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The AUYL Truel

Prof. Rudd Philip
Pittsburg State University Kansas– USA
prudd@pittstate.edu
0000-0002-O717-8798

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Abstract: *Great post-independence migration from rural areas to urban centers has brought contact and competition to African linguistic gene pools. In Nairobi, Kenya, the main contestants are a trio of English, Swahili, and the indigenous language, making the duel a truel. Though the obvious outcome has been an ecological imbalance in socioeconomics (Mufwene 2008), few studies, other than Laitin and Eastman (1989: 52), have addressed the motivations and constraints on the speakers of the dueling languages. This paper introduces the concept of the truel from game theory (Kilgour & Brams 1997) to analyze and illuminate the linguistic tussle between an ex-colonial language, a native lingua franca, and local African Urban Youth Language (AUYL) practices (e.g., Sheng and Engsh). Mufwene and Vigouroux (2008: 23) argue that the elite keep the ex-colonial language as an entitlement. Nationalists support Swahili as a Pan-Africanist unifier. Historically, however, no one wishes to support anyone else's mother tongue, so the indigenous language loses out. A series of motivations for each language variety is described, and it is shown that in each case, the player takes a rational strategy in the competition, but produces the illusion that the indigenous language has lost out. This new approach dramatically reduces the impression that the native speaker of indigenous African languages has lost the linguistic battle, and hence makes the rational choices of linguistic practices clearer.*
Keywords: *AUYL, deloping, game theory, Kenya, truel, Sheng.*
Résumé : *Le meilleur des trois duels de langues africaines de la jeunesse urbaine (AUYL) : La grande migration post-indépendance des zones rurales vers les centres urbains a apporté contact et concurrence aux pools de gènes linguistiques africains. À Nairobi, au Kenya, les principaux candidats sont un trio d'anglais, de swahili et de la langue maternelle, ce qui en fait le mieux-de-trois-duel. Bien que le résultat évident ait été un déséquilibre écologique en socioéconomie (Mufwene 2008), peu d'études, à l'ex.r. de Laitin et Eastman (1989 : 52), ont abordé les motivations et les contraintes qui pèsent sur les locuteurs des langues du duel. Cet article introduit le concept de la truel de la théorie des jeux (Kilgour et Brams 1997) pour analyser et éclairer le bras de fer linguistique entre une langue ex-coloniale, une lingua franca indigène et des pratiques locales de langue africaine de la jeunesse urbaine (AUYL) (p. ex., Sheng et Engsh). Mufwene et Vigouroux (2008 : 23) soutiennent que l'élite conserve la langue ex-coloniale comme un droit. Les nationalistes soutiennent le swahili en tant qu'unificateur panafricaniste. Historiquement, cependant, personne ne souhaite soutenir la langue maternelle de quelqu'un d'autre, de sorte que la langue autochtone perd. Une série de motivations pour chaque variété de langue est décrite, et il est démontré que dans chaque cas, le joueur adopte une stratégie rationnelle dans la compétition, mais produit l'illusion que la langue autochtone a perdu. Cette nouvelle approche réduit considérablement l'impression que le locuteur natif des*

Corresponding author : Rudd Philip

langues autochtones africaines a perdu la bataille linguistique et rend donc les choix rationnels des pratiques linguistiques plus clairs.
Mots clés : *AUYL, deloping, théorie des jeux, Kenya, postcolonial, truel, Sheng.*

1. Introduction

That the *raison d'être* of African Urban Youth Language (AUYL) practices is to mark and encode membership in a specific community of practice (Hollington & Nassenstein 2015) has long been recognized in scholarly literature. Put a bit simply, the speakers do not have a need for a new language because they are already fluent in a language of wider communication. However, these speakers are subject to the "paradox of norms" (Kiessling & Mous 2004: 314) in that they are forced to find a balance between the norms of the AUYL speakers and those of the promoters of the hegemonic language; that is, the "speech community" and the "language community" respectively (Silverstein 1998: 407). Practicing AUYL, on the one hand, entails knowing purportedly the norms of the dominant language(s) in order to be able to defy those norms by creating anti-norm norms for the "anti-language" (Halliday 1978: 164). On the other hand, access to the hegemonic language(s) is limited to the elites, who keep it as an entitlement (Mufwene and Vigouroux 2008: 23, Eastman 1992: 11; Laitin & Eastman 1989: 52) so that a majority is left on the margins. In short, many speakers in the speech community have little to no mastery of the language(s) of hegemony. Nevertheless, mots and morceaux trickle into and filter through the mix. As Silverstein (1998: 407) says, "… *the speech community is the context of emergence, sustenance, and transformation of distinct local language communities*."

Yet something has to give. An explanation for the contradiction of how speakers with no access can exploit the dominant language(s) must exist. Perchance the elucidation lies not at any specific stage in linguistic evolution but in the process of language development itself. Using game theory, Laitin & Eastman (1989) provide a macroanalysis of the conflict among three dominant groups or players to explain the "schizophrenic" state of the language policy of newly independent Kenya. At independence, Swahili was the "national" language. English was only co-official, but as it held hegemony in business, civil service, and university, it was the true sole de facto official language.

In a postcolonial language game, the educated bureaucrats, determined to maintain their grip on privilege, preferred English; fervent nationalists, desirous of a more African state, embraced Swahili, whereas the leaders of the various ethnic groups, hoping to keep their people on par with tribal rivals, favored English for wider communication and the indigenous language for local primary education. Therefore, even though Swahili was regarded as a "bulwark against the loneliness of city life" (Whiteley 1969: 67), bureaucrats viewed it as the language of "servants" (Laitin & Eastman 1989: 52); politicians disdained it and gained political points in parliament by not actually embracing it as the national language (56); moreover, local leaders[1] abjured it as a lost cause and barrier to ethnic competitiveness (61). The final reckoning is that "Swahili drops out of the picture" (66) as it did. However, game theory cautions that the collective welfare of a society is not necessarily the result of a game in which political groups seek their own goals.

[1] Even Kenya's native speakers were less than "enthusiastic" about officializing Swahili (Mark Swartz as cited in Laitin & Eastman 1989:68).

Succinctly, only the decisions of the powerful take precedence in a postcolonial language game, regardless of the needs and desires of commoners. The aim of this paper then is to investigate a game-theoric microanalysis of the perspective of the powerless, the *wananchi* or common citizens, to explore the existence of those who did not have access to the vaunted halls of bureaucracy and government, and to seek an understanding of what sociolinguistically might have happened from the time of independence to the time that Swahili became a national examinable subject in Kenyan schools in 1985. This essay investigates the chief rational choices of the plebeians of postcolonial Nairobi and how they were able to resist, exploit, and appropriate the hegemonic language(s) to establish their own language practices as the new norm.

This paper is organized as follows. Briefly described in Kenya's Urban Youth Language Practices (KUYL) are Sheng and Engsh. In Three-Way Duel or Truel, the concept of the truel from game theory and the association of AUYL with criminality are combined to proffer the AUYL Truel, an explication of how actual language practices were never a player in the official postcolonial language competition. Deloping and Simbas on the Savannah show how being the weaker competitor can counterintuitively lead to a better chance of survival and how a lost niche can little by little be recaptured to the surprise of bigger competitors. In Mzunguko wa Maisha, the cycle of the life of language is explored with an evolutionary tilt. Finally, the Conclusion explains how language change is the norm and how only those clinging to the fiction of the standard are bewildered by what is happening linguistically in Africa's cities.

2. Kenya's Urban Youth Language Practices

During the era that their nations gained independence, African peoples engaged in one of the largest population movements on the planet (Tarver 1994). The inevitable contact between peoples and languages set the game of linguistic gene pool competition (Mufwene 2008) in the cities afoot. The vast influx of people and languages that have flooded into Nairobi over the last half century is a case in point. A bureaucratic elite maintains the ex-colonial language English as a status marker, but, as will be shown later, standard Swahili is but a scholastic endeavor of the intellectual elite, providing little to no influence on a youthful urban populace. As no one's mother tongue is shared by all, linguistic compromises are of a "fluid and unsteady character" and have come to be labeled "youth language practices" (Beyer 2015: 23), of which Kenyan's best-known variety is Sheng. However, a relative newcomer called Engsh appears to be making inroads. The examples below provide fodder for a brief description of them both.

Engsh	**Hebu hey**	**pliz stop please stop**	**thoz those**	**storoz. stories**	
Sheng	Hebu hey	temana leave: RECIP	na with	hizo CL10: DEM.REF	risto stories
Swahili	Hebu tafadhali wachana hadithi			na hizo	
English	Hey please refrain from those affairs/matters				

KUYL Practices (Barasa & Mous 2017: 51)

Engsh has an English grammatical base, whereas Sheng relies on the grammar of Swahili. Though sentence a) displays a more phonemic alphabet, a Swahili loan, and a morphophonological distortion of the plural object, it closely adheres to English d). Sentence b) deviates from c) in choice of verb (a semantic shift) and object, which is a metathesized English loan (risto < story). Engsh then more closely follows the rules of English than Sheng does those of Swahili. This phenomenon may reflect socioeconomics, disclosing more linguistic competence in one set of speakers. In fact, "Engsh is clearly linked to the higher class" (Barasa & Mous 2017: 72), while Sheng is more "proletarian" (Rudd 2018: 286). How this socioeconomic rift may have emerged is explored in the next section?

3. Three-Way Duel or Truel

A rebel motif often embellishes the reality of hyped news and urban legend. Gazettes and blogs of Kenya have recently sensationalized "bling bling" gangsters, youths who engage in criminal activities to flaunt fancy jewelry, fine clothes and celebrity-like lifestyles (Achuka 2017). Nairobi gangs, such as Usiku Sacco (in Umoja), Superpower (Eastleigh), Munyipi (Mathare), Masako Empire (Huruma), Kosovo Boys (Kosovo), Kamukunji Pressure (Kibera), Jeshi la Embaa (Embakasi), 40 Brothers (City Centre), and Gaza (Kayole), are accused of recruiting even young women, one of whom is reputed to have brandished a silver tooth and a six-shot Beretta pistol (Reporter 2017). An ideological link connects speaking AUYL with illegal practices or rebelliousness. Young people use it to project a persona that they find cool and clearly seek to emulate. Yet this projection of covert prestige plays on negative stereotypes of language practices. Hence, an unavoidable paradox exists when one attempts to describe the inherent coolness tapped as in this vignette. Myth begets myth.

The language truel in Kenya may best be analogized as one of rivals in competition. Njoki represents the mother tongue, Hamed Swahili, and Tomaso English. Inspired by Bennett (2017), Njoki, Hamed, and Tomaso are like three gangsters, who have infringed on each other's territories and have arranged a three-way duel. Njoki is a bad shot, missing her target about 2/3s of the time on average. Hamed is better but still misses his target 1/3 of the time. Tomaso is an expert shot, never missing 100% of the time. Each is to take a turn shooting: first Njoki, next Hamed, and then Tomaso. Afterwards, the turn goes back to Njoki again, and so on until no one remains. With her aim being so poor, Njoki should consider carefully what action would give her the best chance to survive.

The solution for Njoki lies in the competitive exclusion principle, which states that "complete competitors" cannot and do not coexist (Hardin 1960: 1292). Let's look at Njoki's chances. Imagine what happens when Njoki attempts to shoot Hamed or Tomaso with her first turn. If she shoots at Hamed, with whom she has better odds, and happens to hit him, then she is doomed, because the expert shot Tomaso with his 100 percent accuracy will shoot her dead at the next turn. However, if Njoki attempts first to take out her biggest threat Tomaso, who never misses, and somehow successfully kills him, then Hamed still has the first shot at the next turn. As Hamed hits his target 2/3s of the time, Njoki is likely dead anyway. However, when she cleverly assesses the situation, she clearly recognizes that Hamed and Tomaso are more worried about each other than about her. She can be relatively certain that each of them will rationally attempt to take out his

biggest threat first. Her best hope then is to delope or "throw away" her shot by shooting in the air (Fleming 1999: 8). When she makes it clear that she is no threat,[2] the remaining two competitors will turn their focus from her and to each other. It may be a point of contention as to whether she is forced out or exits of her own volition. With ecological similitude, the departure of the song thrush in parts of Scotland is said to have been precipitated by the advent of the bigger missle thrush (Hardin 1960: 1295). Nonetheless, Njoki like the songbird is out of the niche.[3]

3.1.Deloping

The duel between Hamed and Tomaso, however, stretches from pre-independence through post-independence. In colonial days, the Brits took over the trade routes of hinterland East Africa, wishing to employ Swahili in Kenya as the Germans and Omanis had in Tanganyika. However, the variety of Swahili in rural Kenya was at best a pidgin (Heine 1979, Duran 1979) that garnered "negative" (Neale 1974: 270) or "inferior" (Mutonya & Parsons 2004: 112) perceptions. The colonials, who standardized Swahili in 1929 (Myers-Scotton 1979: 111), would stumble upon a more foreboding problem, however. Because many Kenyans had been recruited as soldiers during World War Two (WWII) to fight for the Allies in Asia, Europe, and North Africa, the British began to worry a variety of Swahili might aid a struggle against colonialism. Thus began the emphasis on English. At independence, many nationalists still pushed Swahili as the language to unify Kenya. Therefore, after a decade in which the primary schools in Kenya were using English as a medium of instruction (Harries 1976: 154), the first Kenyan president decreed Swahili Kenya's national language on the Fourth of July 1974. The nationalization of Swahili then was an about-face turn from the educational policy that had been pursued since Independence in 1963. Paradoxically, standard Swahili was a hindrance to the poor and the elite. Most Kenyans, especially rural *wananchi*, and even many of the elite, whom the colonists had educated and bequeathed their power, had only an elementary grasp of the language. The nouveau riche had a mastery of English, while the peasants spoke one of the indigenous languages as a mother tongue. Though the idea behind Swahili was to make Kenya more African and less colonial, the elites "saw it as the language that colonialists used to communicate with servants" (Laitin and Eastman 1989: 52). Besides, higher-level civil service positions required literacy in English and were occupied by educated elites, giving them motive to promote English (Laitin & Eastman 1989: 52). Moreover, government policy reflected this attitude with the official language of the Kenyan parliament having been English from Independence in 1963 until the presidential decree in 1974. Interestingly, an amendment in 1975, mirroring the attitude again, makes parliamentary proceedings bilingual, permitting the use of English once more (Mbaabu 1996: 137). Hamed is out again. Furthermore, Swahili remains neither testable nor compulsory on the national examinations for primary and secondary schools until 1985. Njoki and Hamed are out of the game for the time being. Deloping seems the only option left to the mother tongue and Swahili.

[2] Using a Markov chain, Moretti (2015) shows that the deloping strategy is not only Njoki's best strategy "82.2% of the time, it is overall …[her]…best strategy for winning the truel."

[3] Niche here merely means official language usage.

Their deloping is precisely how the language truel in Kenya has played out. As Laitin and Eastman (1989: 70, fn 13) clarify, "A vernacular policy is out of the question because … most Kenyans would oppose its official dominance." For instance, neither the Luo nor the Gikuyu would accept education in the other's tongue. Therefore, as Laitin and Eastman (1989: 67) further explain, "English will remain the language of elite mobility, the vernaculars will get local funding and support as media of instruction at lower levels of education, and Swahili (from party elites) strong moral but weak economic support." However, that 22-year interim from 1963 to 1985 was also the gestatory period of Kenya's first truly independent, postcolonial generation, and they had had little or no schooling in standard Swahili. This educational lapse prevented convergence toward standard Swahili in Nairobi and in Kenya in general; furthermore, it was an incubatory time aiding the emergence of their new identity, the urban sophisticate.

3.2. Simbas on the Savannah

The fuel for the AUYL truel reignites, as a result. Another analogy from game-theory folklore explains how. According to Jeffrey R. Lax (as cited in Kilgour & Brams 1997: 323), *simbas* "lions" on the savannah vie for a fresh kill in a clearing. Cowardly, cannibalistic, and narcoleptic, they feed or not feed in order of their rank. They sense that if the total simba count is odd, the highest ranked lion eats, falls asleep without worry because the remaining simbas will finish the kill, become drowsy, and sleep satisfied. If their total number is even, neither the first nor any of the lesser lions will dine for fear of falling asleep and being themselves devoured. On the Nairobi savannah, complacent Tomaso has been regularly eating the lion's share of the kill, and falling asleep, oblivious to his surroundings. Hamed would like to reassert a challenge but is too young, only having been established as co-official since 2010, and so loses his nerve. Njoki, however, has given birth to a daughter, who has adapted to the new urban savannah and has evolved. She too is a mother tongue, but she is a hybrid, not the first language of an ethnic group, rather she has become Cleah, the language practices of a social group, cosmopolitan Kenyans, meaning the total of the simbas on the savannah is four,[4] an even number. Since Kenya's independence, Cleah has been devouring domain after domain (Githiora 2016) increasing her territory. Meanwhile, Hamed has been stunted in an ivory tower, while Tomaso has been caged as the entitlement of privilege (Mufwene and Vigouroux 2008: 23; Laitin and Eastman 1989: 52). With 60% of the urban populous squeezed into an area that barely covers five percent of the city's residential area (Tooley et al. 2008), and predictions that in 2025 Nairobi's slums will contain as many people as the whole of the city does now (Githira 2016), it is safe to say standard languages are not a paramount concern for residents. Actual language practices of the youth in Kenya, as shown in section §1 above, readily demonstrate this simbas-on-the-savannah turnabout paradox.

[4] Technically, the odd-even alternation could go on ad infinitum (Kilgour & Brams 1997: 327) but four fits the present scenario. Through the lens of Jungian theory and with a sociocultural, paradigmatic mandala, Rudd (2019; 2017) explores how the emergence of this fourth competitor is the consequence of the psychosocial milieu of Nairobi.

3.3. Mzunguko wa Maisha

A language goes through *mzunguko wa maisha* "a circle of life"[5] with a birth and a death. Though an imperfect analog, language is a living organism, an entity whose life is wholly dependent upon its ecology. Of course, neither a birth nor a death certificate can be granted, for each event is a stage in a change of state (Mufwene 2004: 204). Nevertheless, Mufwene (2004: 212) draws a "heuristic bridge" to connect postcolonial language birth and death of the ancient past to that of the recent past. Ancient colonies were "not fully Latinized" when the Romans departed, and the plebeians continued speaking local languages. Similarly, recent African colonies were not fully Europeanized by the time the Europeans left, and the wananchi continued using indigenous languages. "The process of language shift," concludes Mufwene, "was protracted and did not affect all segments of the population concurrently" (213). What we are witnessing in the urban centers of postcolonial Africa is a protracted process of language shift. This shift is not a death, rather it is a birth, a communal level acquisition of competence in AUYL. History fails to notice language birth until the accrual of features is preponderant and so divergent from those of the "parent" that a newborn is reluctantly acknowledged *ex post facto*. This scenario has been the case for Old English, Middle English, creoles, and pidgins. Out of the aftermath of AUYL practices too will come reluctant recognition of the birth of new languages, who, like the Romance languages, have spawned from vulgar[6] usage. Speakers are not "vulgar" out of choice but out of circumstance. As they have no true access to the hegemonic language(s) they make use of the scraps that dominant political groups let fall their way. What they scrap together is marginalized, that is *langue minorée* (Hazaël-Massieux 1999). It is not that this language is spoken by a minority of the population, rather it is simply that it is undervalued. Of course, being undervalued is not the same as having no vitality. In fact, there is an apparent concurrent erosion of the heritage language in the polities accompanying the emergence of the AUYL (Connell 2015: 124). Though the shift is slow, acquiring the urban vernacular, because of its practicality and "inspiring urban culture" (Mufwene 2004: 2006), is a more realistic target. Residents in the slums, who daily struggle together shoulder to shoulder with little access to education (Githinji 2006: 27), are the first to shift, but AUYL practices are penetrating the domains of the affluent as well (Githiora 2016). Moreover, the children born in the cities of Africa are serving as models for those born in the rural areas, creating an ethnographic situation that favors shifting. Furthermore, "the history of the world," writes Mufwene (2004: 206), "shows that languages of the powerless often have been more resilient, or demonstrated more vitality, than those of the powerful."

4. Conclusion

This paper investigated the perspective of the *wananchi* or the overwhelming proletarian majority population in the metropolis of Nairobi. To my knowledge, it is the first study to offer a game-theory microanalysis of postcolonial language competition in Africa. In two

[5] A fitting allusion to a song of similar title in Disney's 1994 film *The Lion King* could be made but is inadvertent.

[6] Advantage is taken here of the semantic shift of "vulgar" over time, emphasizing the condescension projected by those who have access to hegemonic languages.

game-theory inspired analogies, speakers (i.e., Njoki, the mother tongue, and Cleah, KUYL practices) make rational choices. In the official language truel, the mother tongue has no option, other than to delope or step down from the challenge. In the reality of the socioeconomic milieu of the informal settlements, the practices of African urban youth create a new mother tongue and language of wider communication. This finding is in line with Laitin & Eastman (1989: 63), who concede that a sociolinguistic or microanalysis predicts speakers would negotiate a new urban mixed language[7] as "as a dominant force in Kenya." Although evolutionary theory cannot predict the future of language death and birth, a comparison of postcolonial language shift of ancient times with that of more recent times reveals that the agency of speakers and the "unplanned cumulation of individuals' practices into communal behavior" (Mufwene 2004: 2018) camouflage language birth because it is a rather protracted process. This study indicates that the ecological pressure to adopt AUYL practices entails not only a need for "urban belonging" (McLaughlin 2015: 140) but also a need to adjust to a changing socioeconomic glocalization. Having no direct access to the hegemonic languages and being forced to make do with the materials available to them, speakers create a linguistic bricolage from the bits and pieces lying around their language landscape. A potential shortcoming of this study is a lack of input from the residents of the informal settlements themselves. This recognized shortcoming could inspire future research that interviews not the bourgeoisie but the overwhelming proletarian majorities that make up Africa's métropoles.

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