?*		'He/she is standing up?'
48)	*Ochwade*		'He/she has been caned'
49)	*Odhi*		'He/she should leave/go'
50)	*Odiro*		'He/she has thrown'
51)	*Ogada*		'elephant grass'
52)	*Ogoro*		'He/she has drawn'???
53)	*Oketho*	*Okethore*	'It is malfunctioning/faulty.'
54)	*Okimiya?*		'Why don't you give it to me?'
55)	*Okombo*	*Okombe*	'a cup'
56)	*Omodhi*	*omodho*	'he/she...to drink with'???
57)	*Ombasa*	*Mombasa*	'Mombasa' [City]
58)	*Ongade* [ongade]	*Ong'ade* [oŋade]	'He/she has cut it'
59)	*Onge*		'not there' [i.e. 'I have no say']
60)	*Onge dhi*	*Oonge dhiyo*	'He/ she is absent/not here, go away'
61)	*Onindo*		'He is sleeping'
62)	*Oonge*		'She is absent'
63)	*Oonyiero*		'He/she is laughing'
64)	*Orumo*		'It is finished/over'
65)	*Otado*	*tado*	'roof'
66)	*Otero*		'He/she has taken'
67)	*Otho*	*nosetho*	'He/she has died'
68)	*Otindo*		'He/she is sipping'
69)	*Oting'i*		'He/she has carried you'
70)	*Oting'o ng'o*	*oting'o*	'He/she is carrying'
71)	*Otwo*		'He is sick'
72)	*Pi*		'water'
73)	*Piny*		'earth'

74)	*Pipilele*	*pilepile*	'each day/daily'
75)	*Polis*		'policeman'
76)	*Rabo*	*rabolo*	'banana'
77)	*Rangwe*	*Rangwe*	[This is the name of a shopping centre.]
78)	*Ruoko ah!*	*luoko ah!*	'washing ah!'
79)	*Sani*		'now'
80)	*Tado*		'roof'
81)	*Tweye*		'tie it/him/ her'
82)	*Wadhi*		'Let us go'
83)	*Yiecho*	*oyiecho*	'He/she is tearing'
84)	*Yuak*	*oyuak*	'He/she is crying'

4.1.1 *Grammatical features*

The detailed grammatical features observed in Onsanse's performance in Dholuo are the following:

- omitting the modal *-bir-* (will) from *abiro* (I will), merging the personal pronoun *a-* with *-duogo* (to be back) into *aaduogo*, and, in addition, doubling the personal pronoun *a-*. Notice that the blended word *aaduogo* may mean 'I have just returned', even though, from the context Onsanse clearly meant to say 'I will come back';
- omitting the object *-o* from *abiro*;
- omitting the third-person subject marker *o-* from *oyuak* (he/she is crying) to produce *yuak*, from *oyiecho* (he/she is tearing) to produce *yiecho*, from *oonge dhiyo* (he/she is absent/not here) to produce *onge dhi*;
- omitting the past tense morpheme *na-* (was) and the first person singular marker *-a-* from *naaluoko* (I was washing) to produce just *ruoko* (for *luoko*, actually);
- omitting the past tense morpheme *n-* and the third person singular subject morpheme *-o* from *nosetho* (she has died) to produce just *otho*;
- omitting the initial *o-* from *oonge* (he/she is absent) to produce *onge*;

- omitting -re, a reflexive morpheme pointing back to the subject, from *okethore* (it is malfunctioning) to produce *oketho*;
- replacing *diel* (goat) by *ng'o*, which has no meaning, in *oting'o ng'o* (he/she is carrying) used for *oting'o diel* (she is carrying a goat);
- reversing the word order in *nyuka onge* said for *onge nyuka* 'there is no porridge); and
- adding *mao-* to *oketho,* said for *okethore* (it is malfunctioning), to produce *maooketho* (this is dead/out of use);

In summary, Onsanse's grammatical production in Dholuo has two really frequent features: a) omitting morphemes, which is the most frequent feature, and b) substituting some morphemes with others.

4.1.2 *Phonological features*

The detailed phonological features observed in Onsanse's performance in Dholuo are the following:
- omitting the initial *o-* from *ochanu* (comb) to produce *chano*;
- omitting final *-l* from *kel* and then merging *ke-* with *akela* to produce *keakela* from the intended *kel akela* (just bring);
- omitting *-b-* from *nyambura* (cat) to produce *nyamura*;
- omitting the *m-* from *Mombasa,* to produce *Ombasa*;
- omitting the final *-yo* from *dhiyo (???)* to produce *dhi*;
- replacing the initial *-l-* by *r-* in *luoko* (washing) to produce *ruoko*;
- replacing the final *-j* in *kolej* (college) with *-s* to produce *koles*;
- replacing the final *-u* in *ochanu* (comb) by *-o*;
- swapping positions of syllables in *pilepile* (daily) to produce *pipilele*;
- lengthening the final vowel in *dhiii,* used for just *dhi* (go);
- repeating syllables in *adhiadhia,* used for just *adhia* (just go), and *oting'o ng'o* for just *oting'o* (he/she is carrying*).*

In summary, there are three main phonological features of Onsanse's speech: a) omitting phonemes, which is the most frequent feature but with no clear pattern emerging as to which sound and in which position in the word is the most affected; b) substituting some phonemes for others.

4.2 Utterances in Ekegusii

Table 2: All the words produced by Onsanse in Ekegusii

		Target word	Meaning
85)	Abicha	ebicha	'a photo or a picture'
86)	Bikoroto	ebikoroto	'shoes'
87)	Choombe	chiombe	'cows'
88)	Echiro		'market'
89)	Eechuma		'metal'
90)	Eeakulu	esukuru	'school'
91)	Egari		'car'
92)	Ekararamu	ekaramu	'pen'
93)	Ekararamu skulu	ekaramu yesukuru	'a pen for school'
94)	Endege		'an aeroplane' or 'a bird'
95)	Engiya		'It's good / Come in'
96)	Engoko		'a chicken / a hen'
97)	Enyoni		'a bird'
98)	Esese		'a dog'
99)	Eesiko	isiko	'outside'
100)	Eskulu	esukuru	'a school'
101)	Etuon	etwoni	'a cock'
102)	Eya	eye	'this one'
103)	Eye		'this one'
104)	Gere	gera	'weigh'
105)	Ikondo	egekondo	'a monkey'
106)	Itabu	egetabu	'a book'
107)	Irangi	erangi	'paint'
108)	Koroto	egekoroto	'shoe'

109)	*Kubuli*	*ekeburi*	'a padlock'
110)	*Mabwa*	*amaoga*	'flowers'
111)	*Makara*	*amakara*	'charcoal'
112)	*Mbeche*	*embeche*	'pig / warthog'
113)	*Mobe*	*omobe*	'one who is bad'
114)	*Mbuuu...ya*	*mbuya*	'fine'
115)	*Mtobe*	*amatobe*	'mud'
116)	*Ng'ai*	*ngai*	'where?'
117)	*Nyumba*	*enyomba*	'house'
118)	*Obosondoto*	*obosontoto*	'chyme'
119)	*Ochire*		'He/she has come'
120)	*Okure*		'He/she has died'
121)	*Otero*	*oroteru*	'a type of African tray'
122)	*Otwee*	*omotwee*	'head'
123)	*Oyo mwana*	*omwana oye*	'this child'
124)	*Rora*		'see'
125)	*Yaya*		'no'

4.2.1 Grammatical features

The detailed grammatical features observed in Onsanse's Ekegusii performance are the following:

- omitting the noun-initial class-marking vowel *e-* from *ebikoroto* (shoes) to produce *bikoroto*, from *ekeburi* (padlock) to produce *kubulu*, from *embeche* (pig) to produce *mbeche*, from *enyomba* (house) to produce *nyumba*; *o-* from *omobe* (one who is bad) to produce *mobe*; *a-* from *amabwa*—which is a wrong word Onsanse used for *amaoga* (flowers)—to produce *mabwa*; *a-* from *amatobe* (mud) to produce *mtobe*, and *a-* from *amakara* (charcoal) to produce *makara*;

- omitting both the noun-initial class-marking vowel and the second noun-class marker prefix *ege-* from the nouns *egekondo* (a monkey) and *egetabu* (book) to produce *itabu*—where the expected *e-* was replaced

by *i*-; *ebi*- from *ebikoroto* (shoes); *om*- from *omotwee* (head) to produce *otwee*;

- omitting the preposition *ya* from *ekaramu eskulu* (said for *ekaramu yesukuru,* 'a pen for school'); and
- placing the demonstrative *oyo* (for *oye*) before, instead of after, the noun in *oyo mwana* (for *omwana oye,* 'this child').

In summary, Onsanse's Ekegusii grammar production is typically characterized by one feature: omitting the two noun-class marker prefixes, but mostly the noun-initial vowel prefix.

4.2.2 Phonological features

The detailed phonological features observed in Onsanse's performance in Ekegusii are the following:

- doubling the *-ra- ekaramu (*pen) to produce *ekararamu*;
- omitting the medial *-a-* in *amatobe* (mud) to produce in *mtobe*;
- omitting *-s-* from the word *eskulu* (school) to produce it as *eeakulu*— where *-ea-* was substituted for the *-s-*;
- omitting the final *i*- from *etwoni* (cock/rooster) to produce *etwon*;
- omitting the syllable *-ro-* from *oroteru* (a type of tray) to produce *otero*;
- omitting the vowel *-u-* from between the consonant sequence *-sk-* to produce *eskulu* instead of *esukuru (school)*;
- replacing *-ke-* in *ekebuli* (padlock) with *-ku-* to produce *kubuli*;
- replacing the *-r* in *ekuburi* and *esukuru* with *-l*;
- replacing the final *-e* in *eye* (this) by *-a* to produce *eya*;
- replacing the noun-initial vowel *e*- in *ebicha* (photo/picture) with *a*- to produce *abicha*;
- replacing the *-io-* in *chiombe* (cows) with *-oo-* to produce *choombe*;
- replacing the initial *i*- in *isiko* (outside) with *e*- and doubling the latter to produce *eesiko*;

- replacing the initial *e-* in *erangi* (paint), *egekondo* (a monkey) and *egetabo* (a book) with *i-* to produce *irangi*, *ikondo* and *itabu*;
- replacing the final *-a* in *gera* (weigh) with *-e* , to produce *gere*;
- replacing the /ŋg/ in *ngai* (where) with /ŋ/ in *ng'ai*;
- replacing the final *-e* in *oye* (this) with *-o* in *oyo*; and
- voicing the /t/ in *obosontoto* (chyme) to produce *obosondoto*.

In summary, Onsanse's Ekegusii performance is characterized by two main features: a) typically, replacing sounds (mostly vowels) with others, in all word positions (initial, medial and final), and b) omitting sounds (from all three word positions).

4.3   Utterances in Kiswahili

Table 3: All the words produced by Onsanse in Kiswahili

		Target word	Meaning
126)	*Aaa ... rudi?*	anarudi	'He/she is coming back'
127)	*Abaari*	habari	'Greetings'
128)	*Aendapi?*	unaenda wapi?	'Where are you going?'
129)	*Api*	wapi	'Where?'
130)	*Aakuja*	amekuja	'He/she has come'
131)	*Ameleta*	ameleta	'he/she has brought'
132)	*Babari ako?*	Habari yako?	'What's your news? / How are you?'
133)	*Banga*	panga	'machete'
134)	*Boskel*	baiskeli	'bicycle'
135)	*Chai hakuna*	Hakuna chai	'There is no tea'.
136)	*Chiko*	jiko	'Charcoal stove'
137)	*Enda*	aende	'Let him/her go'
138)	*Eenakufa*	alikufa/atakufa	'He/she/it died / will die'
139)	*Fenji*	mfereji	'water tap'
140)	*Gari*		'car/vehicle'
141)	*Hakuna*		'There is not'

142) *Hii gari ... maekoles*   *Hii ni gari ya kolej.*   'This vehicle is for the college.'

143) *Huyu ... mbaya ... enda.*   *Huyu ni mbaya. Aende*
    'This one is bad. Let him/her go.'

144) *Jembe ... mbaya   Jembe ni mbaya*   'The hoe is bad.'

145) *Kama*   *kama*   'if' [condition]

146) *Kasi ... anafanya ... mama. Mama anafanya kazi*
    'Mother is doing work.'

147) *Keso ... eennakufa.*   *Kesho atakufa.* 'tomorrow, he/she will die.'

148) *Kiso*   *kisu*   'a knife'

149) *Kuja*   'come'

150) *Kule*   'there'

151) *Lima*   'dig'

152) *Mbaya*   'bad'

153) *Mandasi*   *mandazi*   'doughnut'

154) *Mboga*   'vegetables'

155) *Mimi egari... osha. Mimi nilikuwa naosha gari.*
    'I was washing the car'

156) *Mototo.*   *mtoto*   'child'

157) *Naend*   *naenda / ninaenda*   'I am going'.

158) *Nadaka*   *nataka*   'I want'

159) *Nakufa*   *amekufa*   'is dead'

160) *Nakuja*   'I'm coming'

161) *Narara*   *nalala*   'I am sleeping'

162) *Nasika*   *nashika*   'I am holding'

163) *Nasom*   *nasoma*   'I am reading'

164) *Naweka*   'I am placing'

165) *Ngoja*   'Wait'

166) *Nyeendapi?*   *waenda/unaenda wapi?* 'Where are you going?'

167) *Mama*   'mother'

168) *Msuuli ... nyumba Nyumba ... nzuri* 'Nice house'

169) *Pipiki ... nendeapi?.*   *Pikipiki ... zinaenda wapi?* 'The motorcycles ... Where are they going?'

170) *Pole*		'I'm sorry'
171) *Sai*	*saa hii*	'now'
172) *Simama*		'Stand up'
173) *Sisisi*	*sisi*	'us'
174) *Sista ... aendapi?*	*Sista ... anaenda wapi?*	'Sister...where is she going to?'
175) *Sista ... kuja*	*Sista anakuja*	'Sister ... is coming'
176) *Ugali*		'ugali'
177) *Uku*	*huku*	'here'
178) *Yako?*	*Habari yako?*	'What's your news? / Good morning'
179) *Yemikuja*	*Umekuja*	'Have you come?'

4.3.1 Grammatical features

The detailed grammatical features from Onsanse's performance in Kiswahili are the following:

- adding the Ekegusii noun-initial vowel *e-* to *gari* to produce *egari*;
- omitting the tense morpheme *-na-* from *anakuja* (he/she is coming) to produce *kuja*, from *anaenda* (he/she is going) to produce *aende*, and from *naosha* (I am washing) to produce *osha*;[6]
- omitting the class marker *zi-* from *zinaenda wapi* (where are they going) to produce *nendeapi*—where, evidently, other changes took place;
- omitting the personal pronoun *a-* from *amekufa* (he/she is dead) to produce *nakufa*;
- omitting the copula verb *ni* e.g. from *Hii gari ni ya kolej* (this call if for the college) to produce *Hii gari ... maekoles*;
- omitting the complex auxiliary *nilikuwa* (decomposable as *ni+li+kuwa* 'I+was+in the process of') and the tense marker *na-* from *Mimi nilikuwa naosha gari* (I was washing the car) to produce *Mimi egari ... osha*;

---

[6] However, the morpheme was not omitted in all cases, since he produced the full form *anafanya*.

- omitting the preposition *ya* from *Hii ni gari ya kolej* to produce *Hii gari ... maekoles*;
- omitting the final *-a* on the verb root from *naenda* (I am going) to produce *naend*;
- replacing *-li-* in *alikufa* (he/she died) with *-na-* to produce *eenakufa*;
- replacing *-me-* in *amekufa* (he/she has died) with *-na-* to produce *nakufa*;
- replacing the personal pronoun *a-* in *alikufa* with *e-* in *eenakufa* (note in passing that it was specifically attached to the verb *-kufa)*;
- replacing the future tense marker *-ta-* in *itakufa* (it will die) with *-na-* in *eenakufa*; and
- using the direct imperative *enda* (go) for the mitigated imperative for *aende* (let him/her go).

In summary, the main features are the following: a) mostly omitting functional morphemes, both inflectional and free, and b) replacing morphemes with others. This latter feature consisted essentially in replacing the other tense morphemes with the present tense marker *-na*. It should be noted, though, that even this *-na-* was omitted in some of Onsanse's utterances.

4.3.2 Phonological features

The detailed phonological features observed in Onsanse's performance in Kiswahili are the following:
- adding an extra syllable to *sisi* (we) to produce *sisisi*;
- avoiding the consonant sequences *mf-* and *mt-* in *mfereji* (water tap) and *motto* (child) to produce *fenji* and *mototo*;
- merging *waenda wapi* into *nyeendapi*;
- omitting (or avoiding?) the sounds /h/ and /w/ in the production of words like *habari* (news), *huku* (here), and *wapi* (where);

- omitting the second syllable from *pikipiki* (motorbike) to produce *pipiki*;
- omitting the final vowel a- (on the verb root) from *nasoma* (I am reading) and *naenda* (I am going) to produce *nasom* and *naend*;
- replacing *-fere-* in *mfereji* by *fen-* to produce *fenji*;
- replacing *wa-* and *una-* in *waenda* (you go) and *unaenda* (you are going) with *nye-* /ɲe/ to produce *nyeendapi*;
- replacing the sounds /z/ and /ʃ/ by /s/, thus producing the words *kasi* for *kazi* (work), *msuuli* for *nzuri* (good), and *keso* for *kesho* (tomorrow);
- replacing the sound /l/ in *nalala* (I am sleeping / lying down) with /r/ to produce *narara*;
- replacing the sound /r/ in *nzuri* by /l/ to produce *msuuli*; and
- voicing the *-ta-* in *nataka* (I want) to produce *nadaka*.

In summary, Onsanse's performance in Kiswahili is characterized by two main features are: a) omitting certain phonemes (from all word positions), and b) replacing certain phonemes with others.

4.4 Utterances in English

Table 4: All the words produced by Onsanse in English

180) *Aayu?* ['How are you?']
181) Bo … bo … bo … boarding
182) Boarding school
183) Eeh … eeh … go back … go … go … eeh … eeh … go back
184) Go back
185) Is coming [for 'Someone is coming']
186) Ooh!
187) Potato [i.e. 'dunderhead']
188) School
189) Too *mush* [for 'too much', i.e. I am tired]

4.4.1 Grammatical features

The only grammatical feature worth pointing out here is the lack of a subject in the verb phrase *is coming*. It should be added, however, that the same segment contains the progressive auxiliary *is* and the accompanying -*ing* inflection on the main verb *coming*. This is significant because the redundancy of both the auxiliary and the inflection, both of which are functional elements, was not expected in this kind of limited grammar which is comparable to that of Broca's aphasics. Unfortunately, Onsanse did not produce enough verb forms to provide us with evidence, or the lack of it, of the possibility that while he may have difficulty with certain inflections, e.g. those marking tense and agreement, he did not have any with the progressive aspect marker -*ing*. That would have been evidence for selective impairment.

4.4.2 Phonological features

Three observations can be made:
- reducing the three syllables of *how are you* into the two of *Aayu*,
- the initial hesitation in trying to pronounce the word *boarding*, and
- the substitution of the sound /tʃ/ with /ʃ/ in the word *much*.

Since these three appeared only once each, no meaningful generalization can be made from them.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The first thing to point out is that Onsanse has acquired language after he was picked up and raised in an environment where he was exposed to plenty of linguistic input. This makes his case comparable to that of Genie, but not that of Victor. And what Curtiss (1977: 45) reported about Genie's linguistic competence, namely that "she had a large vocabulary but lacked

the ability to string words correctly", would also apply to Onsanse's, of course we agreed that "large" has its special meaning in this context.

Whether large or small, Onsanse's vocabulary is the widest in Dholuo: all the utterances gathered contain about 80 different lexical items from Dholuo, about 50 from Kiswahili, about 40 from Ekegusii, and about 10 from English.[7] The difference in these numbers can be easily attributed to the fact that Dholuo is the dominant language in the environment where Onsanse has been living for four decades[8]. But what is of greater significance than just those numbers is the fact that he managed to learn some language, however limited it is.

The nature of Onsanse's speech is of great theoretical relevance in several respects. First, it was highly hesitant, as shown by the numbers of slashes (representing the time in seconds) between words and phrases in the transcribed conversations in the Appendix. Second, not a single one of his utterances was longer than two words in one breath. In other words, his speech can be likened to the "telegraphic speech" reported, for normal children in first language acquisition, to start "around the time of their second birthday" (Fromkin et al., 2011, pp. 346-347). Third, Onsanse's speech, like child language acquisition telegraphic speech and the speech of brain-damaged subjects (specifically Broca's aphasics), is basically composed of content words.

Further, Onsanse's speech is comparable to that of specific language impairment subjects to the extent that some morphemes and phonemes seem to be more affected than others. For instance, in relation to grammatical features, while the most frequent feature of his Dholuo performance was the omission of (obligatory) inflectional morphemes, mostly the subject marker, Onsanse retained all of them in some instances. A good illustration can be found in his utterance *abokayi* (I will bite you),

---

[7] We were not able to trace the following non-words produced by Onsanse to any one of the four languages: *bweeti, esarara, goa, masarara, mbusarara, maseti, oru, owo, sapala, sisiwe, ututi.*

[8] However, to a certain extent the difference seems also to have to do with how often the researcher used each language to put questions to Onsanse.

which is composed of the first person singular and subject marker *a-*, the future marker in the form of modal auxiliary *-bo-* (will), the verb stem *-ka-* (bite), and the second person singular object pronoun *-yi* (you). Another illustration appears in *wadhi* (let us go), where Onsanse maintained the first person plural pronoun *wa-* (we). A third example is in the word *tweye* (tie her), which contains both the main verb *twe-* (tie) and the third person singular object pronoun *-ye* (her).

These examples suggest that Onsanse's impairment of inflectional morphology is selective: on the one hand, he has greater difficulty in handling the subject-marking morphemes than the object-marking ones, and, on the other hand, when it comes to the subject morphemes themselves, he has greater difficulty with the singular marker than the plural marker. This observation mirrors the findings reported by Radford et al. (p. 251) from SLI studies:

> One of these investigated SLI children's performance on two regular inflectional affixes, the plural *-s (two book-s)* and the third person singular present *-s (she arrive-s)*. ... Despite the fact that both affixes are regular, SLI subjects' performance with the plural is considerably better than with the tense/agreement suffix.

It would thus be suitable to borrow Radford et al's conclusion that "Taken together, these findings indicate that the different grammatical functions of the affixes [are] the controlling factor" (p. 251).

Selective morphological impairment was also observed in Kiswahili and Ekegusii. In Kiswahili, Onsanse had less difficulty using the tense marker morpheme *-na-* than the other tense morphemes, namely *-li-*, *-me-*, and *-ta-*. He actually used it in lieu of these latter. In Ekegusii, while the typical feature of his speech was to omit the two noun-class marker prefixes, the noun-initial vowel was more affected than the morpheme that follows it.

With regard to phonological impairment in Onsanse's speech, there were two main tendencies across Dholuo, Ekegusii and Kiswahili: omitting certain phonemes and replacing certain others with others. However, no clear pattern emerged from which sounds were typically affected in Dholuo.

In Ekegusii, on the other hand, the omission and substitution of specific sounds seems to affect more vowels than consonants. The picture seems a little bit clearer in Kiswahili: the omission (or avoidance?) of the two sounds /h/ and /w/ tended to be systematic, and so did the use of the sound /s/ for /z/ and /ʃ/. It could be argued, though, that the latter feature is not particular to Onsanse's Kiswahili, but typical of the Kiswahili of Dholuo speakers in general. Still in Kiswahili, the dropping of the final vowel (as in *naend* for *naenda* and *nasom* for *nasoma*) could also be attributed to influence from Dholuo, a language which, unlike Kiswahili (and other Bantu languages) allows closed syllables.

Beyond grammar and (segmental) phonology, Onsanse's utterances display other linguistic features worth studying: from lexical coinages, like the word *esarara(ra)* (a non-word in the four languages) used as a noun to designate any animal or insect which he could not name, to prosodic features and codemixing.

REFERENCES

Achieng', A. O. 2012. The Critical Period Hypothesis in a multilingual environment: The case of Onsanse Joseph Ondoro from Asumbi, Homa Bay County, Kenya. Unpublished MA Project, University of Nairobi.

Crystal, D. 1997. *The Cambridge Encylopedia of Language*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Curtiss, S. 1977. *Genie: A Psycholinguistic Study of a Modern-day "Wild Child."* New York: Academic Press.

Fromkin, V., R. Rodman, R., and N. Hyams, N. 2011. *An Introduction to Language*, 9th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Lenneberg, E. H. 1967. *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: Wiley.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. 2006. *How Languages are Learned*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Radford, A., M. Atkinson, D. Britain, H. Clahsen, and A. Spencer. 1999. *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singleton, D. and C. Muñoz. 2011. "Around and beyond the Critical Period Hypothesis", in E. Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning,* vol. II. London: Routledge.

Author's Address:

Sr Anne O. Achieng
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
South Africa
Email: aachieng0106@gmail.com

(For Alfred Buregeya, see the address at the end of the first article.)

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCHER'S CONVERSATIONS WITH ONSANSE, THE SUBJECT [9]

(Note: The researcher is R, while Onsanse is S.)

Conversation No. 1: [Greetings, with R's questions asked in Dholuo, Ekegusii and Kiswahili]

1. **R:** *Ondoro misawa?* (Ondoro, good morning?)
2. **S:** *Beer* (fine)
3. **R:** *Idhi nade?* (How are you?)
4. **S:** *Onge* (not there, [meaning: 'I have no say'])
5. **R:** *Ia kanye?* (Where are you coming from?)
6. **S:** *Kucha* (there)
7. **R:** *Niitimo ang'o chakre okinyi?* (What have you been doing since morning?)
8. **S:** *Mtoka //// motoka //// ruoko. Ah /// ah //// motoka* (vehicle, wash, vehicle)
9. **R:** *Ondoro mbuyore?* (How are you Ondoro?)
10. **S:** *Mbu ////// mbuuu //// ya* (Fi... fi...fine)
11. **R:** *Inki gwakora rero?* (What have you been doing from morning?)
12. **S:** *Obosondoto* (chyme)
13. **R:** *Obosondoto? Naya gaki Ondoro?* (Chyme? Really Ondoro?)
14. **S:** *Yaya (no).* [He keeps silent.]

Conversation No 2: [More greetings, with R's questions asked in English and Kiswahili]

15. **R:** How are you Ondoro?
16. **S:** *Aayu?* [Trying to repeat the greeting *How are you?*]
17. **R:** Where are you coming from Ondoro?

---

[9] The number of slashes corresponds to that of seconds which Onsanse took to produce the next utterance.

18. S: eeh/// eeh //// go back ///////// go //// go //// eeh /// eeh //// go back.

19. R: *Habari Ondoro?* (How are you?)

20. S: *Abaari* [Trying to repeat the greeting word *habari*]

21. R: *Umetoka wapi?* (Where are you coming from?)

22. S: *Api? ///// Kucha ///////// kule ///// eeh /// eeh ///// uku* (Where? /// there /// there /// eeh /// eeh /// in here)

23. R: *Ulikuwa unafanya nini mchana kutwa?* (What have you been doing the whole day?)

24. S: *mimi /////// egari ///// mh /// mh // osha ///// gari* (I/// vehicle //// mh // wash /// vehicle)

Conversation No 3: [R's questions asked in English and Dholuo]

25. R: What is her name? [Pointing at a girl he does not like].

26. S: *Hm hm*

27. R: Where is sister Apolonia?

28. S: *Apolo /// otho //// otho* (dead///dead)

29. R: *Macha ang'o?* (What is that?)

30. S: *Abicha //// picha.* (A picture)

31. R: Where is it?

32. S: *mh // mh // mh /// aa-tho* (Am tired)

Conversation No. 4: [Questions asked in English, Dholuo and Ekegusii]

33. R: Which animal is this?

34. S: *Choombe.* (A cow).

35. R: *Ma lemane?* (Which animal is this?)

36. S: *Mee //// oting'o //// oting'o mee ////.* (*mee ////* is carrying //// is carrying *mee*)

37. R: *Ma ang'o?* (What is this?)

38. S: *liigari ///// maekoles.* (This vehicle /// for college).

39. R: *Inki iki?* (What is this?)

40. S: *Esese* (a dog)

41. R: *Inki makobeka?* (What is it doing?)

42. S: *Echiro* (a market*)*

43. R: *Neye?* (What about this one?)

44. S: *Sondari* (secondary school*)*

Conversation No. 5: [Questions asked by both R and S on their way to the Sinema shopping centre]

S greets people along the way.

45. S: *Aayu?* [for 'how are you'?]

[He asks them]:

46. S: *Nyeendapi? Aakuja //// yemikuja //// sisiwe.*

They tell him:

47. *Wadhi e chiro ngiewo omena.* (We are going to the market to buy silver fish).

He is excited by the site of the motorcycles along the way and says:

48. S: *Pipiki //// eee, ///// eee //// nendeapi?. Ere kiny /// chiro. Nyako //// ber.* (The motorcycles /// eee /*/ eee /// Where going? Where tomorrow, market)

The school children from a nearby school are going out for lunch and they greet him:

49. Ondoro, how are you?

50. S: *Eeakulu //// eskulu ////nasom.* (School //// school //// read)

He sees a sister coming their way and he talks to R:

51. S: *Sista /// Kuja // Olisabet //// Ok.* (Sister/// coming // Elizabeth /// Ok).

He greets the sister and asks her:

52. S: *Nan'go? //// Nitie.* (How are you? //// There).

53. Sr. E.: *Antie, idhi nade Ondoro?* (I'm fine Ondoro. How are you?)

54. R: *Otindo. Koro? ///// Onge////.* (Otindo. How? ///// not there)

He meets another female figure and initiates the talk:

55. S: *Madhi //// Haa // Yuu? Aa/// adhi/// Adhia ///. Madhi ///. Haa /// yu?* (Drink //// Haa // You? Ah /// I go///. Just go ///. Drink /// Haa /// You?).

She responds:

56. **Sr. E:** *Ondoro, adhi maber, idhi kanye?* (Ondoro, I am fine, where are you going to?).

57. S: *Too mush ////* (Too much).

He sees a lame boy and comments:

58. S: *Otwo.* (He is sick).

Then after a while, he says:

59. S: *Yuak //// Hakuna //// Nyuka //// Ni // Mbeya //// Chai onge /// Nyuka onge.* (Crying //// it is not there //// porridge //// it is //// bad //// tea is not there /// porridge is not there).

He sees another sister approaching and says:

60. S: Is coming. *Sista //// nakuja ///// Sisisi //// aendapi?* (She's coming. Sister //// She's coming //// Sister //// Where are you going to?)

Raising his voice, he utters:

61. S: *Naendapi?* (Where is he going to?)

62. **The sister:** *Ninaenda nyumbani. Ondoro, na wewe je?* (I am going home. What about you, Ondoro?)

63. S: *Ngoja //// nakuja ////// chai hakuna ///// orumo.* (Wait //// I'm coming ////// Tea is not there ///// it is over).

He claps his hands. Shortly after, he greets an elderly woman:

64. S: *Babari ///// yako //// Babari ako.* (What's your news? ///// Your [news] //// What's your news?).

65. **The elderly woman:** *Ondoro, we chanda gi Kiswahili.* (Ondoro, do not disturb me with Kiswahili).

He then reminds me of the batteries for his portable radio he is carrying.

66. S: *Hakuna //// masasi. Ukimiya //// masasi //// masasi //// masasi. Jembe //// mbaya //// wadhi //// Rangwe. Sai Rangwe //// Maonge ///// Naenda /// e /// gari /// ongade /// ogada.* (No //// batteries. Why don't you give me //// batteries //// batteries ////

batteries. A hoe //// bad //// let us go //// Rangwe. Now Rangwe //// it is not here //// I am going /// to the /// vehicle /// to cut /// elephant grass).

Then he sees a chicken and shouts:

67. S: *Nee* //// *ngoko* ////. *Keso* //// *keso* ////. *Eennakufa* ////. *Okure* (See //// chicken ////. Tomorrow //// tomorrow //// It will die ////. Dead).

R then asks him:

68. R: *Ere wuonu?* (Where is your father?)

He responds:

69. S: *Onge dhi* //// *adhiya* /// *dhi adhia* ///// *koro* //// *dhiii*. Go back ///// Go back. *Wadhi* //// *wadhi* //// *kucha. Nee gari.* (Not there go //// just go ///, go just go ///// now //// go)

Then he turns aggressive and warns R:

70. S: *Abokayi* //// *potato* //// *ng'ou.* (I will bite you, potato, *ng'ou*)

R and S become quiet for a long time waiting for S's temper to cool. Fortunately, the two meet S's friend and S greets him:

71. S: *Habari* ///// *msuri* //// *habari.* (How are you? //// Fine //// How are you?).

He is now smiling. And before the friend can respond, he goes on:

72. S: *Uliendapi?* //// *Sapala. Sista* //// *naend* //// *misa* ///// *abolo.* (Where did you go? //// *Sapala.* Sister //// I'm going //// mass ///// at 2.00).

Then R and S go back to the house where R embarks on letting S identify what is in the pictures she shows him:

73. R: *Ondoro, wachna nying gini?* (Ondoro, name this.)

74. S: *Mabwa.* (For the 'flower' R shows him.)

75. S: *Skul-Sule* ///// Uruti. (School //// *Uruti* [which is a nonsensical word])

76. S: *House hii* //// *msuuli* //// *nyumba* //// *msuuli. Engiya* //// *nyomba* (This //// beautiful //// house //// beautiful. This //// house).

He then remembers that he needs batteries for his small radio and interrupts:

77. **S:** *Keakela ///// masasi ///// Sista. Ma ///// bo //// bo //// bo //// boding //// skul. Maooketho ///// oketho ///// oketho /////* (Just bring them. ////// batteries ///// sister. This one ///// bo ///// bo ///// bo ///// boarding //// school. This spoiled ///// spoiled ///// spoiled).

Conversation No. 6: [R's Questions asked in all four languages]

The next day we meet and R initiates the greetings:

78. **R:** *Ondoro, habari.* (Ondoro, how are you?)

He coughs and says:

79. **S:** *Pole.* (Sorry).

Then he utters, in Ekegusii:

80. **S:** *Bikoroto* (shoes)

I then ask him to name the animals from a picture book.

81. **S:** *Ikondo* (a sheep) [and then he goes on to say] *Mbusarara ////*

At that point he keeps repeating the same word for all the animals he does not know and cannot identify by saying:

82. **S:** *Esararara* and *Sararara* [both of which are nonsensical words]

I then show him a bird and ask him:

83. **R:** Which bird is this?

He answers:

84. **S:** *Endege* (a bird).

85. **R:** *Na huyu, je anaitwaje?* (And what's the name of this one?)

86. **S:** *Engoko //// etuon* (a cock)

87. **R:** Tomato (what about this other animal?) pointing at a dog.

88. **S:** *Esese* (a dog)

89. **R:** *Na huyu je?* (And what about this one?) pointing at a goat.

90. **S:** *Mee /// nee mee* (Mee///see mee).

91. **R:** *Inki eke?* (What is this?)

92. **S:** *Fenji* (a tap)

93. **R:** *Ma en ang'o?* (What is this?)

94. **S:** *Pesa* (a pot).

Then I point at a picture of a woman in the book. He correctly identifies her as:

95. **S:** *Mama.* (Mother)

96. **R:** *Mama anafanya nini?* (What is she doing?)

97. **S:** *Kasi ///// anafanya ///// mama.* (Work ... She is working...)

98. **R:** *Huyu ni nani?* (Who is this?)

He identifies the child the woman is carrying as:

99. **S:** *Hii //// ya //// mototo. Oyo //// mwana.* (This //// for //// mototo. This one //// child).

Pointing at a jug, I then ask him:

100. **R:** *Mato en ang'o?* (What is this?)

101. **S:** *Okombo //// Ooh ////// omodhi ////// pi ///// maji. Otado //
tado.* (Okombo //// ooh ////// drinking ////// water ///// water.
Otado // tado).

Pointing at the bicycle, I ask him:

102. **R:** What is this?

103. **S:** *Bo // bo // bo /// boskel. egari. Egari eye* (Bicycle. Vehicle. This
vehicle). (bo /// bo /// bo.

Pointing at a snake, I ask him:

104. **R:** *Nee, ma ang'o?* (Look at this, what is this?)

105. **S:** *Ikondo* (a sheep)

Then, he calls all the other animals *esararara*, a word which does not exist in any one of the four languages.

106. **R:** *Inki eke?* (What is this? [in Ekegusii])

107. **S:** *Enyoni* (a bird [in Ekegusii])

Then I show him a pen, and ask him:

108. **R:** *Hii ni kitu gani?* (What is this thing here?)

109. **S:** *Ekararamu* (a pen) //// *skulu* (school)

Pointing at a ball, I ask in Dholuo:

110. **R:** *Wachna nying gini?* (Tell me the name of this item?)

111. **S:** *Mbeche //// tado //// kama ////, tatu //// mmmpira ////
mupira //// mupira.* (*Mbeche* //// roof //// like this /// three ////
mmball //// ball //// ball).

Then I show him a hoe and ask:

112. **R:** *Hii ni nini?* (What is this?)

113. **S:** *Eechuma ///// chuma ///// gere //// lima.* (Metal ///// metal
///// gere //// I dig)

I show him wheat flour and ask:

114. **R:** *Na hii ni nini?* (And what's this?)

115. **S:** *Chapati* (chapatti) /// *mandasi* (doughnout)

116. **R:** *Hivi ni vitu vipi?* (What are these?)

117. **S:** *Koroto ///, ee/// koroto. Ng'ai //// koroto.* (Shoes //// ee ////
shoes. Where? //// shoes.)

He sees a girl that he has contempt for and our interview is distracted. He
begins by such sounds as:

118. **S:** *mh, mh, mh* [he makes this sound when he does not want to
welcome someone].

119. **S:** *ooo ///// ogoro //// go piny //// ogoro //// piny //// oo ////
gari. Ochwade ///// odhi // odhi /// nindo //// kucho ///// anaenda.*
(Oh oh! /// Fell her down, /// fell /// May someone cane her //// she
should go //// to bed //// there far away, //// go.

I give the girl some food and ask him:

120. **R:** What is the girl doing?

121. **S:** *Ochamo //// kama//// ochamo.* She is eating //// like this ////
she is eating.

Pointing to a picture of the Kenyan flag, I ask him:

122. **R:** What is this?

123. **S:** *Ee // tai //// tai //// tai.* (Ee // tie //// tie //// tie.)

And pointing to a banana:

124. **R:** Which fruit is this?

125. **S:** *Rabo //// ra //// ra //// rabolo.* (Rabo //// ra //// ra ////
banana.

On seeing the sisters returning from work, he is distracted and says:

126. **S:** *Aaa //// Rudi ? Anakuja? //// Simama ///// Ochungo?*

Pointing to a stove, I ask him:

127. **R:** What is this?

128. **S:** *Chiko* (for *jiko*, in Swahili)

Then I show him a picture of a child and ask him:

129. **R:** *Mtoto anafanya nini?* (What's the child doing?)

130. **S:** *Mtoto //// mtoto //// mtoto //// onindo* (Child //// child //// is sleeping)

I show him a picture of cars, and ask:

131. **R:** Which vehicles are these?

132. **S:** *egari* (A vehicle).

Then I show him a comb and a key, respectively, and ask him:

133. **R:** Which items are these?

134. **S:** *Chano /// kubuli /// kubuli eya.* (Chano /// padlock /// that padlock).

Then I show him a man carrying a knife, but he only identifies the knife as

135. **S:** *Kiso* ([for *kisu*, in Swahili] meaning a knife)

Then I show him a pen, which he correctly names:

136. **R:** What is this?

137. **S:** *Kalamu //// kalamu //// kalamu* (a pen)

I show him a picture of a cow, and ask:

138. **R:** Which animal is this?

139. **S:** *Kama* (milk [the cow] now [in Ekegusii])

And when the girl stands up as if to go, he says,

140. **S:** *Potato //// rabuon. Odhi /// odhi //// odhii /// nee //// odhi //// ochire.* (Potato////potato. Let her go///let her go////let her gooo /// see /// she is going //// she is gone [in Dholuo]).

141. **R:** Today you will have a bath here.

142. **S:** *Mh // mh // mh.*

He spots a cat and calls out:

143. **S:** *Nyamura /// ae //// Nyamura cham //// dhi //.* (Nyamura /// ae //// Nyamura eat //// go//).

Later, while he is having a bath, he sees the girl coming back and shouts:

144. **S:** *Huyu //// Mbaya//// Enda////. Ndhiyo //// chwade ///// Polis tweye.* (This person //// bad //// go ////. Ndhiyo //// cane her ///// Policeman jail her).

Our conversation resumes the next day:

145. **R:** What is this Ondoro?

146. **S:** *Itabu* (for *kitabu* 'book', [in Swahili])

147. **R:** How many are they?

148. **S:** *Itabu* (book).

Pointing to the sisters who come into the room, I ask him:

149. **R:** Who are these?

150. **S:** Sister.

And when he sees the grounds man laughing, he utters:

151. **S :** *Onyiero* (he is laughing).

To elicit lengthy sentences from him, I ask:

152. **R:** What did you eat yesterday?

153. **S:** *Mh mh mh //// mh // mh // mh. Aaduogo.*

154. **R:** The Bishop is coming today. **S:** *Mh // mh mh /// mh mh*

155. **R:** Where is the T-shirt I bought for you?

156. **S:** *Mh /// Msuri /// ber.* (*Mh ///* Fine [Kiswahili] /// fine [Dholuo]).

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT IN THE SPEECH OF MESHACK, AN EKEGUSII SPEAKER

Peter Nyansera OTIENO
Bugema University, Elgon View College, Kisii

Research on SLI, mostly on European languages like English, German and Italian, has suggested that it mainly affects inflectional morphology and, to a lesser degree, syntax and phonology. The present study researched SLI in Ekegusii, an African language which, unlike those three, is a tone language. The study found that the impairment in the case studied significantly affected not only inflectional (essentially verbal) morphology, but also phonology, especially tones. It found much fewer instances of lexical and syntactic impairment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Specific Language Impairment (SLI) is a type of linguistic deficit that affects first language acquisition. This is how Fromkin et al. (2011: 18-19) introduce the topic of SLI:

> In addition to brain-damage individuals who have lost their language ability, there are children without brain lesions who nevertheless have difficulties in acquiring language and are much slower than the average child. They show no other cognitive deficits, they are not autistic or retarded, and they have no perceptual problems. Such children are suffering from **specific language impairment (SLI).**

For their part, Radford et al. (1999, chapters 15 & 26) compare what happens in SLI with what happens in two aphasic syndromes, Broca's aphasia and Wernicke's aphasia.[1] But, from early on in their book, they too make it clear that SLI is "a language disorder that needs to be distinguished

---

[1] There are more types of aphasia. Fabbro (1999: 43-45) describes eight types, on the basis of what he calls "a brief review of the most accepted and currently most widespread classifications of aphasia..." (p. 43). However, Broca's aphasia and Wernicke's aphasia, which are the most widespread, are the most widely studied in the literature.

from [disorders due to aphasia], which are *acquired* as the result of damage to the brain" (p. 15). They go on to say that

> The *specificity* of SLI is indicated by the fact that SLI subjects have normal-verbal IQs, no hearing deficits and no obvious emotional or behavioural difficulties. ... The nature of the impairment displayed by SLI subjects seems to be fairly narrow in scope, affecting aspects of grammatical inflection and certain complex syntactic processes...".
> (Radford et al., 1999, p. 15)

Further (in Chapter 15), the authors show how SLI children have difficulties with both nominal and verbal inflections, like the past tense marker *-(e)d*, or the third person singular present tense *-s* and plural *-s*. But they also point out that

> ... the development of inflection is selectively impaired: the acquisition of regular inflection causes more problems than learning irregulars, and inflectional morphemes encoding tense/agreement seem to be more adversely affected than pluralisation morphemes. (p. 252)

Further (in Chapter 26), Radford et al. look at the possibility that SLI children's syntax is also impaired. They start their discussion by noting that "English-speaking SLI children do not have problems with word order" (p. 413). They assume that this may be due to the fact that "the word-order system of English is rather simple", and then go on to explore the possibility that "it might well be that SLI subjects do show word-order problems in a language [like German] which has a more complex system" (ibid.). They observe that what appear to be word-order problems (involving finite vs. non-finite verbs) in German are in fact linked not to word-order *per se*, but still to morphosyntactic aspects. They conclude in the following way:

> Thus, it seems that with respect to word order, the grammar of SLI subjects is in fact identical to that of unimpaired speakers, as all the verbs they use appear in the correct positions. The only difference

between SLI subjects and normal children is that SLI children do not produce as many finite verbs as the language requires. (p.415).

...

We conclude that the grammatical problems of SLI subjects lie mainly with inflection, and that word order is in fact unimpaired. Within the area of inflection, subject-verb agreement, case marking, gender and auxiliaries appear to be more strongly affected than, for example, noun plurals.... (p.415)

Fromkin et al. (2011), for their part, note that while "[some] studies of children with SLI reveal broader grammatical impairments, involving difficulties with many grammatical structures and operations, ... most investigations of SLI children show that they have particular problems with verbal inflection ... and also with syntactic structures involving certain kinds of word reorderings..." (p. 19). The authors add that "Recent work on SLI children also shows that the different components of language (phonology, syntax, lexicon) can be selectively impaired or spared" (p. 19).

From the preceding paragraphs it would be interesting to learn more about SLI from studies on as many different languages as possible. It is this that motivated postgraduate research by Otieno (2012), who was lucky to come across a 7-year old boy (Meshack) whose speech in his first and only language had features similar to those reported in the literature. The boy's language is Ekegusii, a Bantu language spoken in Kenya. To collect data for analysis, on several occasions Otieno visited the boy at his parents' home to engage him in a series of conversations. The researcher's analysis of the data showed that the boy had difficulties not only with inflections but also with phonological and lexical aspects of Ekegusii. Illustrating with extracts from the data collected for Otieno's (2012) study, this paper aims to deepen the analysis of the various linguistic features of Specific Language Impairment observed in Meshack's speech.

2. MORPHOLOGICAL IMPAIRMENT

Ekegusii, like other Bantu languages, is typologically classified as an agglutinating language, that is, one that attaches several morphemes together to form a word. This is particularly the case of verb forms, in which prefixes and suffixes are affixed to the root to express grammatical meanings related mainly to tense, aspect, and agreement.

2.1 Difficulty inserting the subject and object pronouns into the verb

Ekegusii is an SVO language. In addition, the overt subject is always represented by a pronoun morpheme incorporated into the verb. As illustrated in extracts 1 and 2 below[2] in the words in bold type, Meshack's speech is atypical in the sense that he has difficulty incorporating the subject pronoun into the verb.

Extract 1

Meshack's utterance	Gloss
M: *Rose **ikaransete** nyomba are*	Rose sitting inside the house she is•
R: *Inki agokora?*	What is she doing?
M: ***Teneine***	Standing
R: *Naende bata eyende*	Press the button again
M: *Rose nomwana*	Rose with the baby
R: *Naende eyende*	Get another one
M: *Rose are nom... ere bweka*	Rose with ... she is alone
R: *Inki agokora?*	What is she doing?
M: ***Ikaransete***	Is sitting

---

[2] The letter *M* refers to Meshack, while *R* refers to the researcher who interviewed him. In the extract, the researcher shows Meshack a picture of a familiar neighbour and asks him to say what she is doing in the picture.

The verbs in bold type (*ikaransete* and *teneine*) lack the prefix that is expected to be used to mark the subject. Meshack's usage *i-karans-et-e* (is sitting) should have been *a-i-karans-et-e* (she is sitting). What is missing is the prefix *a-*, which corresponds to the subject pronoun *she*. Similarly, *tene-in-e* (standing) lacks the *a-* of the target form *a-tene-in-e* (she is standing). It is also interesting that Meshack put the equivalent of the subject *she* in the first line (*Rose ikaransete nyomba are*) at the end of the sentence instead of prefixing it to the verb. He should have said: *Rose aikaransete nyomba* (Rose is sitting in the house).

Extract 2

R: *Mware abana barenga...mware komigana.*   How many were you ... were you squeezed up?

M: *Ebirogo **gasinini, bike bike**.*   Tiny chairs, very small.

The dropping of the preprefix[3] *e-*, which must be copied from the noun (*ebirogo*) to the adjective (*bike*), is the main impairment here. The *e-* must be copied from the noun to the adjective *bike*. The correct form should have been the following: *ebirogo ebisinini, ebike ebike* (The chairs are small, very tiny). The morpheme *ebi-* (which is actually a "twin" morpheme composed of *e-* and *bi-*, both of which are necessary to represent the subject in this case), is obligatory. The *ga-* in the word *gasinini* used by Meshack is not a plural morpheme in Ekegusii.

Extract 3 below illustrates a different aspect of the impairment: the subject morpheme has been used, but not the right one.

Extract 3

R: *Naki obokima bokorugwa?*   How is *ugali* cooked?

M: *Akobeka esuguri riko namache.*   She puts a pot with water over fire.

　　Obeka obera, yabera. Obeka obosi She puts she boils, it boils. She adds

---

[3] This is a term used by Bickmore (1998, p. 165, endnote 1) to refer to that "initial vowel"—as he also calls it.

| | flour. |
| *Ochaka koruga.* | She starts to cook. |

In the verb *o-bera* (she boils), Meshack used the morpheme *o-*, which is used for noun classes 1 and 2 *(o-mo* and *a-ba)* to describe people, instead of the expected morpheme **ya**-, which should be used when referring to things. The correct utterance should have been **yabera** (it boils).

It is, however, interesting to note that while Meshack omitted the subject prefix in the extracts above, he correctly attached it in some instances, as illustrated in extracts 4 and 5.

Extract 4

Ochaka koruga. She starts to cook.

Here, the *o-* of *ochaka* (she starts) is the subject pronoun.

Extract 5

Agachaka korera He started crying.

This utterance has no impairment at all. The verb *agachaka* starts with **a-** instead of *o-* because the latter is used for the habitual present and the immediate past, while **a-** is used for the recent past and the remote past.

It transpires from extracts 1 to 5 that Meshack's inability to use the subject prefix is not absolute; it is a question of degree. This observation is consistent with results reported by Radford *et al.* (1999), which they reported in terms of percentages, in the following way:

> It was found that the SLI children's usage of the third person singular present -*s* was only 36 per cent correct, whereas 83 per cent of their -*s* plurals were correct, this difference being statistically significant. (p. 251)

Meshack's difficulty in inserting the object pronoun into the verb is illustrated in Extract 6.

Extract 6

R: *Ange barenga?*	They are about how many?
M: **Tibainyorete**	They cannot remember.
R: *Eee?*	What?
M: **Nkobaeba**	I forget them.

Meshack produced **ti-ba-inyor-et-e** (they cannot remember) instead of *ti-mba-inyor-et-i* (I cannot remember them), thus dropping the object morpheme represented by the letter -*m*-. He also produced **nko-ba-eba** (I forget them) instead of **na-ba-eb-ir-e** (I have forgotten them). Here, he correctly inserted the object pronoun -*ba*-, but to the detriment of the rest of the structure of the verb.

2.2 Difficulty in distinguishing the tense-marking morphemes

According to Odero (2008: 83), the Ekegusii tense system is divided into the past and the non-past. The past tense is further divided into three: the immediate past, the recent past and the distant (remote) past. Odero goes further to divide the non-past tense into the non-past in the present and the non-past in the future. This latter is in turn sub-divided into two: the non-past in the immediate future—which also includes the near future (mainly marked by adverbials), and the non-past in the distant future.

The words in bold type in the following extract illustrate how Meshack had difficulty distinguishing between the different past and non-past tense forms outlined above.

Extract 7

R: *Bono... Intebie bono omogano.*	Now... tell me a story.
M: *Omogano yogotereri? Mogano mogano!*	A ballad? Story story!
R: *Mogano ninchwo!*	Story come!
M: *Mogano ninchu.***Inkonyora** *omwana onde* **agosibia** *chianga.* **Agotiga** *eyanga ende*	come! I get another child washing clothes. She left one piece of cloth

*eyemo roche. Bono mamomwabo **akamotebia***	at the river. Now, her mother told her
***totiga** egesibao kiaye nesigati yaye*	leave her blouse and skirt.
*Mamomwabo **okomotebi** buna **genda***	Her mother *tells her that to go
***onyioyi akonyora** esimba "engai ogochi?"*	and get it, she finds a lion "where are you going?"
*"esigati yane **naenda** kwoyi natiga negesibao"*	I went to bring my skirt and blouse"
*"Esigati?" Esimba **ekomotebia** "ng'ai ogochi?"*	Skirt? Lion says, "where are you going?"
*"Nesigati negesibao yane **naenda** kwoyia"*	"It is my skirt and blouse I went to bring."
"Ng'a esigati negesibao?"	"That skirt and blouse?"
*Eriakane **egokora** inki? Eyemo esimba **ekomotebia**,*	the fourth time did what...one lion told her,
*"Kwana buya!" Eyagatato **ekomominyokia***	"Speak up!" the third chased her.
Eyende.	Another one.

Meshack used the present-tense morpheme *-o-* for the past-tense *-a-*. Thus, *i-**nko**-nyor-a* (I find) should have been *i-**nka**-nyor-a* (I found), *a-**go**-tig-a* (he/she is leaving) should have been *a-**ga**-tig-a* (he/she left), *a-**ko**-mo-tebi-a* (he/she is telling her) should have been *a-**ka**-mo-tebi-a* (she told her), while *to-tig-a* (do not leave) should have been *ta-tig-a* (He was not to leave).

It should be noted, however, that a number of verb forms in Extract 7 were correctly marked for tense. Those are: the past tense form *a-ga-chaka* (he started), the immediate past *naenda* (he just went), the present tense *ogochi* (you go), the past tense *natiga* (I left), and the present tense *kwana (say)*. This reinforces the idea that the non-use of a given morpheme is not absolute. Interestingly, the verb forms whose tense marking he did not get

right are all in the remote past. So, the selective nature of Meshack's tense-marking rules becomes manifest here.

2.3 Difficulty in using the right final vowel letter on a verb

In Ekegusii, a verb can end in *-a, -e, -i* and *-u,* depending on its grammatical mood. But Meshack tends to use the vowel *-e* for all the others, as illustrated in extracts 8 and 9.

Extract 8

M: *Goocha. Inge mwake.*	Look here. Give me, I take a photo of her.
R: *Naki okomoaka?*	How do you take it?
M: *Niiga.*	This way.

Extract 9

M: *Mbabwati ... mbabwate chifaeli.*	They don't have ... they have files.

In Extract 8, Meshack's use of the final vowel *-e* in *ing'e* (give me) is wrong; he should have said *ing'a* (give me).[4] The form *ing'e* has no meaning in Ekegusii. In Extract 9, from the context Meshack ought to have said *mbabwate* (they have) instead of *mbabwati* (they don't have). His use of *-i* instead of *-e* made him say the opposite. However, he realized this and corrected himself.

2.4 Difficulty in using the right morphemes in negative verb forms

Negation in Ekegusii is marked by prefixing the morpheme *ti-* to the root of the verb. But this morpheme *ti-* can also be realized in its allomorphs as 'ta-' or 'to-', depending on number and person. For instance, the verb form

---

[4] It is worth pointing out that this same wrong word *ing'-e* was produced by Meshack in three different sets of data collected over a period of eleven months. It could thus be concluded that the impairment was systematic in his language.

to-ter-et-i means 'you did not sing', in the singular, while *ti-mo-ter-et-i* also means 'you did not sing', but in the plural.

While Meshack's language shows evidence of his knowledge of the negative morpheme *ti-*, he had difficulty with the accompanying morphemes that mark number and person, as the following extract illustrates.

Extract 10

R: *Ange barenga?*   They are about how many?

M: ***Tibainyorete.***   They cannot remember.

The verb form *tibainyorete* can be segmented into component morphemes as *ti-ba-inyor-et-e*, where *-ba-*, meant to be the third person (pronoun) morpheme, is not the correct one. This should have been *-mba-*, for the whole form to be *ti-mba-inyor-et-i* (I cannot remember them), meaning that the correct final vowel should have been *-i* instead of *-e*. So, while Meshack used the negative prefix *ti-* correctly, he failed to use the correct personal pronoun *-ba-* and the final vowel letter *-i*, which should be the second element to signal that a verb is in the negative.

3. PHONOLOGICAL IMPAIRMENT

3.1 Tones

Ekegusii has two major distinct tones: the high and the low. They are used to mark a question and negation and to distinguish between tenses.

3.1.1 *Meshack's non-use of the negation-marking tone*

The wrong tone can change a positive statement into a negative one, as in the case of Extract 11.

Extract 11

Meshack's utterance	Gloss	Target word	Gloss
Mbá-n-tèbèt-ì	They did not tell me	*mbá-n-tébèt-i*	They told me
/mbántèßètì/		/mbántéßètì/	

The utterance *mbá-n-tèbèt-ì* (they did not tell me), where the high tone is used on the first syllable while the second, third and fourth syllables carry a low tone, is a negative statement. However, from the context that was meant to be a positive statement, one which should have carried a high tone on the first and second syllables, i.e. *mbá-n-tébèt-ì*. Many other examples of the same nature from the collected data indicated that this impairment was systematic.

3.1.2 Difficulty with the question-marking tone

In Ekegusii, a change in tone can turn statements into questions and questions into statements. This is illustrated in extracts 12 and 13 below.

Extract 12

Meshack's utterance		Target word	
éy-áng-á	Did it refuse?	*èyàngà*	(a piece of) cloth
/éjá:ŋgá/		/èjàŋgà/	

In the extract above Meshack used a high tone on all the syllables, making it a question, when he really intended to refer to a piece of cloth, the pronunciation of which is done with only low tones.

Extract 13

Meshack's utterance		Target word	
bá-kò-mbòr-ì	They will ask me	*bà-kò-mbòr-ì*	What did they ask me?
/Bákòmbòrì/		/Bàkòmbò:rì/	

Here Meshack's pronunciation turned what was intended to be a question into a statement by placing the high tone on the first syllable.

3.1.3 Difficulty with the tense-marking tone

Tense in Ekegusii is marked by a distinct (prefix) morpheme, one which also co-occurs with a specific tone. The immediate past is marked by a low tone, placed on the first syllable *tà-* in *tàrèngè* (he/she was not there); the

remote past is marked by a high tone, as in *táréngé* (he/she was (long time ago) not there); the immediate future is marked by a low tone, as in *nàchè* (he will come [shortly]); the distant future is marked by a high tone, as in *náché* (he/she will [eventually] come).

Let us now see how confusing all that is for Meshack.

Extract 14

M: *à-rèng-è omote igoro* 'She was (recently) on a tree'

He should have said:

     á-réng-è omote igoro 'She was (a long time ago) on a tree'.

Meshack's use of the low tone on all the syllables made the tense be the immediate past. Yet, he was narrating a story that had taken place a long time before. The intended utterance would have to bear a high tone on the first and second syllables to indicate a remote past.

Extract 15

Meshack's utterance   **Target word**

á-gó-tèb-èt-ì   'She told you (a long time ago)'   *à-gò-tèb-ì* 'She (just) told you'

In this extract, Meshack placed the high tone on the first and second syllables instead of the low tone, thus saying 'she told you a long time ago' instead of the intended 'she has just told you'. Actually, Meshack's utterances in extracts 14 and 15 suggest that his rule for tone marking is simply the reverse of what it should be: using a low tone instead of a high one and a high tone instead of a low one.

3.2 Other phonological aspects

3.2.1 Non-application of Dahl's law

Dahl's law is one of dissimilation. Dissimilation "refer[s] to the influence exercised by one sound segment upon the articulation of another, so that the sounds become less alike, or different" (Crystal, 2003, p. 144). Dahl's law applies to some Bantu languages. To (over)simplify, this law has the

effect of having the consonant in the syllable preceding the root morpheme to be voiced if the first syllable of the root is voiceless, and to be voiceless if the latter is voiced. Ekegusii is one of those Bantu languages where Dahl's law obtains.[5] But Meshack seems to have difficulty with it, as illustrated in the next two extracts.

Extract 16

Meshack's utterance		**Target word**	
ki-atek-ir-e	It has burst.	*gi-atek-ir-e*	It has burst.

Extract 17

gwa-end-a	(You) go	*kwa-end-a*	(You) go
kwa-kor-ir-e	(You) finish	*gwa-kor-ir-e*	(You) finish

In Extract 16, since the first consonant in the verb root *-atek-* (in Meshack's utterance *ki-atek-ir-e*) is the voiceless sound /t/, the velar consonant in the prefix to be added should have been voiced. In Extract 17, since the first consonant in the root *-end-* (in Meshack's utterance *kwa-end-a*) is voiced, the velar sound in the prefix should have been voiceless. Conversely, since the first consonant in the root *-kor-* (in Meshack's utterance *kwa-kor-ir-e*), the velar sound in the prefix should have been voiced. Apparently, Dahl's law in Ekegusii is another one which Meshack has got in reverse.

3.2.2   Unnecessary or misleading vowel lengthening

For every short vowel in Ekegusii, there is a corresponding long one. Such vowel length is contrastive. For instance, the word *eri* /eri/ means 'that one (nearby)', while *eeri* /e:ri/ means 'that one (further away)'. Although Meshack's language features both short and long vowels, his use of vowel length does not always change meaning but produces a non-word in Ekegusii, as in the following extract.

---

[5] For a technical description of Dahl's law in Ekegusii, see Bickmore (1998).

Extract 18

Meshack's pronunciation	**Target pronunciation**	
niiga /niːga/	*niga* /niga/	this way
tobeeke riiko /tobeːke riːko/	*tobeke riiko* /tobeke riːko/	we put on fire

In the above extract, Meshack's pronunciation elongated a short vowel, but without leading to a change in meaning.

However, in some cases his use of vowel length made him produce words with unintended meanings, as illustrated in the following extract.

Extract 19

Meshack's pronunciation	**Target pronunciation**
a) *agochaaka* /agotʃaːka/	*agochaka* /agotʃaka/
'he/she comes and beats repeatedly'	'he/she start's
b) *amaiira* /amaiːra/	*amaira* /amaira/
'He/she has taken (something)'	'pus'

4. LEXICAL IMPAIRMENT

4.1 Creation of non-words

Meshack's utterances contain a number of non-words. Some of these resulted from his idiosyncratic articulation of existing words, which makes it possible to guess their meanings. That is the case of *sakara* in Extract 20.

Extract 20

M: O-*beka sakara o-gacha obisi*

   'She-put *sakara* she- keep office'

   'She puts in a paper bag and keeps (them) in the office'

The word *sakara* does not exist in Ekegusii. But the listener can guess that Meshack intended to say *risakara* (paper bag).

However, in Extract 21 Meshack used two words, *nkorike* and *nacho*, which are so strange that even the context could not help the listener to guess the intended word.

Extract 21

R: *Intebie buna kwagaetire.*	Tell me how you could walk
Intebie korwa esukuru mbaka nka.	from school to here [home].
M: **Nkorike** *tokoigorerwa,*	??? when we are released,
naturumboka naika rikori	I walk down to the foot-path.
Naika obisi. Narigereri gochiari.	I reach the office. I look there.
Rikori. Naturumboka.	Footpath. I go down.
Naturumboka **nacho** *bakobeka chiombe.*	I go down ??? they put cows.
Inkominyoka ebituma biaye mogondo.	I am running in her maize garden
Ngoika nkonyora omochionde	I find you another homestead
ingoetera ribwago. Ingosoka igaria.	I pass through the quarry. I come there.
Ingoturumboka, ngoika minto.	I walk down, I reach our home.

Those words that are not recognizable even from the context have been termed "neologisms" by Fabbro (1999: 40) in the case of the speech produced by aphasic patients.

4.2 Difficulty in repeating nonsense words

The following twelve are non-words in Ekegusii, though they would perfectly fit into the morphology and phonology of the language:

embwogori /embwogori/, *ekebwangina* /ekebwaŋina/, *eting'ori* /etiŋori/, *ekemiri* /ekemiri/, *richwanda* /ritʃwanda/, *riraso* /riraso/, *ekemora* /ekemora/, *rigege* /rigege/, *chinkorosi* /tʃiŋkorosi/, *ching'anya* /tʃiŋaɲa/, *nyankiri* /ɲaŋkiri/, and *baromo* /βaromo/

They were read to Meshack by his age-mate and family friend called Sarah. He was required to repeat them after her. Extract 22 shows how the repeating went.

Extract 22
S: *Embwogori*
M: ...
S: *Ekebwang'ina*
M: *Ekebanina*
[S repeats the word e*kebwang'ina*]
M: *Eke...*
R: *Naende erinde*   'Another one'
S: *Eting'ori*
M: *Etigori*
R: *Eting'ori. Meshack kwana bo.*   'Eting'ori. Meshack say that.'
M: *Enting'ori*
R: *Sarah, kwana erinde.*   'Sarah, read another one.'
S: *Ekemiri*
M: *Ekemini*   'A tiny thing'
S: *Richwanda*
M: **Richwanda**
S: *Riraso*
M: **Riraso**
S: *Ekemura*
M: **Ekemura**
S: *Rigege*
M: **Rigege**
S: *Chinkorosi.*
M: *Tinkorosi*   'Let me not tire you'.
S: *Ching'anya.*
M: *Chinyanya.*   'Tomatoes'
[S repeats the word *ching'anya*]
M: *Ring'anya - Chinyama*   'Meats'

S: *Nyakiri.*

M: *Nakiri.*   'I made it silent'.

S: *Baromo.*

M: *Baroma.*   'They bit'.

Out of the twelve nonsense words, Meshack could correctly repeat only four of them: *richwanda, riraso, ekemura, rigege.* For six words (*eting'ori, nyankiri, ching'anya, chinkorosi, baromo, ekemiri*) he was able to produce words that are phonetically similar. For the word *ekebwang'ina*, he managed to repeat only the first two syllables. As for the word *embwogori*, he could not repeat even a single syllable.

5. SYNTACTIC IMPAIRMENT

Meshack's utterances show that by and large his word order is just like that of the Ekegusii speakers who suffer no linguistic deficits. In very few instances did Meshack flout the word order, and they all relate to the position of the adjective vis-à-vis the noun it modifies, as in the following two extracts.

Extract 23

	Target structure
M: *Eyemo esimba ekomotebia*	*Esimba eyemo ekamotebia*
'One lion tells him'	'One lion told him'

The order in the sentence above is wrong because in Ekegusii the adjective should be placed after, not before, the noun that it modifies. The (numeral) adjective in this case is *eyemo* (one).

Extract 24

	Target structure
M: *Rikoyi rirabwoni*	*rirabwoni rikoyi*
'cooked sweet potato'	'sweet potato cooked'
	('The sweet potato was cooked')

Rirabwoni (sweet potato) is a noun, while *rikoyi* (cooked) is a past-participial adjective.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper was meant to be an in-depth study of the features of Specific Language Impairment that could be found in Meshack's speech. The study has found a great deal of morphological and phonological impairment. Morphological impairment in Meshack's speech was found to consist mainly in his difficulty in inserting the subject and object morphemes into the verb and distinguishing between the morphemes marking the different tenses and nuances of tense (e.g. recent past vs. remote past). But, as is intrinsic to SLI, this difficulty was found to be a matter of degree in some cases, and selective in others. For instance, Meshack had greater difficulty in handling the morpheme marking the remote past than that marking the recent past. Phonological impairment was found to consist mainly in Meshack's inability to use the right tones. Here, too, selective impairment was evidenced by the fact that the tone marking tense was more impaired than e.g. that marking a question. The little lexical impairment found in Meshack's speech has to do with his production of some non-words in Ekegusii and his inability to repeat Ekegusii-like nonsense words. The even lesser amount of syntactic impairment consists in a specific word-order problem: placing the adjective before, rather than after, the noun which it modifies.

While both Radford et al. (1999) and Fromkin et al. (2011) have suggested, as already pointed out in the Introduction, that SLI mainly affects verbal inflections, the SLI found in Meshack's speech significantly affects both verbal inflections and grammatical tones. This finding about tones is "new" (?) to the extent Ekegusii is a tone language. If cases of SLI were not hard to come by, studying them in another tone language would help to corroborate or not the present study's observations. But more can still be done even if with the case of Meshack: it would be interesting to study his speech after a certain number of years to see if, for instance, his use of tones has improved.

REFERENCES

Bickmore, S. L. 1998. "Metathesis and Dahl's law in Ekegusii". *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 28/2: 148-168.

Crystal, D. 2003. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fabbro, F. 1999. *The Neurolinguistics of Bilingualism: An Introduction*. Hove and New York: Psychology Press.

Fromkin, V., R. Rodman, and N. Hyams. 2011. *An Introduction to Language*, 9th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Hyman, L. M. 1975. *Phonology: Theory and Analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Odero, E. 2008. Tense and aspect in Ekegusii: A minimalist analysis. Unpublished MA Project: University of Nairobi.

Otieno, P. N. 2012. Language impairment in a Specific-Language-Impairment (SLI) subject in Ekegusii. Unpublished MA Project, University of Nairobi.

Radford, A., M. Atkinson, D. Britain, H. Clahsen, and A.Spencer. 1999. *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Author's address:

Peter Nyansera Otieno
PO. Box 3641 – 40200,
Kisii, Kenya.
Email: petrotieno21@yahoo.com

HARMONIZING THE ORTHOGRAPHIES OF BANTU LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF GĨKŨYŨ AND EKEGUSII IN KENYA

Phyllis W. MWANGI, Martin C. NJOROGE & Edinah G. MOSE
Kenyatta University

Despite the multiplicity of African languages, available literature on the development of these languages points to the need to have their orthographies harmonized and standardised. This is because properly designed orthographies can play a monumental role in promoting their use in all spheres of life, and hence contribute to Africa's socio-economic development. Such harmonisation is practical, especially among languages such as Gĩkũyũ and Ekegusii, two distinct Kenyan Bantu languages that are mutually intelligible. This paper examines how similar or dissimilar their phonologies and orthographies are, with a view to proposing how they can be harmonized. The paper concludes that there are benefits that can accrue from such harmonisation efforts, especially because there will be greater availability of literacy materials accessible to the speakers of the two languages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kioko et al. (2012a: 40) have noted that a number of scholars in Africa have conducted research on and advocated the harmonisation of orthography in African languages (also see Prah, 2003; Banda, 2003). Prah points out that one way to address the multiplicity of African languages is to capitalize on their mutual intelligibility by clustering them and harmonising their orthographies. This makes practical sense because, as Prah's (2003: 23) research reveals, 85% of Africa's total population speaks no more than 12 to 15 languages. To illustrate, many Kenyan languages fall under Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic language families. Languages in any one group have more similarities than differences in their orthographies and the harmonisation of these orthographies may be beneficial to those who use them. Gĩkũyũ and Ekegusii, the two Kenyan languages whose phonologies and orthographies

are discussed below, belong to the Bantu family and are in many respects mutually intelligible.

Ekegusii was classified as E42 by Guthrie (1971: 43), who added that it fell under Zone E40 together with most Kenyan and Ugandan languages[1]. According to Cammenga (2002: 27-33), the language has two dialects: Rogoro (the northern dialect) and Maate (the southern dialect). Cammenga considers the Rogoro dialect to be the standard one, for being the one used in written works such as the Bible, story books, and the grammar texts used to teach Ekegusii in primary school grades 1-3. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2010: 397), the Kisii people (the assumed speakers of Ekegusii) totalled 2,205,669 in 2009.

For its part, Gĩkũyũ belongs to the Central Branch of the Niger-Congo family. It forms one of the five Bantu languages of the Thagichu subgroup which stretches from Kenya to Tanzania. Guthrie classified it as E50 language 51 (Guthrie, 1971: 43). According to the Kenya National Bureau Statistics (2010), Kenya had 6,662,576 Agĩkũyũ in 2009. As cited in Macharia (2011: 7), Gĩkũyũ has five dialects: Southern Gĩkũyũ (spoken in Kiambu and southern Murang'a), Northern Gĩkũyũ (northern Murang'a), Mathira (Nyeri), Gichugu (northern Kirinyaga) and Ndia (southern Kirinyaga. The southern dialect is considered the standard one.

Kioko et al. (2012a: 41) note that the first Gĩkũyũ orthography was designed by Christian missionaries. These were non-native speakers of Gĩkũyũ who did not represent the words the way they were pronounced by the native speakers. Kioko et al. observe that "There was thus no one-to-one correspondence between the phonemes and their graphemes." And while the United Kikuyu Language Committee in the 1940s resolved some difficulties in representing vocalic phonemes graphemically, they did not do so with consonantal problems. They, for example, proposed that the cardinal vowel /e/ be represented by the grapheme <ĩ>. But while phoneme-grapheme discrepancies do exist in the Ekegusii vowel system as

---

[1] Other sources that have similarly classified Ekegusii are: Nurse and Phillipson (1980), Keragori (1995), Nash (2009), Lewis (2009) and Maho (2008).

well (cf. section 4), unlike for Gĩkũyũ, no such language committee has ever existed to resolve them.

Before making a case for the harmonization of the orthographies of Gĩkũyũ and Ekegusii, the paper will first present the phonemic and graphemic inventories of the two languages in order to establish the extent to which they are similar. Then it will address the discrepancies that are evident between the orthographies and phonologies of the two languages. In view of those discrepancies, the paper will propose how the orthographies can be harmonized and then conclude by outlining the benefits of such harmonization.[2]

2. THE VOWELS OF EKEGUSII AND GĨKŨYŨ

Below we look at the vowel graphemes and phonemes found in Ekegusii and Gĩkũyũ. For each vowel, a word in which it occurs is given.
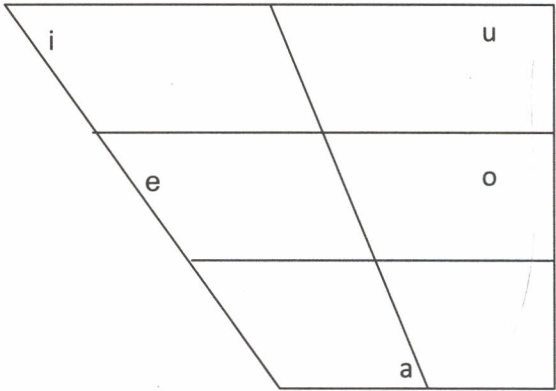
2.1 The vowels of Ekegusii

According to Nyakundi (2010: 10), the Ekegusii orthography has five vowels, namely: *a, e, i, o, u.* However, there are seven vocalic phonemes, as shown in Figure 1. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that two of the graphemes have two phonological realisations each, as shown below. The grapheme <e> is realised as a mid vowel /e/ in *egete* /eɣete/ (stick) and *ekerito* /ekeritɔ/ (heavy), but as an open vowel /ɛ/ in *eyaye* /ɛjajɛ/ (his or hers) and *ekioge* /ekiɔɣɛ/ (eyelash). The grapheme <o> also has two phonemic realisations: half open vowel /ɔ/ in *rora* /rɔra/ (see), *bota* /βɔta/ (the rising of dough), and *rosa* /rɔsa/ (tired), but mid /o/ in *obokima* /oβokima/ (ugali), *kora* /kora/ (finish) and *obonge* /oβoŋge/

(many). This means that there are homographs, as in the following examples, where (a) and (b) are both spelt as *esese* in (1) and as *soka* in (2):

(1) (a) /ɛsɛsɛ/ (things have gone wrong)

   (b) /esese/ (dog)

(2) (a) /sɔka/ (clothe – in the imperative)

   (b)/soka/ (be ashamed)

Figure 1: Ekegusii vowel chart

(Source: Komenda, 2011: 28)

In Table 1, the vowel sounds and graphemes of Ekegusii are juxtaposed.

Table 1: Ekegusii vocalic phonemes and graphemes

Phoneme	grapheme	illustrative word	gloss
/i/	i	embori	goat
/e/	e	enyancha	lake
/ɛ/	e	aye	you
/a/	a	mesa	shine
/ɔ/	o	nkobe	escort
/o/	o	boka	wake up
/u/	u	buna	break

It is evident that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between vowel sounds and graphemes.

2.2 The Gĩkũyũ vowels

The Gĩkũyũ vocalic phonemes are /a/, /ɛ/, /i/, /e/, /ɔ/, /u/ and /o/, as presented in Figure 2. They are represented graphemically as <a>, <e>, <i>, <ĩ>, <o>, <u>, and <ũ>, respectively. Unlike in Ekegusii, there is a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes in Gĩkũyũ.

Figure 2: Gĩkũyũ vowel chart
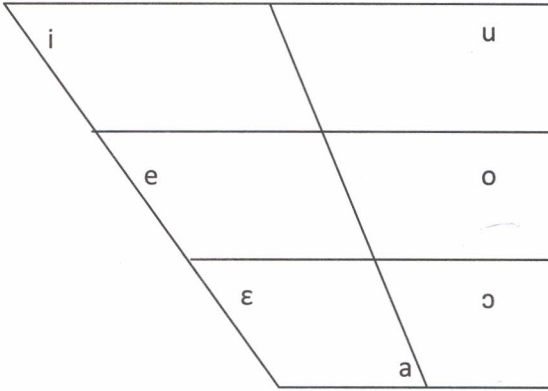
Source: Mwihaki (1998: 37)

As noted by Kioko et al. (2012a: 41), the Gĩkũyũ vowel sound is short in a word like *bara* /ɸara/ (road) and long in *baara* /ɸa:ra/ (look carefully). Thus, vowel length is distinctive. The short sound corresponds to a single vowel letter and the long sound to a double vowel letter.

Table 2: Gĩkũyũ vocalic phonemes and their corresponding graphemes

Phoneme	Grapheme	Illustration	Gloss
/i/	*i*	*ira*	yesterday
/e/	*ĩ*	*ĩra*	tell
/ɛ/	*e*	*eka*	hiccup
/a/	*a*	*ara*	spread
/ɔ/	*o*	*onja*	be crippled
/o/	*ũ*	*ũka*	come
/u/	*u*	*uma*	get out

3. THE CONSONANTS OF EKEGUSII AND GĨKŨYŨ

3.1 The Ekegusii consonants

According to Komenda (2011: 28), Ekegusii has twenty-two consonants. However, our research revealed that they are actually twenty. Komenda (2011) includes the geminates <mm> and <nn> as consonants but we exclude them because they only occur as fillers (meaningless sounds such as *mmm, aaaa* that are used to fill gaps in thought and speech) and not in Ekegusii words. The twenty consonants are the ones that we plot in Table 3.

Table 3: Ekegusii consonant phonemes

PLACE / MANNER	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
PLOSIVES	mb		t, nt, nd			k, ŋk, ŋg	
FRICATIVES	β		s, ns			ɣ	
AFFRICATES				tʃ, ntʃ			
NASALS	m	n			ɲ	ŋ	
APPROXIMANTS	w		r		j		

Table 4 pairs up the consonantal phonemes with their corresponding graphemes.

Table 4: Ekegusii consonantal phonemes and their corresponding graphemes

Phoneme	Grapheme	Example	Gloss
/β/	b	bera	boil
/mb/	mb	embura	rain
/m/	m	mena	lick
/t/	t	tata	father
/nt/	nt	omonto	person
/nd/	nd	enda	stomach
/n/	n	buna	break
/r/	r	roga	bewitch
/s/	s	seka	laugh
/tʃ/	ch	amache	water
/ntʃ/	nch	inchwo	come
/ɲ/	ny	enyongo	pot
/j/	y	eyaberi	female
/k/	k	kogora	to buy
/ɣ/	g	igoro	yesterday
/ŋ/	ng'	eng'ombe	cow
/ŋk/	nk	nkai	where
/ŋg/	ng	engabi	impala
/w/[3]	w	bweka	alone
/ns/	ns	ense	world

---

[3] It should be pointed out that /w/ can also be realised through gliding where the root begins with a vowel as in -eba /eβa/ (forget). So, the infinitive koeba is realised as kweba /kweβa/ (to forget).

3.2 The Gĩkũyũ consonants

Armstrong (1967), using the southern dialect of Gĩkũyũ, identified the following eighteen consonantal phonemes: /mb/, /ɸ/, /m/, /ɲ/ /t/, /θ/, nd/, /r/, /n/, /ʃ/, /ndʒ/, /k/, /ŋg/, /ŋ/, /w/, /h/, /j/ and /ɣ/. She used the phonemic principle to develop the orthography of Gĩkũyũ. From our research, however, we discovered that the voiceless inter-dental fricative /θ/ was not a phoneme in Gĩkũyũ; it is its voiced counterpart /ð/ that is. Karega (1983), cited in Macharia (2011: 7), however, claims that it is only the Mathira (Nyeri) dialect that has /ð/. According to him, the other dialects use /θ/. We concur with Macharia (2011: 71) that both sounds are found in the Mathira dialect but are not contrastive. They are allophones of the same phoneme.

The Gĩkũyũ consonant phonemes are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Gĩkũyũ consonant phonemes

PLACE / MANNER	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
PLOSIVES	mb		t nd			k ŋg	
FRICATIVES	ɸ	ð				ɣ	h
AFFRICATES				ndʒ			
Nasals	m	n			ɲ	ŋ	
Approximants	w		r		j		

Source: Njoroge (2006: 481)

Table 6: Gĩkũyũ consonantal phonemes and their corresponding graphemes

Phoneme	grapheme	Example	Gloss
/ɸ/	b	bata	need
/mb/	mb[4]	mbata	duck
/m/	m	muti	tree
/t/	t	tene	Early
/ð/	th	thina	Poverty
/nd/	nd	nduuma	arrow roots
/n/	n	nene	Big
/r/	r	rora	See
/ʃ/	c	coro	Trumpet
/ndʒ/	nj	njata	Star
/ɲ/	ny	nyanya	Tomatoes
/j/	y	maya	These
/k/	k	kena	be happy
/ɣ/	g	gĩra	come for
/ŋg/	ng	ngara	Mouse
/ŋ/	ng'	ng'etia	have a look at
/w/	w	wira	Work
/h/	h	haata	Sweep

4. DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN ORTHOGRAPHY AND PHONOLOGY

A close examination of the writing system and the phonology of Ekegusii and Gĩkũyũ reveals a number of discrepancies between the two. In relation with Ekegusii, Nyakundi (2010: 11) has claimed that the following consonant

---

[4] This sequence of letters comes out as a prenasalized /b/. However, /m/ is only slightly perceptible. Indeed our own investigation revealed that some Gikuyu speakers do not prenasalize the sequence it all.

letters do not exist in Ekegusii orthography: b, c, f, h, j, l, q, v, x, z. Yet a number of them have been used in Ekegusii, as in the following examples drawn from biblical books: *Timotheo* appears in the Ekegusii Bible for the book of Timothy, yet the grapheme <*th*> is absent in Ekegusii. However, even in the reading of the Bible, <*th*> is not pronounced as /ð/, as is the case in other Bantu languages like Gĩkũyũ, Kiembu, Kimeru and Kikamba, but as /t/. Similarly, <*l*>, <*z*> and <*f*> are in principle nonexistent in Ekegusii, yet <*l*> occurs in *Luka* (Luke) (pronounced as /ruka/, though), <z> occurs in *Zaburi* (Psalms), *Zekaria* (Zechariah) and *Ezekieli* (Ezekiel), though it is read as /s/, while <f> is present in *Filemoni* (Philemon) and *Abaefeso* (Ephesians), but is read as /β/ in spoken Ekegusii. Our recommendation is that the graphemes used in these biblical names be written as they are pronounced: thus, *Timotheo* as *Timoteo*, *Luka* as *Ruka*, *Zaburi as Saburi*, *Zekaria as Sekaria and Abaefeso as* Afaefeso.

A discrepancy of a different nature is in the use of the sound /ŋ/, represented by both <*ng*>, with a bar over it, in the word *engombe* (cow) and <ng'>–as *eng'ombe*. In school, learners are taught the one with a bar, while in the Bible and other written texts such as Ngoko's (1979) book *Ninyanchete omonwa oito* (I like my language), they encounter <*ng'*>. By way of harmonisation, Ekegusii should use this latter variant with the apostrophe because it is the one that is used in related languages.

In Gĩkũyũ, the palatal alveolar /ʃ/ is orthographically represented by the letter <c>. However, it has allophonic dialectal realizations: /tʃ/, /s/ and /ʃ/. In the Gĩkũyũ Bible, however, we find this sound represented by both <*sh*> and <*c*> in the book of *Joshua* and in *Macakaya* (Lamentations), respectively. To avoid these discrepancies, we suggest that the phoneme should be represented by the grapheme <s> in line with related languages like Kikamba. The bilabial fricative /ɸ/, represented by the letter <*b*>, is close to /v/ and /f/ in terms of place and manner of articulation. This probably explains why the Gĩkũyũ Bible uses <v> in *Jehova* (Jehovah) and *Nineve* (Nineveh) and <*f*> in *Aefeso* (Ephesians) and *Afilipi* (Phillipians). The same sound is even represented by <*p*> in *Petero* (Peter) and *Afilipi*. Intriguingly, the same Bible represents the same sound with the commonly

used <b> in *Jakubu* (Jacob) and *Ayubu* (Job). But as is evident from Table 6, the graphemes <v>, <f> *and* <p> are not present in the orthography of Gĩkũyũ. Other graphemes that are present only in the Bible are <l> and <z>. They occur in *Alawii* (Levites), *Luka* (Luke), *Ezara* (Ezra) *and* Zekaria (Zechariah).

5. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR HARMONIZING THE ORTHOGRAPHIES OF GĨKŨYŨ AND EKEGUSII

The first proposal for harmonizing the two orthographies concerns the harmonization of the vowel graphemes in the two languages by just adding two vowels, <ĩ> and <ŭ>, in Ekegusii, to bring this in line with related languages like Gĩkũyũ, Kikamba, Kimeru and Kiembu. More importantly, adding the two vowels would help to distinguish between the two different realizations of <e> and <o>. For instance, <esese> (things gone wrong) could be spelt using the tilde used in Gĩkũyũ, as <ĩsĩsĩ>, to differentiate it from <esese> (dog). The word <soka> (be ashamed) could be spelt as <sũka>, to differentiate it from <soka> (clothe – in the imperative). In this way, Ekegusii would have a seven-letter vowel system like Gĩkũyũ and related Bantu languages. This is a suggestion already made by Kioko et al. (2012b: 15) and we totally agree with it. And it is one which agrees with Guthrie's (1971: 7) observation that "... it would be misleading to represent identical pronunciation differently in different languages".

Since, as Kioko et al. (2012a: 2) have pointed out, in Gĩkũyũ, the sounds /s/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ are dialectal variants, they could be represented by the grapheme <s>, so as to have a word like <coro> (trumpet) written as <soro>. And since the letter <b> (pronounced as /f/) is found in both languages in words such as *baba* (father) in Gĩkũyũ) and *boka* (wake up) in Ekegusii, the letter <f> could be used to spell the two words as <fafa> and <foka>.[5]

---

[5] This suggestion only partly agrees with Kioko et al.'s (2012b: 1) suggestion of using <f> for Gĩkũyũ but <bh> for Ekegusii.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to make a case for the harmonization of the orthographies of two Bantu languages, Gĩkũyũ and Ekegusii. It first presented the phonemic and graphemic inventories of the two languages, which showed that all the five vowels found in Ekegusii were also found in Gĩkũyũ, although the latter has an additional two. Regarding the corresponding consonant inventories, these showed both intra- and inter-language discrepancies: for example, the sounds /ɸ/ in Gĩkũyũ and /β/ in Ekegusii, though close to /f/, are orthographically represented by <b>. We have proposed that the grapheme <f> should be used in both languages. As for vowels in Ekegusii, a discrepancy was noted in the word *esese*, which can be pronounced either as /esese/ or /ɛsɛsɛ/, depending on the intended meaning. We have proposed that the grapheme <ĩ> should be adopted to distinguish the two meanings, so that <ĩ> represents /e/ and <e> represents /ɛ/.

At least two benefits would be reaped from harmonising the orthographies of the two languages. First, as documented by Kioko et al. (2012a), a harmonized orthography would make the production of literacy materials more cost-effective because the same materials would not need to be written in two different orthographies. Second, the harmonisation would make the process of translation from one language into the other easier, since the two languages already have very many common lexical items and share a lot culturally. The exchange of written or translated materials across the two languages would end up enriching the lexis of the two languages. As Banda (2003: 46) argues, properly designed orthographies can play a monumental role in promoting the use of African languages in all spheres of life, and, hence, contribute to the socio-economic development of Africans.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, L. E. 1967. *The Phonetic and Tonal Structure of Kikuyu*. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall.

Banda, F. (ed.). 2003. *Language across Borders*. Cape Town: CASAS.

Banda, F. 2008. "Orthography design and harmonization in development in Southern Africa". *Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa*, 12/3: 39-48.

Bosire, M. 1993. A comparative study of Rogoro and Maate dialects of Ekegusii. Unpublished MA Disseration, University of Nairobi.

Cammenga, J. 2002. *The Phonology and Morphology of Ekegusii – A Bantu Language of Kenya*. Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlag.

Ebibilia Enchenu [The Bible in Ekegusii]. 1990. Nairobi: The Bible Society of Kenya.

Guthrie, M. 1971. *Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to the Comparative Linguistics Pre-history of Bantu Languages*, vol. 2. Farnborough: Greyg Press.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2010. *The 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census: Population Distribution by Age, Sex, and Administrative Units, vol. 1 c*. Nairobi: Government Press.

Keragori, A. 1995. *Totems of Ekegusii*. Nairobi: Jacaranda Design Ltd.

Kioko, A. N., M. Njoroge, and P. Kuria, P. 2012a. "Harmonizing the orthography of Gĩkũyũ and Kikamba", in N. Ogechi, J. Oduor & P. Iribemwangi (eds.), *The Harmonization and Standardization of Kenyan Languages*, Cape Town: CASAS, pp. 39-63.

Kioko, A. N., B. Mbori, C. Kitetu, D. Ongarora, F. Buliba, F. Mworia, F. Chai, H. Babusa, H. Mwaliwa, L. Chacha, M. Saidi, M. Njoroge, M. Lonyangapuo, M. Njoka, R. Ndung'u, and N. Ogechi. 2012b. *A Unified Orthography for Bantu Languages of Kenya*. Cape Town: CASAS.

Komenda, S. 2011. An autosegmental analysis of vowel compensatory lengthening in Ekegusii. Unpublished MA thesis. Kenyatta University.

Kuria, P. 2005. An examination of the discrepancies between the graphemic and the phonological structure of Gĩkũyũ. Unpublished MA Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Lewis, M. P. (ed.). 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th ed. Dallas, Texas: SIL International.

Macharia, D. 2011. Phonological variation and change in Gikuyu: A case study of Mathira dialect in Kenya. Unpublished MA Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Maho, J. 2008. *The Bantu Bibliography (African Linguistic Bibliographies)*. Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlag.

Mwihaki A. N. 1998. Loanword nativization: A generative view of the phonological adaptation of Gĩkũyũ loanwords. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Nash, M. C. 2009. Tone in Ekegusii: A description of nominal and verbal tonology. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California.

Ngoko, A. M. 1979. *Ninyanchete Omonwa Oito*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.

Njoroge, M. 2006. Linguistic variation in spoken English as used by teachers in Kenyan primary schools. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Nurse, D. and G. Phillipson. 1980. *The Bantu Languages*. London: Routledge.

Nyakundi, P. M. 2010. Motivation, morphological process in Egesembesa Argot Ekegusii-speaking males of western Kenya. Unpublished MA Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Prah, K. 2003. "Going native: Language of instruction in education, development and African emancipation", in B. Brock-Utne, Z. Desai & M. Qorro (eds.), *Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITSA)*, Dar es Salaam: E & D Limited, pp. 14-34.

Authors' address:

Department of English and Linguistics
Kenyatta University
P.O. Box 43844-00100
Nairobi, Kenya
Contact Email: pwmwangi514@gmail.com