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From Stigma to Status
— Sheng and Engsh in Kenya's Linguistic and Literary Space

ABSTRACT

Sheng and Engsh, Kenya's two major hybrid urban languages, are the subject of this wide-ranging enquiry into the sociolinguistic realities of contemporary Kenya and their impact on politics, media, literature, and popular culture. While the precise boundaries of 'Kenyan English' and, even more so, 'Kenyan Swahili' are hard to establish, English and Swahili form the matrix languages of Engsh and Sheng, which the author prefers to call hybrid 'codes' rather than languages. While Engsh is mainly spoken by upwardly mobile middle-class youth in Western Nairobi, Sheng is spoken by a much larger proportion of urban youth and has evolved from a stigmatized 'ghetto' code in eastern Nairobi into a prestigious code that symbolizes ideological affinity, in-group identity, coolness, generational rebellion, linguistic innovation, and rejection of tribal identities. Yet both languages have contributed to the expression of new forms of cultural meaning and to the construction of a linguistic third space between the global, represented by Western images and artefacts, and the local, represented by Kenyan/African symbols and languages. The growing importance of Sheng and Engsh in Kenyan literature and popular culture blurs established boundaries between Swahili and English, creates a space of hybridity in which multiple voices can be heard, and is likely to eventually expand the literary space in East Africa as a whole.

Introduction

KENYA IS A MULTILINGUAL COUNTRY, with English and Kiswahili as official languages enshrined in the Kenyan Constitution (2010). English is the language of academic instruction at all levels, for conducting official business (within the public and private sectors) and legal transactions, and for local, regional, and international dialogue. Both English and Kiswahili are examinable subjects in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) national examinations. Before the year 2010, when Kenya enacted a new Constitution, English was the official language, while Kiswahili was re-

cognized as the country's national language. From an historical perspective, Kiswahili is associated with urbanization, local trade, and blue-collar jobs and is the lingua franca used for inter-ethnic communication by the masses residing in the city of Nairobi. Before 1984, Kiswahili was an optional subject that was taught but not examined as a compulsory subject in the KCPE and KCSE examinations. However, this situation changed in 1985 when Kiswahili was made a compulsory subject examinable in both national primary and secondary school examinations.

I have deliberately chosen to refer to Sheng and Engsh as 'hybrid codes' rather than 'languages' or 'dialects' of English or Kiswahili, because in sociolinguistic studies the term 'code' is a neutral label for any linguistic system of communication.[1] It also implies "a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group."[2] On the other hand, invoking the term 'language' not only has linguistic implications but also has political, cultural, social, and historical connotations, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that, since Engsh and Sheng are fairly recent linguistic innovations, they have not yet achieved the level of stability and widespread acceptance in the Kenyan sociolinguistic space that would accord them the status of distinct languages.

According to Nathan Ogechi, a code can be said to be grammatically stable if it has native speakers and a grammar and lexicon which are fairly consistent and regular.[3] This permits scientific interrogation of their structure. But investigating a grammatically unstable code is challenging because of the fluidity of its lexicon and structure. Languages such as Kiswahili and English which have been in existence for a considerable period of time, though mani-

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[1] Mokaya Bosire, "Hybrid Languages: The Case of Sheng," in *Selected Proceedings of the 36th Annual Conference on African Linguistics: Shifting the Center of Africanism in Language Politics and Economic Globalization*, ed. Olaoba F. Arasanyin & Michael A. Pemberton (Somerville MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2006): 185–93. Bosire refers to Sheng as a "hybrid language" rather than a 'hybrid code'.

[2] Stephen W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication* (Albuquerque NM: Wadsworth, 2002): 278. Also, a code is the particular dialect or language one chooses to use on any occasion, and a system for communication between two or more parties; see Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986): 102.

[3] Nathan Ogechi, "Sheng as a Youth Identity Marker: Reality or Misconception?" in *Culture, Performance and Identity: Paths of Communication in Kenya*, ed. Kimani Njogu (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2008): 75–92.

festing dialectal variation, are stable codes, whereas the hybrid codes of Sheng and Engsh which emerged in the 1980s are still unstable, particularly owing to the dynamism and open-endedness of their lexicon, which permits the mixing of elements from different languages. I concur with Ogechi in his definition of Sheng as "an unstable code whose grammar is largely but not always based on Kiswahili with a highly lexicalized vocabulary that is sourced from various codes blended with several innovations."[4]

I have also avoided referring to Engsh and Sheng as 'dialects' of either English or Kiswahili, because this would assume that the two codes are mutually intelligible to all speakers of English and Kiswahili in Kenya. As I shall demonstrate later in my discussion, this is not always the case, because these hybrid codes are used and understood by specific subcultures in the Kenyan sociolinguistic space. In addition, Sheng has been perceived as a code solely used by urban youth.[5] Githiora articulates this position quite aptly when he describes Sheng thus:

> [...] a mixed language that emerged from the complex multilingual situation of Nairobi city. It is spoken by young people – preadolescents to young adults – and dominates the discourses of primary and secondary school children outside their formal classroom setting. Its syntax is basically Swahili, but through ingenious code-switching, it draws from the phonology, morphology and lexicon of Kenyan languages [...] English is also an important source of many loanwords in Sheng.[6]

I concur with this position insofar as it recognizes Sheng as a youth-form of communication based on Kiswahili with loanwords borrowed from Kenyan ethnic languages and English; Sheng and Engsh certainly draw on the phonology and morphology of Kenyan languages. For instance, both Sheng and Engsh use diminutive and augmentative noun-class prefixes borrowed from

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[4] Ogechi, "Sheng as a Youth Identity Marker," 79.

[5] For a comprehensive discussion of the origin and development of Sheng, see Ken Osinde, "Sheng: An Investigation into the Social and Structural Aspects of an Evolving Language" (BA thesis, University of Nairobi, 1986); Mary Spyropoulos, "Sheng: Some Preliminary Investigations Into A Recently Emerged Nairobi Street Language," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 18 (1987): 125–36; Mazrui, "Slang and Code-Switching: The Case of Sheng in Kenya," *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 42 (*Swahili Forum* II, 1995): 16–79.

[6] Chege Githiora, "Sheng: Peer Language, Swahili Dialect or Emerging Creole?" *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15.2 (2002): 159.

Kenyan Bantu languages for emphasis. Hence, it is quite common to hear ex-
pressions in Engsh such as '*a ka-funny smile*' (a sly little smile), '*a ki-huge
guy*' (a really big guy), or the Sheng phrases '*kale kadem ni kapoa*' (that
dame [young girl/woman] is cute/nice) or '*tule tutoi*' (those little children). In
addition, both Engsh and Sheng show the influence of Dholuo (a Nilotic lan-
guage, one of the major languages in Kenya) through the presence of the 'o-'
prefix or suffix as a syllable reduction and thus simplification process em-
ployed particularly with proper nouns. Thus 'Patrick' becomes '*Pato*',
'cousin' becomes '*cuzo*', 'the United States (USA)' becomes '*Stato*', and so
on.[7] All loanwords and neologisms are then adapted to fit into the morpho-
syntactic and phonological structures of each code. Moreover, although both
codes emerged in the 1980s as cases of "ingenious code-switching" between
Kiswahili, English, and Kenyan ethnic languages, the two codes as used today
have developed fairly stable morpho-syntactic bases. The underlying gram-
matical structure of Sheng is based on a Kiswahili morpho-syntactic and
phonological structure which remains stable and does not readily shift to
adopt the grammatical structure of other languages. Similarly, the grammati-
cal framework of Engsh is relatively stable and based largely on the morpho-
syntax of English. However, both hybrid codes permit the blending of bor-
rowed idioms and vocabulary from other languages in order to accommodate
the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic identities of the mostly urban users of
these codes.

Sociolinguistic Background

The localization of English and Kiswahili to fit into the Kenyan linguistic
space is not a unique phenomenon – on the contrary, speakers of all major
languages in the world often remodel a stable and well-established code to
make it a part of their identity and unique heritage. This has given rise to dif-
ferent varieties of 'Englishes', particularly in former British colonies, which
are indigenized forms of English. These regional dialects differ significantly
from Standard British or American English.[8] Similar to the situation in

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[7] Having been born and bred in Nairobi, I was given the name 'Kalilo', which is a
corruption of 'Lillian'. Note the combination of the Bantu diminutive prefix /ka-/ (as a
term of endearment) and the Dholuo suffix /-o/.

[8] See Braj B. Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models
of Non-Native Englishes* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1986), and "The Speaking Tree: A
Medium of Plural Canons," in *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and*

Kenya, English is used alongside other local languages in these countries to serve an official role. According to Braj Kachru, such language-contact situations will inevitably result in the 'exoglossic' language (English and Kiswahili) being influenced by its linguistic and socio-cultural environment, through nativization or acculturation processes.[9] In such a linguistic situation, this language will be retailored or 'localized' to communicate the socio-cultural experiences immediate to its users. The language then loses its 'foreignness' and thus becomes one of the languages in the repertoire of its multilingual speakers. The end-product would be similar to the situation in Kenya, where forms of spoken and written English exist, which, although mutually intelligible to other English speakers, differ significantly with regard to grammatical, phonological, and semantic features.

   The postulation that there exist homogeneous forms of English or Kiswahili that represent 'Kenyan English' and 'Kenyan Kiswahili' is quite contentious. Many of the investigations that endeavour to present features of 'Kenyan English' largely base their generalizations on the errors made and non-native oral or written forms employed by different categories of Kenyans in their efforts to communicate in English. Hence, what is usually presented as 'Kenyan English' is a collection of inter-language features due to the influence of different ethnic languages, incorrect pronunciation of words, ungrammatical sentences, semantic shifts, and other deviations from Standard British English.[10] Admittedly, there are elements of grammar, neologisms,

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Linguistics (G U R T) 1994: Educational Linguistics, Cross-Cultural Communication, and Global Interdependence, ed. James E. Alatis (Washington D C: Georgetown U P, 1994): 6–22, and "World Englishes and English-Using Communities," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 17 (1997): 66–87; as well as Jane Zuengler, "Kenyan English," in *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, ed. Braj B. Kachru (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982): 112–24.

   [9] Kachru, "The Speaking Tree," 6–22, and "World Englishes and English-Using Communities," 66–87.

   [10] Investigations of aspects of 'Kenyan English' include Zuengler, "Kenyan English," 112–24; Paul Skandera, *Drawing a Map of Africa: Idiom in Kenyan English* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003); Alfred Buregeya, "Grammatical Features of Kenyan English and the Extent of their Acceptability," *English World-Wide* 27.2 (2006): 199–216, and "Aspects of the Vocabulary of Kenyan English: An Overview," *Occasional Papers in Language and Linguistics* 3 (University of Nairobi, 2007): 1–32; Alfred Buregeya & Beatrice Achoki, "Misuse of Prepositions in Kenyan English: Further Evidence of the Difficulty in Choosing the 'Right' Preposition," in *Occasional Papers in*

and idioms that could be generalized as uniquely Kenyan.[11] However, the differences in the way Kenyans use English far outweigh any salient similarities. The multicultural and multilingual reality of Kenya (and, indeed, Nairobi) has given rise to regional idiosyncrasies that influence lexical choice, pronunciation, and grammar to accommodate the local experiences associated with specific ethnic communities. Further, sociolinguistic variables such as age, socio-economic status, and educational background all contribute to which variety of English a Kenyan will eventually develop. The lack of a single homogeneous dialect of English can be attributed to the fact that each ethnic community has its idiosyncratic variety (especially with regard to pronunciation), thereby complicating the task of developing a standard variety of what would correctly be labelled as 'Kenyan English' or 'Kenyan Kiswahili.'

There is no consensus on exactly when Sheng and Engsh emerged, on whether these hybrid codes are distinct from each other, and on whether they even merit study. This is owing to their lexical fluidity and perceived grammatical instability. However, what is generally agreed upon is that some urban form of communication evolved in Nairobi that manifests the morphosyntax of Kiswahili and borrows heavily from English and other languages spoken in Kenya, but with an unstable yet innovative lexicon. Sheng has received more scholarly attention than Engsh because of the erroneous assumption that Engsh is not a distinct code but one that can be subsumed under

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Language and Linguistics 1 (University of Nairobi, 2010): 71–85; Serah Mwangi, *Prepositions in Kenyan English: A Corpus-Based Study in Lexico-Grammatical Variation* (Aachen: Shaker, 2003), and "Prepositions Vanishing in Kenyan English: A Case of Syntactic Simplification in a Variety of East African English," *English Today* 20.1 (2004): 27–32, among others. All of these studies make reference to 'Kenyan English'. My objection to such investigations is that the corpus of data analysed is based on limited samples that are not representative of all speakers of English in Kenya. For instance, Buregeya focuses on "aspects of the vocabulary of Kenyan English," and "the misuse of prepositions in Kenyan English" to demonstrate the deviations in usage from what he refers to as "Standard International English." The generalizations of two of his investigations are based on a sample of forty-seven of his undergraduate students and research in a single rural school in the Gucha district of Kenya.

[11] See Brian Dominic Windsor Hocking, *All What I Was Taught and Other Mistakes: A Handbook of Common Errors in English* (Nairobi: Oxford UP, 1974), and Eunice A. Nyamasyo, "A Corpus Based Study of Grammatical and Lexical Characteristics of the Writing of Kenyan Pre-University Students" (doctoral dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1992).

Sheng. The different schools of thought concerning the origin and development of Sheng and Engsh are discussed extensively by Kaviti[12] and can be summarized as follows:

— Sheng developed during the colonial days in the 1950s among migrant workers who spoke different first languages.[13]
— Sheng was a deviant code invented by criminals and gangs with the intention of using secret codes without anyone (particularly security agents) understanding them.[14]
— Sheng developed in the 1970s in the Eastlands low-income areas and was the innovation of creative children living in low-income neighbourhoods who needed to converse without their parents understanding them. Conversely, Engsh developed in the Westlands area among youth living in affluent areas.[15]
— Sheng is the signature peer language or idiom for urban youth, denoting in-group identity, generational rebellion, and rejection of tribal identity. It defines the identity of young people who want to share their secrets to the exclusion of adults.[16]

   The position held in this discussion is that Engsh and Sheng differ with regard to which matrix language forms the underlying morpho-syntactic and phonological framework of the code. Kiswahili forms the matrix language for Sheng, whereas Engsh has English as its matrix language. Hence, they are distinct hybrid codes if we use their grammatical (and to some extent, phonological) framework as a basis for analysis. The reason why they are erroneously perceived to be the same mixed code is that Engsh and Sheng share

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   [12] See Lillian Kaviti, "The Evolution of Urban Hybrid Languages in Kenya," in *New Approaches to the Study of Linguistic Variability*, ed. Markus Bieswanger & Amei Koll–Stobbe (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013): 43–63.

   [13] See Spyropoulos, "Sheng," 125–36.

   [14] See Mazrui, "Slang and Code-Switching," 168–79.

   [15] See Mohammed Abdulaziz & Ken Osinde, "Sheng and English: Development of Mixed Codes among the Urban Youth in Kenya," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 125 (1997): 45–63, and Osinde, "Sheng: An Investigation into the Social and Structural Aspects of an Evolving Language."

   [16] See Fredrick Iraki, "Cognitive Efficiency: The Sheng Phenomenon in Kenya," *Pragmatics* 14.1 (2009): 55–69, and Githiora, "Sheng: Peer Language, Swahili Dialect or Emerging Creole?" 159–81.

numerous lexical similarities and frequently borrow from each other. More-over, as shall be explained later in my discussion, speakers of Engsh tend to be competent in Sheng as well – hence the blurring of linguistic boundaries between the two codes. If, indeed, we were to refer to them as 'varieties' of any language, then Engsh would be classified as one of the varieties of English as used in Kenya, while Sheng would be a variety of 'Kiswahili cha Bara (cha Kenya)' ([Kenyan] Mainland Kiswahili). The following points summarize the distinction between Engsh and Sheng.[17]

i. *Spread and growth of hybrid codes*

Whereas Sheng developed in the low-income Eastlands neighbourhood of Nairobi, Engsh emerged on the opposite side of the city in the affluent, up-market Westlands suburbs. Socio-economic factors decide whether urban dwellers will be competent in Engsh or in Sheng, including the neighbour-hood where they spent their formative years, their educational background, and the degree of exposure to near-native forms of Kiswahili or English. This will subsequently determine which of the hybrid codes an urban youth will eventually acquire. For reasons that will be highlighted later, Sheng has grad-ually spread to the rest of Nairobi and its environs as well as to the rural areas as a status youth language. The use of Sheng is more prevalent than Engsh, primarily because over eighty percent of the residents living in Nairobi speak Kiswahili as the primary lingua franca to communicate with their fellow residents from other ethnic communities. Most residents of Nairobi have com-petence (to varying degrees) in at least two languages, with one of these being Kiswahili.

ii. *Grammatical distinctions between Sheng and Engsh*

The vocabulary of Sheng is primarily based on the Kiswahili lexicon and grammar with loanwords from English, Engsh, and four major Kenyan ethnic languages: namely, Gĩkũyũ, Dholuo, Luhya, and Kamba. For its part, Engsh is largely based on English grammar with borrowed expressions from Ameri-can (and, to some extent, British) slang picked up from the Western entertain-ment industry, including (but not limited to) American hip-hop, Jamaican reggae, and other genres of Western popular culture as mediated through print

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[17] For a comprehensive discussion of the linguistic similarities and differences between Sheng and Engsh, see Kaviti, "The Evolution of Urban Hybrid Languages in Kenya," 43–63.

and electronic media. The loanwords in Sheng and Engsh then undergo various nativization processes to fit into their respective morpho-syntactic and phonological structures. Such processes include syllable reduction or clipping, affixation, semantic shift, coinages and neologisms, and peculiar idiomatic expressions.

iii. *Current status of Sheng and Engsh*

Sheng has evolved to become a status code used by children, urban and rural youth, and adults who were born and bred in Nairobi from the 1960s. Although Engsh is less wide-spread than Sheng, speakers of Sheng frequently use Engsh expressions, thereby blurring the linguistic boundaries between the two hybrid codes. Further, middle-class, Engsh-speaking youth have of necessity had to acquire Sheng in solidarity or to identify with the 'ghetto' subculture in the Eastlands, which is the cradle of Kenyan hip-hop music, the *matatu* (minibus) subculture, and other local innovations that appeal to youth. Since Kiswahili (the matrix language for Sheng) was also made an examinable subject in both primary and secondary national examinations, the Engsh in-group was forced to develop competence in the language. Hence, from a stigmatized ghetto code, Sheng gradually evolved into a prestigious code that symbolizes ideological affinity, in-group identity, coolness, generational rebellion, linguistic innovation, and rejection of tribal identity.[18] Interestingly, there was no reciprocal move by Eastlands youth to acquire Engsh (in addition to their competence in Sheng), because this would necessitate environmental exposure to native or near-native forms of English, which the Eastlands youth lack. It seems to be much easier for middle-class Engsh-speaking youth to bridge the in-group divide to acquire Sheng than it is for Sheng youth to acquire Engsh.[19]

The spread of Sheng has broken down socio-economic and linguistic barriers dividing youth bred in the privileged Westlands and the low-income Eastlands areas; Sheng has crossed the urban–rural youth divide and (to some extent), the generational divide as well. Today, rural youth strive to speak Sheng because it identifies them as part of the prestigious urban culture. Moreover, both hybrid codes have been popularized through the platform of

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[18] See Iraki, "Cognitive Efficiency," 55–69.

[19] See below for theoretical insights into why speakers of Sheng do not necessarily speak Engsh as well.

marketing and advertising language, political discourse, popular literature, and the local entertainment industry through FM radio stations and television.

Sheng has received negative attention from educationists and 'cultural gate-keepers' who perceive it to be a deviant language and a threat to educational performance.[20] This is largely due to the fact that its use is confined to an in-group youth population to the exclusion of older generations. However, the rise of hybrid codes, particularly in Nairobi, cannot be blamed for the falling standards of language performance, because the standards remain low even in regions such as the north-eastern and coastal parts of Kenya, where Sheng and Engsh are not commonly used.[21] The internal norms of correctness and appropriateness taught in Kenyan institutions of learning with reference to pronunciation, grammar, or semantics are theoretically meant to mirror the norms of British Standard. However, Kenyan English-language teachers, although professionally trained, were themselves taught by non-native speakers of English who did not always have the capacity to provide an accurate model of the British native-speaker standard. According to Kioko and Muthwii, there is "a lack of concordance between practice and attitudes towards English […] and the British norm and its demands that has had undesirable consequences on the use of English in Kenya."[22] This explains why Kenyan forms of English (both spoken and written) display a peculiar mix of interference from various ethnic languages and from Kiswahili as well. The effective learning of English and Kiswahili is a challenge because of the limited exposure that students have to near-native speaker models and to the appropriate norms of overall communicative competence in each of these languages.

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[20] See Clara Momanyi, "The Effects of 'Sheng' in the Teaching of Kiswahili in Kenyan Schools," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 2.8 (March 2009): 127–38, for a discussion of the effects of Sheng on academic performance of Kiswahili in Kenyan schools.

[21] Kiswahili is acquired and used as a native (first) language in the coastal region of Kenya. However, the performance of Kiswahili as an examinable subject in this region remains dismally low.

[22] Angelina Kioko & Margaret Muthwii, "The Demands of a Changing Society: English in Education in Kenya Today," *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 14.3 (2001): 204.

Alternative Third Spaces: Sheng and Engsh
in Politics, the Mass Media, and Music

Hybridity and the 'third space' propounded by Bhabha[23] recognize that, in a multicultural setting, a situation of linguistic and cultural negotiations and compromise is inevitable. This is the 'third space' where traditional practices are challenged, rearticulated, and negotiated. The theoretical concepts of hybridity and the third space provide an explanation for the emergence of Engsh and Sheng as a reaction to the multilingual and multicultural context in which urban youth in Nairobi are immersed. Sheng and Engsh represent a hybrid youth ideology and distinct youth identity by maintaining in-group belonging and erasing ethnic allegiances among youth. Their versatility in incorporating new words and coinages (including American and British slang) is a reflection of how aspects of modernity, as represented by Western culture, can be adapted to fit the local Kenyan situation. This is symbolic of the third space that enables new linguistic voices and new forms of cultural meaning. Sheng and Engsh give youth the tools to construct a linguistic third space between the global (Western culture) and the local, represented by the respective ethnic identities of youth. The popularity of Sheng among youth makes it an ideal vehicle with which politicians, advertisers, music artists, the print and electronic media, and publishers attempt to enter into dialogue and to 'connect' with a youthful audience.

i. *Sheng and Engsh in political discourse*

The integration of Sheng in Kenyan political discourse was motivated by the need to appeal to the youth who form a significant part of the Kenyan electorate. Politicians realized that in order to woo the masses and gain grassroot support, particularly in the capital city of Nairobi, they had to make an effort to identify with the masses by throwing in a few Sheng expressions to capture the crucial youth vote. Recognition of Sheng and Engsh as powerful symbols of Kenyan youth identity occurred during the 2002 and 2012 general-election campaigns. In 2002, the campaign slogan of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) party was 'We are unbwogable!' This rallying call was borrowed from the hip-hop rap titled 'I am unbwogable' by the duo GidiGidi, MajiMaji. The word '*unbwogable*' is an Engsh coinage borrowed from the Dholuo word *bwogo* 'to be shaken or scared'. The English negative prefix 'un-' and the

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[23] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

suffix '-able' are then affixed to the loanword to derive the Engsh word '*un-bwogable*', which in the new context meant 'We are unshakable/immovable'.

The effort to use Sheng and Engsh to appeal to youth was replicated during the 2012 general-election campaigns, when Deputy President-Elect William Ruto referred to himself and President-Elect Uhuru Kenyatta as '*Sisi ni mahustler*' (we are hustlers). The term 'hustler' is derived from the American English expression 'to hustle' which means 'to be street-smart', and to do whatever it takes to earn a living. This obviously resonated well particularly with economically challenged youth in the Eastlands ghettos, for whom life is a daily struggle to make ends meet. During the same election period, Rachel Shebesh, the elected women's representative for Nairobi, campaigned under the label '*Manzi wa Nairobi*' (girl brought up in Nairobi). The use of the Sheng word *manzi* as opposed to conventional Kiswahili references such as *mama* (mother) or *mwanamke* (woman) was a deliberate effort to identify with urban youth by showing that she had a common heritage with them. Similarly, Nairobi's first elected senator in 2012 adopted the name '*Sonko*', which in Sheng means 'a rich person'. This endeared him to Eastlands youth, who, among other things, were wooed by his financial empowerment. Not surprisingly, he was elected with an overwhelming majority of votes, particularly from the Eastlands.

ii. *Sheng and Engsh in the third space of the mass media*

Kenyan media recognize the impact of Sheng and Engsh as a core component of urban youth identity. Both the print and the electronic media in Kenya recognize that a sizable part of the population uses Sheng and Engsh in their day-to-day interactions. In order to cater to this crucial segment, all the leading FM stations have prime-time talkshow hosts who regularly code-mix English with Engsh and Kiswahili with Sheng. Two stations, Ghetto FM and HOT FM, use Sheng quite liberally. The other stations communicate primarily in English or Kiswahili, but with the hosts in prime-time entertainment slots interjecting elements from Sheng and Engsh.

The print media have also recognized the need to appeal to the urban youth reading public through feature articles and pullout magazines that liberally use Sheng and Engsh. For instance, the *Saturday Nation* distributes the monthly *Mashujaaz* ('Heroes') magazine, which is an animated series purely in a mixture of Sheng and Engsh codes. The *Standard on Friday* has the 'Pulse' pullout magazine which has features in Engsh. The *Nairobian* is a weekly newspaper that sets aside a page for purely Sheng discourse. Other

publications include the *Insyder*, a monthly magazine which caters exclusive-ly to a youthful Engsh and Sheng reading public. The leading newspapers al-locate space once a week to entertainment features targeting the youth audi-ence and dealing with issues that they will readily identify with. Images in the print and electronic media, internet, music, and mobile telephone have inte-grated urban youth codes into popular culture, on both the local and the inter-national level, thereby placing popular culture at the centre of identity-formation. This links urban youth in Kenya with youth cultures in the West. The *Nairobian* is a weekly newspaper that features an entertainment page titled: 'Story za Mtaa by Mbusii' (stories of the street by Mbusii) and 'Hood Vibe by King Kafu' (talk of the neighbourhood by King Kafu). The dominant code is Sheng, with code-mixed elements from English and Engsh. Consider the excerpts overleaf from the *Nairobian* (and note the underlined code-mixed expressions from English and Engsh).[24]

The issues addressed in these feature articles, such as fires in residential areas, the careless driving habits of *matatu* drivers, and social ills such as drunkenness, are familiar in both the Engsh and the Sheng subcultures. The media have demonstrated that the hybrid codes can be used as a channel of dialogue to educate and sensitize youth on issues of relevance to their lives such as HIV/AIDS prevention, early pregnancies, corruption, and patriotism.

Big up fire fighters kwa *kusave* Avenue Park	*Big up [congratulations] fire-fighters for saving* Avenue Park
Big up fire brigade waliozima nare *Avenue Park estate* huko pipeline. Wali *maintain* vipoa na hakuna raiya alipata *injury*. *Big up* sana wazito.	*Big up to the fire brigade* who put out the fire at *Avenue Park estate* at the *pipeline*. They *maintained* [the situation] well and no civilian sustained an *injury*. *Big up* guys.
Matotoise kulewa mchana haileti bidii	*Tortoises* getting drunk in the day doesn't bring effort [add value]
Sisemi eti ulevi ya wanaume ni poa mchana. *And I can't encourage anyone* kulewa ovyo. Lakini kulewa mchana zi, kazi kwanza, ulevi baadaye....	I'm not saying that the drunkenness of men is good in the day. *And I can't encourage anyone* to get drunk any-how. But getting drunk in the day is absolutely wrong; work first, drunken-ness afterwards….

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[24] Mbusii, "Story za Mtaa," *The Nairobian* (18–24 October 2013): 37.

Na wanawake mkilewa, lewa *vi decent*.

And women, when you do get drunk, do it *in a decent way*.

Nyahunyo Nyahunyahu

Whip Whipped

Unajua tunaambiwangwa *that careless driving is dangerous*. Lakini kuna hawa *madere*, especially *madere* wa mathree. Wanaendesha gari *design* ingine mbaya. Na si madere wa mathree tu, *ma personal na ma taxi*.

You know we keep on being told that *careless driving is dangerous*. But there are those *drivers*, especially *drivers* of mathrees [public transport minibuses]. They drive their vehicles in a bad way. It's not only mathree drivers alone, [drivers] of *personal cars and taxis* as well [drive badly].

iii. *Sheng and Engsh in Kenyan hip-hop music*

African-American hip-hop/rap culture has had a significant influence in shaping youth identity with regard to slang expressions, fashion, music, and other symbols of 'bling-bling' culture.[25] Ever since the 1990s, East African hip-hop music has been a platform for the spread of Sheng and Engsh. Most of the Kenyan hip-hop artists were born and raised in Nairobi's Eastlands (the cradle of Sheng) and through their rap lyrics have made a significant contribution to the dynamism of Sheng vocabulary. The creativity of these artists engages them in forming a link between the international, regional, and local spaces through the platforms of music, fashion, speech style, and overall youth identity. By adapting Sheng to hip-hop and rap music and culture, Kenyan urban youth have subverted the West as the source of modernity. Although hip-hop and rap music and culture are traceable to the African American community, Kenyan artists have incorporated Sheng as the vehicle of the messages embedded in the music. A significant proportion of Sheng and Engsh idioms have been coined and popularized by Kenyan music artists who include them in their lyrics. Kenyan hip-hop is known as '*Genge*', which is either derived from the Kiswahili word '*genge*' with the connotations of 'a group of thugs' or is a corruption of the English word 'gang' (a group of people). The lyrics of *Genge* music are typically a mixture of Kiswahili and Sheng, with loanwords from English and Engsh. The pioneers of *Genge* hip-hop started off under the umbrella of Calif Records on the 'California' estate, located in the heart of Eastlands.[26]

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[25] 'Bling-bling' (or 'bling') is American slang referring to the hip-hop culture of elaborate jewellery and other ostentatious displays of wealth and celebrity status.

[26] Tanzania also has its hip-hop variety known as '*Bongo Fleva*', a corruption of the

I will draw examples from the Sheng lyrics of an Eastlands-based group called Ukoo Flani Mau Mau, which is an acronym for the phrase '*Upendo Kote Olewenu Ombeni Funzo La Aliyetuumba Njia Iwepo*' (love everywhere all who seek teachings of the creator; there is a way). The group consists of twenty-four hip-hop artists who, as the Kiswahili word '*ukoo*' (clan) suggests, view themselves as a clan of the Mau Mau. This was a heterogeneous group of Kenyan fighters who resisted British colonial rule from 1952 to 1960. Their uprising was a reaction to the violent repression and economic depriva-tion that Kenyans experienced during their colonial history. Today, the Mau Mau are recognized as revolutionaries who fought patriotically for Kenya's independence. As a 'clan' of the Mau Mau, Ukoo Flani believes they have a social responsibility towards youth. Using a Sheng hip-hop platform, they communicate socio-political realities to society; hence, their lyrics often highlight the harsh conditions of life in the Eastlands ghettos and the need for a youth revolution. In the following, I present the lyrics of the Sheng rap song "Subira" by Ukoo Flani, which describes the experiences and challenges of living in the Eastlands (the borrowed English expressions are italicized):

"Subira"[27]	Patience
Ni *step by step* haijalishi mguu gani	It's *step by step*, it doesn't matter which leg
Uli*step* chini ulipotoka kitandani	You *stepped* with when you got out of bed
Ghetto maisha kukaza	In the *ghetto*, life is a struggle
Si kitu kwetu sii ma *brother*	It's nothing to us because we are *brothers*
Tunatangaza ufalme	We announce rulership / we reign
Wa-sanaa za kuungaza	Artists of creativity
Kwanza kabisa	The first thing
Kufufua ma *soldier* wote wale kufaa vitani.	Is to bring back to life all the *soldiers* who are suitable in this fight.

What is remarkable here is the reference to the struggles of ghetto life, aware-ness of the shift in status, where Eastlands Sheng youth have become pace-setters for identity, and the appeal for group solidarity in the struggle for

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phrase 'bongo flavour', where 'bongo' is derived from the Kiswahili word '*ubongo*' ('brain'). The code used in this variety of hip-hop is based on the Tanzanian urban argot known as *Kiswahili cha Mitaani*, which, as mediated through *Bongo Fleva*, is the modern-day version of oral storytelling. Both *Genge* and *Bongo Fleva* developed as local versions of American hip-hop, influenced by American hip-hop, Jamaican reg-gae, Afrobeat, and traditional African rhythms.

  [27] Ukoo Flani MauMau, "Subira," *Kwani?* 4 (2007): 127.

broader social recognition. Sheng has become the hip-hop channel for negotiating protean youth identity. Another Sheng hip-hop artist, MC KAH, emphasizes in his rap "Ukombozi wa Ki Akili – Part 1–2" (liberation of the
mind) the importance of youth empowerment and liberation. Sheng is used as
the code through which socio-political ills are addressed (note, once again, the
italicized code-mixed elements from English and Engsh):

"Ukombozi wa Ki Akili: Part 2"[28]	Liberation of the Mind
Wazaliwa mtaa, *nightmare* na ka ni ndoto	Those born in the ghetto [Eastlands], *nightmare* looks like a dream
Niza vile watawai pata *goldmines*	Of how they will get *goldmines* [become rich]
Kabla wa *grow old*, *vanity souls* za vijana kuwa *sold,*	Before they *grow old*, their *vanity souls* have been *sold* off,
Wakuu wa Africa kuvunjika guu,	When those in power in Africa break a leg [unable to govern]
Casualty majuto mjukuu, *political* Africa kuruka	The *casualties* are the future generations, the *politics* in Africa avoid responsibility,
Kwa *election* bila *liberation*,	At an *election* without *liberation*,
Ma *squatter* wana *vote*,	*Squatters* [the poor] *vote*,
Ma *squatter* wanaendelea ku *squat*…	The *squatters* continue to *squat* [be poor]...

The lyrics demonstrate awareness on the part of youth of the vast gap between
those in power and those they govern. There is recognition that, despite the
efforts of ordinary citizens to exercise their democratic rights through the
vote, nothing ever changes; they keep getting poorer and to suffer. The youth
are described as a vulnerable group who, in their eagerness to succeed economically in life, fall easy prey to politicians who use them to further their tyranny.

Sheng and Engsh in the Third Space of Literature

In this section, my focus of analysis is the *Kwani?* literary journal series, and
its bold step of publishing creative works crafted in Engsh and Sheng. *Kwani?*
was founded in 2002 by Binyavanga Wainaina with the aim of providing a
literary forum that allows the use of Sheng and Engsh in different genres of
literature. It appeals to youth by making literature 'young' and comparable to
other youth identity markers such as hip-hop music and fashion. *Kwani?* emphasizes the social and cultural significance of literary texts as tools to illuminate the everyday experiences and challenges of Kenyans. The journal has
broadened the space of Kenyan popular literature by positioning itself in a

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[28] MC KAH, "Ukombozi wa Ki Akili – Part 2," *Kwani?* 3 (2003): 168.

'third space' that provides a forum for issues of relevance to youthful, urban audiences. The reading public typically has an urban background and a good command of English and Kiswahili as mediated through the Kenyan educational system and environmental exposure.

There are striking differences in Engsh and Sheng texts in the context, characters, and themes that emerge from the discourse, as seen from the list of Sheng and Engsh texts analysed for this discussion:

Genre	Sheng	Engsh
Vignettes, blogs and short stories in *Kwani?*	"Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!" by Mwas Mahugu[29]	"Nyof Nyof" by Jambazi Fulani[30]
	"Captured" by Mwas Mahugu[31]	"Nai Reloaded" by Jambazi Fulani[32]
		"Vain Jango Letter" by Vain Jango[33]
		"Reply to Vain Jango Letter" by Binyavanga Wainaina & Muthoni Garland[34]
		"Nairobi back in the days: Aggression" by Memoire[35]
Genge hip-hop lyrics in *Kwani?*	"Ukombozi wa Ki Akili" by M C K A H[36]	
	"Subira" by Ukoo Flani MauMau[37]	
	"Malaya Ama Mpenzi, Bado Ni Hip-hop" by La Balaa[38]	
Entertainment features and commentaries	"Story za Mtaa" by Mbusii[39] "Hood Vibe" by King Kafu[40]	"Metallica Smitta – Thru the Never" by Tony Mochma[41]

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[29] Mwas Mahugu, "Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!" *Kwani?* 5 (2008): 378.

[30] Jambazi Fulani, "Nyof Nyof," *Kwani?* 2 (2004): 56–58.

[31] Mwas Mahugu, "Captured," *Kwani?* 3 (2006): 379–83.

[32] Jambazi Fulani, "Nairobi Reloaded," *Kwani?* 2 (2004): 127–29.

[33] Vain Jango, "Vain Jango Letter," *Kwani?* 1 (2003): 103–107.

[34] Binyavanga Wainaina & Muthoni Garland, "Reply to Vain Jango Letter," *Kwani?* 1 (2003): 108–12

[35] Memoire, "Nairobi Back in the Days: Aggression," *Kwani?* 4 (2007): 37–38.

[36] M C K A H, "Ukombozi wa Ki Akili – Part 2," 168.

[37] Ukoo Flani Mau Mau, "Subira," 127.

[38] La Balaa, "Malaya Ama Mpenzi, Bado Ni Hip-hop," *Kwani?* 4 (2007): 128.

[39] Mbusii, "Story za Mtaa," 37.

[40] King Kafu, "Hood Vibe," *The Nairobian* (18–24 October 2013): 37.

This is representative of the socio-economic divide between users of Sheng and Engsh, who, though sharing common experiences by virtue of being city dwellers, still live separate identities in different subcultures. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the characters reveals startling differences. The characters in Engsh vignettes, blogs, and entertainment features are depicted as economically empowered, upwardly mobile, and able to shift, negotiate, or compromise their Engsh identities when there is a need to show solidarity with the Eastlands Sheng speakers. Moreover, they are upwardly mobile geographically, socially, and culturally, which allows them to access both the restricted codes (Sheng and Engsh) and the elaborated codes (English and Kiswahili).

i. *Shared experiences in Sheng and Engsh literary texts*

Both Engsh and Sheng subcultures are forced to coexist and communicate with each other, thus reflecting a shared experience. The dominant themes in the *Kwani?* vignettes, short stories, hip-hop lyrics, and entertainment features reflect issues that both Engsh and Sheng speakers would relate to, including the *matatu*/*mathree* (public transport minibus) culture, social ills such as drunkenness, fires on residential estates, and the like. Consider the Sheng text "Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!," where the persona describes a scene at a public transport station during the rush hour (the italicized words highlight borrowings from English or Engsh):

"Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!"[42]	That is the News!
Matatu zimejaa ma-*graffiti all over*, *screeching* za *tyres*, hizi ndai zikipiga *abrupt breaks*, karibu zigongane, *horns* za kichizi, ngoma za *hip-hop* na *Ragga* ziki-*blast* kutoka kwa ma-*woofer*.	The *matatu*s [public minibuses] are *full of graffiti all over*, *the screeching of tyres*, feet stepping *abruptly on the breaks*, almost crashing into each other, crazy *horns* [hooting], *hip-hop* and *reggae* music blasting from the *woofers*.
"beba beba *fifty fifty* … Huruma!"	"carry carry [for] *fifty fifty* [shillings] ... Huruma!"
"Wawili wawili *forty* Kariobangi mwisho …!	"Two two [for] *forty* [shillings] last stop is Kariobangi ...!

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[41] Tony Mochama, "Metallica Smitta – Thru the Never," *The Standard – Pulse Magazine* (18 October 2013): 7.

[42] Mwas Mahugu, "Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!," 378.

"Eastleigh Eastleigh beba …!
"*Fifty fifty*-Dandora mwisho ..."

Number 32-Dandora, 9-Eastleigh, 14-Huruma, zilikua zinasomeka kutoka kwa ka-*small board*, ma-*concordi* walikua wameshikilia huku wakistretch *vocals* zao *as loud as possible*. Ma-shory na *hipsters*, wengine *tight jeans* zikiwa zina pee mahagaa zao *definition* ya *true African woman*, maboi na ma *hoods*, na pia rai ya kawaida wale wa mucatha, na *clads* zao za *exhibitions*, na wengine *cladi fani fani* kutoka gikomba, walikua wanadandia hizi mat *speedie speedie* nika wana *escape hell* waki *climb* Nganya za ku-*go Heaven*.

"Eastleigh Eastleigh carry ...!
"*Fifty fifty*-Dandora last stop ..."

Number 32-Dandora, 9-Eastleigh, 14-Huruma, the numbers could all be read from *a small board*, *the concords* [drivers] were at work *stretching their vocals* [playing music] *as loud as possible*. The girls with *hipsters* [tight-fitting trousers], others in *tight jeans* that revealed their bottoms, the *definition* of a *true African woman*, the boys with *hoods*, and ordinary folk, the ones from Mucatha [a low-income location], with their *clad* [clothes] from *exhibitions*, and others with *funny* [weird/cheap] Gikomba [flea market, secondhand clothes] all were *speedily* jumping on these *matatu*s as if they were *escaping hell* as they *climb* the stairs to *go* to *Heaven*.

The scene just described is typical of the *matatu* culture and the daily hustle and bustle that city dwellers experience as they struggle to get means of transport during the rush-hour. Despite differences in geographical and socio-economic background, there is a shared sense of identity and belonging that intricately links the Engsh and Sheng subcultures to modernity and urban life. The *matatu*/*mathree* drivers are notorious for breaking traffic rules, breaking the speed-limit, playing loud music, and other deviant forms of behaviour. It is important to note that Sheng is the lingua franca within the *matatu* subculture, from which a sizable number of coinages have emerged. Both Engsh- and Sheng-speaking youth can easily relate to boarding *matatus* as the most common means of transport in the city. Interestingly, in the text just quoted from "Habari Ndiyo Hiyo!" all the *matatus* are Eastlands-bound, which establishes an intimate connection between the Sheng in-group and the *matatu* subculture.

ii. *The linguistic and literary space of the Sheng subculture*

The 'ghetto' with all its hardships forms the backdrop of all the Sheng texts examined for purposes of this discussion. In each genre (hip-hop/rap, short stories, vignettes, and feature articles), the focus is on some kind of struggle,

social ill, or deviant form of behaviour such as muggings in broad daylight, crime and shootings, poverty, drug-peddling, people struggling to get public transport, or funeral meetings as a result of criminals being gunned down. Consider the following text (overleaf) from "Captured," which describes a typical day in the ghetto (the borrowed forms from English are italicized). The story begins with a mugging scene which is the norm in the Eastlands ghetto. A young man, who is new to this neighbourhood (and judging by his attire, is most likely from the Western part of the city), arrives, dressed in new and expensive Adidas designer sports shoes and shirt. The Sheng-speaking persona 'Gas', a ghetto resident, stumbles upon the scene where the muggers (who are known to him) address him by name and tell him they are at 'work'. There is a wide socio-economic gap between the young man being mugged and his muggers, symbolic of the Eastern and Western divide. The hardships of 'ghetto' life are evident from the beginning when the muggers ask their victim: "*Unadhani si humanga mchana*?" ("Do you think we eat in the day?").

"Captured"[43]	Captured
'Unadhani sihumanga mchana?' Nilisikia jamaa anabonga vinoma nikajua hata kabla sija piga hiyo *kona* kuwa kuna msee anapigwa ngeta. Lakini sikugwaya, kupiga *kona* nika*cheki* Manu na Don wamekamata kamsee juu ya hewa, huku Kama antoa huyo msee ndula za nguvu na tena Adidas jo mpya! *Top* pia mpya, ah!	"Do you think we eat in the day?" I heard someone talking badly and I knew even before turning the *corner* that someone was being mugged. I didn't panic and as I turned the *corner*, I *checked* [saw] Manu and Don grabbing a man up into the air, as Kamau removed the man's expensive new shoes, Adidas at that! He also had a new *top*, ah!
'Niaje Gas!' Manu alini*call*. 'Poa jo!' Nilisema na kupita *spidi*.	"Hi Gas!" Manu *called* to me. "I'm alright, man!" I said as I *speedily* [quickly] passed by.
'Tuko *works*, jo, haka kamwere wacha tukavutishe *aerial*!'	"We are at *work*, man, this little guy, we'll pull up his *aerial*! [strip him clean and teach him a lesson!]"
Huyo jamaa hata yeye alikuwa fala. Lazima si msee wa kubangaiza *base*. Hakuelewa *code* ya mtaa; angejua angechapailia masaunya angalau. *Base*	That guy was foolish. Surely he couldn't be from the *base* [ghetto]. He didn't understand the *code* [rules] of living here; if he had known he

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⁴³ Mwas Mahugu, "Captured," 378.

huwezi kuwa na ndula mpya hivyo, *no wonder* kalivamiwa.

wouldn't have worn such clothes. At the *base* [ghetto], it's impossible for one to have new shoes, *no wonder* he got mugged.

In the 'ghetto,' getting a meal is a hustle and overwhelming poverty forces the youth to engage in criminal activities such as mugging innocent victims to survive.

The same 'ghetto' context of crime, desperation, and social ills is seen in the text "*Madem wacheni kuchoma picha*" (girls, stop burning pictures) from Hood Vibe by King Kafu (notice the underlined loanwords from English):

"*Madem* wacheni kuchoma *picha*"[44]	Ladies [*madames*/young women], stop burning *pictures*
Kuna *madem* wanapenda sana kula vako na wagondi. Kama wewe si *thief*, hataki vako yako. Na hawa *madem*, zao ni kuomba *uta die* when ndio achukue mali yako. Kwa matanga unashangaa analia vi*serious*. Hata mwezi haijaisha ashachukua *beshte* ya marehemu wanatimbua mali ya *the late*.	There are *ladies* [*girls*] who like keeping company with thieves. If you are not a *thief*, she doesn't want your company. And these *ladies* [*girls*] keep on praying that *you will die* so that they can take your property. During funeral arrangement meetings you are surprised how *seriously* she is crying. No sooner is a month over than she has already taken the *best friend* of the deceased and together they use the property of *the late* [deceased].
Unapata Eastlando *madem* wa 18*yrs* ni ma *widow* na alijua ana *date* mgondi na sasa amewachiwa watoi watatu. Ukienda Eastlando matanga ni *mob* kuliko ma *wedo*. Wengi wao wame *die* kupitia *ndeng'aa*. Huko hawaendagi ma *wedo*, zao ni ku*dance* kwa matanga.	In Eastlands, *ladies* [*young women*] of eighteen *years* are *widows*, yet she knew she was *dating* a thief and now she has been left with three children. If you go to Eastlands, the funerals are more than the *weddings*. Many of them have *died* by the *gun*. There [Eastlands], they don't go to *weddings*, their lot is to *dance* at funerals.
Beshte ya marehemu aki *die*, dem bado anasakanya mwingine Mgondi.	When the *best friend* of the deceased *dies*, the girl still gets another thug.

The text describes the reality of life in the Eastlands, where young women marry criminals but are soon left widowed after their husbands are gunned

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⁴⁴ King Kafu, "Hood Vibe," 37.

down. Funerals are commonplace here; the young widows quickly move on with friends of their dead husbands, and the cycle continues. This seems to be an acceptable part and parcel of life and a reflection of the level of social decay in the 'ghetto'. The description of crime in various forms is a common theme in Sheng discourse that cuts across genres.

iii. *The linguistic and literary space of the Engsh subculture*

The context in which the Sheng and Engsh stories unfold reveals the economic divide between the two hybrid subcultures. In stark contrast to the backdrop of the Sheng texts, there is not even the slightest reference to criminal activities, poverty, and other social ills in the *Kwani?* Engsh vignettes. The main characters in the Engsh texts tend to be very cosmopolitan, economically empowered, refined, and with Western interests, values and tastes. They have a good educational background by virtue of their privileged middle-class upbringing and are gainfully employed. They also possess an excellent command of standard and slang forms of both American and British English. The female character Koi in "Nyof Nyof" is a young, Engsh-speaking woman with a good educational background (having attended one of the best-performing national secondary schools in Kenya). She has recently obtained employment at Safaricom, which in reality is the leading communication service provider in Kenya:

"Nyof Nyof"[45]	Nonsense
Koi was a typical Boma girl trying to organize her *perso* and recently employed as a marketer for Safaricom.	Koi was a typical Boma [Kenyan high school] girl trying to organize her *personality* and recently employed as a marketer for Safaricom.

The irony is that she is attracted to Waf (short for Wafula), who is a *matatu* driver of an Eastlands-bound vehicle and is thus part of the Sheng ('ghetto') subculture. She is so attracted to this driver that she has even dumped her previous boyfriend Maish (Maina), because he had no money and no personality (notice the italicized code-mixed Sheng and Kiswahili expressions):

Ati the *makanga* of the fifty-eight *mathree* was *mbolox* so Koi *fuated nyayo* and placed herself in the admirable eyes of Waf. Waf was the	The *mini-bus tout* of the number 58 *mini-bus* was *handsome*, so Koi *followed suit* and placed herself in the admirable eyes of Waf (Wafula). Waf

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45 Jambazi Fulani, "Nyof Nyof," 57.

dere of Western Bull and the *mathree* known for its bullish horn that attracted the choosiest of the bunch in Buru.[46] She had dissed Maish because he was not focused; he happened to be *bila chums* and needed also to improve on *perso*.

was the *driver* of Western Bull and the *minibus* known for its bullish horn that attracted the choosiest of the bunch in Buru [Buru Buru]. She had dumped Maish because he was not focused; he *didn't have money* and also needed to improve his *personality*.

Koi is quite enlightened and economically empowered, as demonstrated by her ability to buy her own lunch, while also concerned not to eat too much to avoid putting on weight. In the world of Engsh characters like Koi in "Nyof Nyof," Nish in "Nai Reloaded," and the young (anonymous) man in "Vain Jango Letter," the ability to buy a good meal and expensive alcoholic drinks at entertainment spots is not a problem – Koi even has to instruct the waiter to limit her portions so as to maintain her figure! This is in contrast to the setting of the Sheng texts examined, where people struggle and fight for basic resources. In "Captured" by Mwas Mahugu, one of the muggers asks his victim, perhaps to justify his criminal act, "*Unadhani si humanga mchana*?" (Do you think we eat in the daytime?). The irony is that whereas the characters in the Sheng texts have to resort to mugging people in order to get something to eat, the Engsh characters are trying to limit how much they eat.

   As is common in the Engsh subculture, the main characters in the Engsh texts have the ability to switch identity to show solidarity with Sheng speakers. In "Nyof Nyof," Koi compromises her Engsh identity, first, by having lunch in a downtown food-kiosk joint frequented by *matatu* drivers from the Eastlands and, secondly, by code-switching to Sheng. This she does not only to identify with Waf the *matatu* driver (on whom she has a crush), but also when conversing with Njoro, the waiter at the kiosk. Njoro speaks to Koi in a mixture of Kiswahili and Sheng and she answers in the same way. Koi's internal monologue is narrated in Engsh, showing her shift between identities:

The joint wasn't really packed but the *nyam chom* was calling *yaani* the aroma was beckoning her to some lunch. Njoro happened to be the one running the joint on this day. He gave

The place wasn't really full but the *nyama choma* [roasted meat] aroma was appealing to her to have some lunch. Njoroge happened to be the one in charge of the restaurant on this day. He gave

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[46] The full name of this residential estate in the Eastern part of Nairobi is 'Buru Buru'. However, as is typical with Sheng proper nouns and names, it has been clipped to 'Buru'.

her that knowing look and asked her, "*Kama kawaida*?"

"*Lakini usijaze*," she replied, she *juad* that if she *kulad* so much it would take some time before she shed of the ka*threatening* pot.

"Hizi ndizo masaa za Waf mulikuwa nak*adate* nini?" Njoro asked.

"*Zii* ni ku*chance* tu," she responded knowingly. The kiosk was another of those information agencies. Vibe must have gone round that something was cutting between her and Waf.

her that knowing look and asked her, "*The usual*?"

"*But don't fill it*," she replied, she *knew* that if she *ate* too much it would take some time before she shed the *threatening* belly fat.

"This is the time Wafula comes over; did you have *a date* with him or what?" Njoroge asked.

"Zii [zero-*No*], I'm just taking a *chance*," she responded knowingly. The kiosk was an information agency. Gossip must have gone round that something was going on between her and Wafula.

All the Engsh vignettes begin with the central character in a relaxed atmosphere – for instance, having a drink in an expensive up-market club. The female character Nish in "Nai Reloaded" is waiting for her boyfriend at Kengele's, which in reality is a middle-class entertainment spot located in the Westlands area. Similarly, the setting of "Vain Jango Letter" is at the Cactus Bar, an expensive bar popular with middle-class youth and located in Nairobi's central business district. "Vain Jango Letter" narrates the experience of a young Engsh-speaking man hanging out on a Saturday night in an up-market bar, where he meets a beautiful young woman (the italicized words are code-mixed from Sheng or Kiswahili):

"Vain Jango Letter"[47]

The other *Sato* I was chilling in Cactus. My skinny butt was perched precariously on a bar stool as I sipped my Tusker *baridi* as per *kawa* while I watched a premier league match between ManU and Southampton disinterestedly. I hate ManU bro. I mean, why would those clowns want to win every damn English title? Anyway, back to my *storo* – my Tusker had started to *ingia* my system...

Letter by Vain Luo

The other *Saturday* I was killing time at the Cactus bar. I was sitting precariously on a bar stool as I sipped my *cold* Tusker beer as I *usually* do while I watched a premier league match between Manchester United and Southampton disinterestedly. I hate ManU, brother. I mean, why would those clowns want to win every damn English title? Anyway, back to my *story* – my Tusker had started to *enter* my system.

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[47] Vain Jango, "Vain Jango Letter," 103–107. The word '*jango*' ('*jang'o*') is Sheng for a person of Luo descent (Luo being one of Kenya's major ethnic languages).

Ngoja, this baby with some serious bootie ingiad the pub ... damn, baby had bootie and she knew it.	*Wait*, this young woman with a voluptuous figure entered the pub ... damn, the woman had hips/backside and she knew it.
Took that *ki-emergency ka-small* sample bottle of Polo sport cologne I got from Dubai duty free and splashed it on then hoofed it hurriedly upstairs.	I took the *emergency small* sample bottle of Polo sport cologne I got from Dubai duty free and splashed it on then walked hurriedly upstairs.

Note the persona's affiliation with Western culture (the English Premier League match between Manchester United and Southampton) and his economic empowerment indicated by the use of cologne bought at the Dubai duty-free shop. Engsh borrows heavily from American slang, as is evident in the persona's narration ("I was chilling […] My skinny butt […] baby with some serious bootie ... damn, baby had bootie and she knew it"). This is in reference to the beautiful woman who walks into the bar. Such American slang expressions have most likely been gleaned from exposure to Western music, movies, and popular literature as well as international sources of print and electronic media. Engsh speakers typically have an excellent command of English and speak it with near-native speaker competence. Within this in-group, correct articulation of English words is paramount, and ethnic accents are the subject of ridicule. In the text, Vain Jango loses interest in the beautiful woman once he engages her in a conversation and realizes (through her accent) that she does not belong to the Engsh subculture and is therefore not cosmopolitan enough for him.[48]

Kwanza the baby has a deep rural Okuyu accent, you know, the one where the Rs and Ls are *kabisa* interchanged.	*First*, the girl has a deep rural Gĩkũyũ accent, you know, where the Rs and Ls are *completely* interchanged.

The female character in "Vain Jango" speaks English with heavy interference from her first language, Gĩkũyũ, which marks her as an outsider to the urban youth culture. Both Engsh and Sheng speakers look down upon ethnic accents, as these suggest a rural 'country bumpkin' identity as opposed to a 'Nairobian' identity.

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[48] In "Reply to Vain Jango" the joke ends up being on the persona Vain Jango because the woman, although not part of the Engsh subculture, sees through Vain Jango's superficial, vain demeanor and therefore outwits him by feigning naivety and deliberately posing as an ignorant, unrefined woman.

iv. *Code-switching in Engsh and Sheng texts*

The contemporary Sheng subculture includes youth from both low-income and privileged backgrounds, unlike the situation in the 1980s when Sheng was confined to Nairobi's Eastlands area. The Engsh in-group possess the capacity to negotiate, compromise, and shift identities in order to show solidarity with the Sheng in-group when the need arises. This is indicated by their frequent code-switching in order to associate with the Sheng in-group, after which they quickly shift back to their own middle-class Engsh identity. In "Nai Reloaded" and "Nyof Nyof," the author Jambazi Fulani deliberately mixes languages and hybrid codes in the narrative to convey the negotiations and compromises of identities between the western and eastern parts of Nairobi. Similarly, the narrative style in "Nai Reloaded" reveals extensive code-mixing with borrowed words from Sheng and Kiswahili, which are then adapted to fit into the Engsh grammatical structure (the words are borrowed from Sheng and Kiswahili):

"Nai Reloaded"[49]	Gloss
Nish *juad* Malo was going to pick her up at Kengeles of A B C, I mean that is where he said he would be after Pavements. She picked up her Siemens again to call but *nasikitika mteja hawe...*, it wasn't even over 'Shit!' She cussed and nearly crushed the poor thing in Raju, the bartender's face.	Nish *knew* Malo was going to pick her up at Kengeles of A B C, I mean that is where he said he would be after Pavements. She picked up her Siemens again to call but *I'm afraid the customer cannot...*; it wasn't even over 'Shit!' She cursed and nearly crushed the poor thing in Raju, the bartender's face.
She *songead* and got close, sat down *pole pole* behind him and you guessed right, ordered for some *Pilis* and *washaad* her A F C O, five five fives, then *Kamozo, kanywaji, kamozo, kanywaji*, then a sigh.	She *moved* and got close, sat down *slowly* behind him and, you guessed right, ordered for some *Pilsners* and *lit* her A F C O, five five five [cigarettes], then *a cigarette, a drink, a cigarette, a drink*, then a sigh.

The context of the narration is in an expensive club located in the Westlands (Engsh) area. The female character Nish has an Engsh identity and is economically empowered and upwardly mobile, to judge from her presence in an expensive entertainment establishment and her ability to buy herself quality cigarettes from A F C O (an acronym for the Kenyan military tax-free shops)

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[49] Jambazi Fulani, "Nairobi Reloaded," 129.

and drinks at the club. In "Nyof Nyof," Koi (the young woman who belongs to the Engsh subculture) code-switches when she engages in dialogue with the waiter in a downtown food kiosk. Notice the mixed Kiswahili, Sheng, and Engsh dialogue:

Kiswahili	"Kama kawaida?"	"The usual?"
	"Lakini usijaze," she replied	"[yes] but don't fill it," she replied.
Sheng	"Hizi ndizo masaa za Waf mulikuwa *nakadate* nini?" Njoro asked.	"This is Waf's usual time [to be here]; did you *have a date* or something?"
	"Zii ni ku*chance* tu," she responded.	"No, I'm just *chancing*," she responded.
Engsh	She *juad* that if she *kulad* so much it would take some time before she shed off the ka*threatening* pot.	She *knew* that if she *ate* so much it would take some time before she shed the *threatening* belly fat.
	Vibe must have gone round that something was cutting between her and Waf.	Word must have got round that something was going on between her and Wafula.

The original status of Sheng as a purely 'ghetto code' is no longer valid, because the contemporary Engsh in-group frequently code-switches to Sheng. Sheng and (to a lesser extent) Engsh have crossed geographical, socio-economic and generational barriers, so that referring to them as 'urban youth languages or codes' is no longer entirely accurate. According to Aurélie Journo, such shifts and constant code-switching between 'proper English' and informal spoken forms (Engsh and Sheng) reflects what happens when a marginal, subcultural code encroaches on what was previously considered to be the domain of 'proper' (literary) English[50] – in essence, the intrusion of everyday speech into a literary space.

Conclusion

Engsh and Sheng not only give youth the linguistic resources to question and challenge the ideologies and identities that define them, but also represent the construction of a linguistic third space between the global, represented by Western images and artefacts, and the local, represented by Kenyan/African symbols and languages. Sheng in particular unites and accommodates youth

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[50] See Aurélie Journo, "Jambazi Fulani: Hip-Hop Literature and the Redefining of Literary Spaces in Kenya," *Postcolonial Text* 5.3 (2009): 1–22.

from different ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic classes, thereby form-
ing a new and unified identity. It also represents an effort by youth to extend
their definition beyond the ethnic identities of their parents' generation and
provides them with a space where their different cultural backgrounds and
identities are accommodated. The hybrid codes accentuate the importance, not
of adhering to Western values or ethnic identities, but of a hybrid combination
of the two in a third, hybrid space. In using Sheng and, to some extent, Engsh,
youth in Nairobi and beyond find their space and identity, since these forms
of communication allow for creativity and innovativeness in communication.

As has been underscored throughout my discussion, linguistic codes define
subcultures and their unique identities. Indeed, both Engsh and Sheng, in par-
ticular, could eventually evolve to become not only symbols of Kenyan youth
identity but also symbols of national identity. This is not a far-fetched idea,
since Sheng and Engsh are already acceptable codes in political discourse, the
print and electronic media, popular literature, and the entertainment industry.
However, I need to emphasize that the development of these hybrid languages
must not be allowed to happen at the expense of promoting forms of English
and Kiswahili that are nationally, regionally, and internationally intelligible.
Eventually, youth will need to seek employment where the ability to commu-
nicate effectively is essential in marketing oneself and promoting specific
agendas to a culturally diverse audience. Sheng and to a lesser extent Engsh
provide youth with the ability to question and challenge the ideologies and
identities that attempt to define them. Moreover, the codes are overt expres-
sions of a hybrid identity which allows youth to internalize the popular icons
of Western music and fashion while at the same time keeping in touch with
their nationality as Kenyans.

Publications in Sheng and Engsh demonstrate that what constitutes popular
literature in Kenya must now be broadened to include products of linguistic
and cultural hybrids as a consequence of renegotiated spaces. Literary dis-
course in these hybrid codes opens up a space where the dichotomy between
traditional and popular literature can be negotiated. Although the efforts of
innovative publishers in Kenya have created new literary spaces, they have
not yet succeeded in wholly transcending criticism from advocates of conven-
tional, 'mainstream' forms of literature. Sheng-Engsh literary texts demon-
strate a dialogue that reflects on-going negotiations within Kenyan society
and the (re)definition of youth identity. This new wave of literature is placed
in the new context of urban youth culture.

The evolution of the Kenyan literary scene needs to be viewed in relation to larger socio-cultural, economic, political, and global factors that collectively influence the promotion of this literature. Through Engsh and Sheng, Kenya's youth create new forms of cultural practice and redefined identities. The expansion of the linguistic and literary space in Kenya will entail an inclusionary and multifaceted approach in creative writing. This redefinition could take place in an alternative space that ignores boundaries between mainstream literature written in English and Kiswahili, on the one hand, and newly emerging works composed in Sheng and Engsh, on the other; this, I firmly believe, engenders new possibilities for popular literature. In my discussion, a key goal is to clear a space for multiple voices. This space of hybridity could be encouraged by increasing the volume of urban youth's voice through the medium of Sheng and Engsh, which will eventually expand the literary space in East Africa as a whole.

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