

Heteroglossic approach to Discourse Analysis in Selected Languages spoken in Kenya: A Case of ‘Matatu’ Touts in Nairobi and Kiambu Counties in Kenya.

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Abstract

This paper reflects on duplicity of meanings in a single informal utterance. This refers to the several interpretations that can be adduced to an utterance in the course of informal interaction. This study investigates discourse in which we investigate the multiplicity of meanings embedded in single informal expressions in Kiswahili, Kikuyu, English and Slang as used by public transport *matatu* touts (*minibus touts*). This study employed a qualitative research approach and focused on observation and recording of touts at various public transport bus termini. Our research population was composed of *matatu* touts plying routes in Nairobi and Kiambu counties of Kenya. Informal interactions between touts, drivers and passengers were recorded. We sampled 28 out of 127 expressions that characterize their day-to-day language use. Data coding to facilitate text and content analysis of the expressions used by *matatu* touts. The findings of this study illustrate that despite there being several interpretations to an encoded informal utterance, this does not hinder the receiver from decoding the intended meaning of the speaker. This language is characterized by morphosyntactical principles in various language registers within the confines of the given context. This paper argues that *matatu* touts in Kenya maintain the use of a structurally coded and informal language of communication to facilitate fluid interaction in their line of work.

Keywords: *Heteroglossia, Code-switching, Discourse analysis, Morphosyntax*

Introduction

Language use in discourse is very dynamic due to the linguistic repertoire of individual speakers that can be analyzed in the context of communication. Communicative competence refers to the use of grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations (Hymes D 1972). In informal communication, relations between speakers may influence the use of

structured morphosyntactically correct phrases. As a result, informal communication may bear traits of incomplete grammatical and lexical structures. Heteroglossia highlights the multiple meanings that a simple utterance may bear (Bakhtin 1981). Speakers demonstrate communicative competence in their informal interaction with others by manipulating language structures of the same language in order to transmit information. They adjust their language register to suit the context of communication, ensuring that the information they are conveying is transmitted effectively.

In this study, heteroglossia is exemplified by utterances made by minibus touts in the Kenyan public transport industry. This is affirmed by what is popularly referred to as '*matatu*' culture. The term *matatu* is derived from an interpretation of a lexical term "mang'otore *matatu*" which refers to 'thirty cents', the language of one of the ethnic communities in Kenya, the Agikuyu. This public transport fare was the standard charge for every trip made (Aduwo, 1990) that used to be charged for most intercity and inter-suburban routes within Nairobi in the 1950s.

This terminology *matatu* has evolved and the term *matatu* has metamorphosed into several terms such as 'mathree', 'mat', 'nganya' About 63% of the *matatu* sector had a turnover of Sh400 billion per annum before the pandemic disrupted transport (Mwangi 2021). According to data from the National Transport and Safety Authority, there are over 700 registered *matatu* Saccos in Kenya serving more than 80,000 vehicles (Mwangi 2021). In addition, there is an array of persons, businesses and institutions associated with the *matatu* means of transport, a situation that has led to multiple political, social and economic interests and conflicts in this transport sector (Kyayesi 1999)

This paper is based on a heteroglossic approach to discourse analysis. The study of data consisting of expressions used by *matatu* touts plying routes in Nairobi and Kiambu counties was motivated by the quest to study their use of informal language jargon. These touts have developed a language jargon that is widely used in the public transport business today. It is a language categorized by code-switching, use of slang and a dichotomy between utterances made and actual communication intended. In our theoretical framework, the dependent variable, selected languages, is altered by the independent variable, in this case, the heteroglossic approach to discourse analysis.

The problem

Communication could be described either as interactive and transactional (Osgood 1954) if there is feedback between the sender and the receiver. This theory is based on the premise that there is an exchange of meaning between the participants of the exchange. It follows that in every working environment, there is an established code of communication that is generally accepted and followed. What usually accounts for multiplicity of interpretations when a speaker makes an informal utterance? Other related studies carried focus on macro, meso and micro language relationships (Rassool 2014) or ideological heteroglossia of ideologies of personal identities (Di Carlo et al 2020) whereas our study focuses on divergent meanings attributed to a single expression, given by a single utterer. This paper intends to highlight this language phenomena by exploring discourse between ‘matatu’ touts, drivers in Nairobi and Kiambu counties of Kenya. The gap that this study intends to fill is the discordance between the surface meaning of a phrase and the hidden meaning that has no impact on informal communication between matatu touts, drivers and passengers.

Objectives

Firstly, we shall investigate the characteristics of language use in informal communication amongst matatu touts and passengers or drivers. Secondly, we shall analyse the discordance between the direct expression and the actual intended meaning of the same expression as used by touts while at work. Thirdly, we shall explore the thematic ideas that are observable in the expressions used by the touts, in this case as the utterer, during the informal communication. Lastly, we shall analyse the effect of language choice preference on communication between touts, passengers and drivers.

Literature Review

Heteroglossia, refers to the simultaneous use of different kinds of speech or other signs, the tension between them, and their conflicting relationship within one text, (Bakhtin 1981) In addition, it can be defined as the use of multiple sourced, semiotic (verbal and nonverbal) forms (Jaffe A et al 2014), description of the many-voicedness of language, linguistic variety as an aspect of social conflict, as in tensions between central and marginal uses of the same national language (Bakhtin 1935) In other words, it could refer to a diversity of voices, styles of discourse, or points of view in a literary work and especially a novel, the presence of two or more voices or expressed viewpoints in a text or other artistic work, the fact of there being

two or more different types of language or opinions in a text (Merriam Webster) Heteroglossia can portray the idea that different forms of language can exist within a single cohesive text. (Leverkuhn A 2021) or variations of languages and ideas/perspectives within those languages (Lulos J 2013). This is particularly observable amongst multilingual speakers. Multilingualism refers to one having a broad linguistic repertoire (Fischer et al 20218). In other words, multilingual speakers or polyglots have the linguistic competencies of expressing themselves accurately in several languages.

Discourse analysis is a method for the analysis of connected speech or writing, for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time (Harris 1952). According to (Fillmore) two sentences taken together as a single discourse can have meanings different from each one taken separately. (Brown & Yule 1983; Cook 1989) or the study of the organization of language in larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written text. Discourse analysis, therefore, studies the relationship between language (written, spoken conversation, institutionalized forms of talk) and the contexts in which it is used without necessarily being grammatically correct. We can posit that language is organized in a coherent manner such that it communicates something to its receivers (Kamalu I, Osisanwo. A 2015)

Methodology

Our research involves a linguistic and pragmatic study of expressions in various languages that focussed on their literal as well as intended meaning. We employed a qualitative research approach that focus on getting in depth views of our respondents. Our research population consisted of matatu touts and drivers plying different routes in both Nairobi and County during the months of July and August 2021. Our research tool included observation and audio recording conversations of utterances by touts. These recordings were anonymous and no details of the speakers was captured. These recordings were carried out at designated termini using the researcher's phone. Purposive sampling was carried since this research required the analysis of specific characteristics within the sampled population. Out of a total of 127 expressions 28 were sampled and analyzed. Data analysis involved data coding to identify the various language combinations. To facilitate text and content analysis, we concentrated on the expressions characterized by complex morphosyntactical structures.

3. Findings

We proceeded to divide collected data into seven categories for facilitate data analysis and interpretation. They included the following: *Expressions in Kiswahili*, *Expressions entirely in Kikuyu*, *Expressions bearing code-switching particularities in English/Kiswahili*, *Expressions bearing code-switching particularities in Kikuyu/Kiswahili*, *Expressions bearing code-switching particularities in Kiswahili/Kikuyu*, *Expressions bearing particularities of Slang in Kiswahili/Kiswahili*, and *Expressions bearing particularities in abbreviated expressions in Kikuyu/Kiswahili*

Our sample sizes of 4 expressions per category is presented in the 7 tables below. Each of the table has 4 columns each. In the first column, we consider the expression itself as made by the utterer whereas the second column focuses on the direct or literal meaning of the expression. In regards to the third column, the actual meaning intended by the utterer has been provided. The last column defines the context in which the expression was used by the utterer.

Table 1: Expressions in Kiswahili

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Nyuma wane kama PK | Behind four like PK | The back is designed for four passengers | When passengers seem to be contesting the rule of having 4 passengers in the back seat |
| Hapo nyuma bado kuna nafasi | Behind there, there is still space | We still have room at the back | Idem |
| Moja ijae | One for it to be full | We only need one passenger for us to depart | The tout encouraging passengers to board his vehicle since it's almost fully packed. |
| Pesa mkononi | Money in the hand. | Please you have your fare ready | Conductor announcing that he is about to start collecting bus fare |

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------------------|--|
| Mwisho Runda | Last is Runda | The last stop is Runda | The conductor announcing the terminus of his vehicle |
|--------------|---------------|------------------------|--|

Table 2: Expressions in Kikuyu

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| Me kuo | They are there | The police are in the vicinity | The tout signalling the driver to be keen since a police roadblock may have been mounted |
| Ria Jomo | For Jomo | Fare is 100ksh | The tout recognizes that the passenger speaks his vernacular. He tells him the fare is 100sh (one of Kenyan currency notes that bears the picture of Kenya's founding president) |
| Nituthie na ithaa riu... | Let us go with the time | Let's speed up the pace so as to keep time | The tout advising the tout to drive faster since at that hour they are many passengers on the road who would be waiting for public transportation. |
| Iga hau | Put/place there | Kindly stop and allow the passenger to alight | The tout motioning the driver to stop at the next stage to allow a passenger to alight |
| Ngari iyo ni njega nituthii | That car is nice, let us go | The matatu is carrying full capacity, we may proceed | The tout informing the driver that he doesn't need to stop on the way to carry more |

| | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------------|---|
| | | | passengers |
| Twarithia ringi | Drive again | You could proceed with the trip | The tout alerting driver that a passenger has alighted and they may proceed |

Table 3: Code-switching, English/Swahili

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Tushikanishe hizo stage | Let us connect those stops | Let us have common stops | The tout telling the driver not to make vey many stops, several passengers could alight at common designated stops |
| Hamsini tao beba | Fifty town carry | The fare to town is 50 Ksh | The tout giving double messages in a short 3-worded phrase, namely; the amount and the destination |
| 3.3. Nitakupea change | I will give you change | Kindly be patient, I will give you back your change | A tout trying to tell an impatient passenger that he will give back the bus fare change |
| Sina change | I don't have change | I am unable to give you back your change right now | The tout trying to explain that he is doing his level best to give back bus fare change |
| Alliance mbao | Alliance wood | The fare to the bus stage called Alliance is Ksh 20, equivalent to a 'pound' in the UK in the 1960s. | The tout announcing a very low amount of bus fare to a destination known as 'Alliance' to entice passengers |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------------|
| | | | to board his vehicle |
|--|--|--|----------------------|

Table 4: Code-switching, Kikuyu/English

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Ku madam? | Where madam? | Where are you travelling to madam? | The tout inquiring where a female passenger is travelling to before she boards the vehicle |
| Sister niurathie | Sister are you going? | Would you like to board the vehicle madam? | The tout asking a young female passenger who has not yet boarded the vehicle whether she is ready to. |
| Tutigakue excess kwi na Karao | Let's not carry excess there are police | We shouldn't carry excess passengers since there are police manning the route | The tout dissuading the driver from stopping the vehicle further to carry any more passengers since they would have issues with the police. |
| Wekirire manini kari ma stove | You have put very little like for a stove | You should have put more fuel | A tout taunting a driver whose car has stalled by the roadside |

Table 5: Slang in Kiswahili/Kiswahili

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-----------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Wachilia mahewa | Release the air | Increase music volume | The tout asking the driver to increase the music volume(usually new matatus have very powerful |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | | speakers installed) |
| Shikisha apo huyu ana doh | Drop here, this one has no fare | Kindly stop the vehicle for enable this passenger to alight, since he doesn't have fare | The tout asking the driver to alight so that he can request a passenger without fare to alight |
| Si unijenge do hapo mbele buda | Why don't you build me in front there guy | Kindly sir, at the front, could you pay your fare? | The tout requesting a passenger seated at the front to pay his fare. |
| Muthii andondoka wapi? | The goer is alighting where? | Where is the passenger alighting? | The tout asking matatu stage managers on the ground where a particular passenger is going. |

Table 6: Abbreviated Kiswahili/Kiswahili

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Dere kanyaga gari | Driver, step on the car | Driver, could you drive a little bit faster? | The tout motioning the driver that he needs to increase speed, since there is a competitor matatu behind them |
| Dere beba hawa wawili tukiendanga | Driver carry these two as we go along | Driver, lets pick these two passengers that we continue with the trip | The tout signalling to the driver that there is still room for two more passengers |
| Weka hapo dere | Driver put there | Driver, kindly stop the vehicle for a passenger to alight | The tout signalling the driver that a passenger is about to alight |
| Dere huyu ni wa Gitaru | Driver, this one if for Gitaru | Driver, this passenger usually alights at a stage called Gitaru | The tout enticing the passenger to board the vehicle because he (tout) assumedly knows the passenger |

Table 7: Slang

| Expression | Literal/direct Translation into English | Intended meaning in English | Context |
|----------------|---|--|---|
| 7.1. Tao mbao | Town is wood | The fare to town is 20ksh | The tout announcing the fare to town |
| 7.2.Tao....Tao | Town, town | This vehicle is going to the town centre | The tout calling for passengers going to the town centre |
| Westy | Westlands | Anyone alighting at Westlands? | The conductor asking the passengers before they reach the Westlands stage |
| Ku mzae? | Where old man? | Which is you stop sir? | The tout enquiring where the gentleman wants to alight before he boards the vehicle |

4. Discussion

On the characteristics of language use in informal communication amongst matatu touts and passengers or drivers we observed that the touts have a mastery of different language inclinations, registers and structures that they uses while at work. The informal conversations are usually contextualized and encoded such that the receiver has to decode the message transmitted. The use of language by the touts is usually dictated by age, appearance and attitude of the passengers. The following themes can be observed; *Warmth* (cf 6.4), *Causery* (cf.2.5), *Humour* (cf.1.1), *Trickery* ((cf.1.3), *Assertiveness* (cf. 1.4,1.5, 5.5), *Cunningness* (cf.2.1), *Mother Tongue* (cf.2.2.), *Interrogation* (cf.7.4.)

As concerns the discordance between the direct expression and the actual intended meaning of the same expression as used by touts while at work, we noted that through the observation of literal or direct translation into English we noted that there is symmetry in the

morphological structure of phrases. (cf 1.1, 2.3, 3.1, 4.3, 5.1). We observe the use of the imperative tense whereby the subject is not explicitly mentioned by the speaker.

As regards the thematic ideas that are observable in the expressions used by the touts, in this case as the utterer, during the informal communication we observed that it is extremely rare to find expressions having a Kiswahili/Kikuyu combination. It would be assumed that due to the proximity of these two languages, the first being the official and National language and the latter being an ethnic language of the most populous ethnic community in Kenya that there would not have a strong code-switching affinity.

In so far as the effect of language choice preference on communication between touts, passengers and drivers is concerned, we observed that there is a very strong correlation in language use for all the language combinations that were analyzed. (cf. Table 1 to Table 8) There is consistency in the meaning of the message transmitted from the speaker to the recipient. (cf. 1.5, 2.4, 3.1, 4.1, 5.4, 7.3, 7.4, and 8.4) In each informal communication the context refers to a bus stop, matatu stage or a specific destination that is plied by the matatu in question.

Conclusion

Communication between matatus touts and drivers follows a coded language. This study revealed that the context of communication enables the recipient of the message to encode the meaning that was encoded by the speaker. There is a very strong correlation in language use for all the language combinations that were analysed. Through the observation of literal or direct translation into English we noted that there is symmetry in the morphological structure of phrases. Despite the various interpretations of the encoded message, the recipient was able to decode the message as exemplified in the column displaying the intended meaning in English. Through this study we deduced that the tout's manipulation of language structures in four languages namely; English, Kiswahili, Kikuyu, Slang is indispensable in his dynamic line of work. In light of the findings of this study that covered only two counties of Kenya, namely Nairobi and Kiambu, I would recommend a more comprehensive study covering more counties in Kenya. This would facilitate the acquisition of data that would inform on language usage in the informal transport sector in Kenya. Language analysis could also be carried out on language use in the formal section of selected sectors of the Kenyan economy.

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