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## Challenges of Using Bukusu Dialect on FM Radio Stations in Bungoma County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*Use of vernacular languages on radio stations has for some time experienced many challenges in Kenya. These languages have among many others been accused of spreading hatred amongst Kenyans. The paper highlights and explains the challenges experienced by Bukusu dialect speakers when the language is used on FM radio stations. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to carry out the study. The research was anchored on two theories: Halliday's Functional Grammar Theory and McCombs and Snow's Agenda Setting Theory. The study found out that there were many challenges that faced use of vernacular languages on FM stations which included negative attitudes; lack of enough terminologies among others. The paper recommends formation of institutes of research on terminologies in vernacular languages; teaching some of these vernacular languages at university level so as to change their negative publicity; county governments to initiate language policies at the county level and revival of teaching of vernacular languages among others in the Kenyan language policy.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Bukusu dialect, FM radio stations, Vernacular Languages

### **1. Introduction**

Language is central in all the things that we do, in that we can hardly function without it. Most of Kenyans at grassroots rely on their vernacular languages to communicate. The increase of vernacular radio stations in Kenya to 54 out of 158 (Okoth, 2015) is commendable because the big population of Kenyans who are not comfortable with English and Kiswahili can now participate actively in issues that affect them. As asserted by Castle (2014), vernacular languages on media are important especially in addressing development issues because many listeners are able to get and understand information in a clear manner.

The same sentiments are shared by Okombo (2014), when he says, we must strengthen our vernaculars for the benefit of Kenyans living in the rural areas. The scholar says devolved governments should go to the grassroots where fishermen and farmers sit under trees and discuss development issues that affect them directly. This depicts itself through educating their children, looking for market for their fish and farm products and their presentations at Chief's barazas. Despite these efforts and importance of vernacular languages, they are faced by many challenges that have hindered their wider usage in many spheres of life.

One of the challenges of growth of vernacular languages is lack of recognition of these languages (Kanana, 2013). This is as result of lack of recognition of languages of the minorities. When such languages are not recognized, they shall not grow and be given ability to be used in several spheres of life. As a result of that, speakers shall end up not being given proper government services, knowledge on issues that affect them and important information that can enable them make informative decisions. According to Kanana (2013), speakers of such languages do not understand policies, objectives and development plans of the government as a result of the policies and plans being relayed to them in foreign languages. They therefore do not actively contribute positively in the implementation process of these policies. From this, it is clear that in order for people to benefit from government services, the knowledge and information. Therefore, for speakers of the language community who in this context is vernacular can benefit from government services when knowledge, skills and information is relayed in the language that they understand.

According Prah (2005), sustained development in a country involves communities at the grassroots. He says reaching the rural is only possible if the language community can be given creative knowledge in a language that they understand. Apart from that, in order to get proper development, government policies and plans in political, cultural, economic and health fields should be presented to people in a language that is understood (Mohochi, 2007). Such a language is vernacular language. This is because vernacular languages are

understood by a majority of people at the grassroots, especially those who do not understand English and Kiswahili. The few who do not understand it are people who are a product of mixed marriages and especially those who were born in town.

People are able to explain their views better in a language that they are competent in (Kachale, 2008). Among many Africans their language of competence is vernacular. If Africans have to participate in decision making processes that affect their lives, then they must have a lot of understanding on the happenings in the world. For them to get that understanding there is need for use of Communication Technology. It is through this Communication Technology that people can exchange ideas. It is therefore important for African languages to also embrace this technology. As the technology is embraced, it should be done in a language that is understood by the majority of the people.

It is against this backdrop that most African languages face challenges when it comes to their wider usage especially on media. Among the challenges that are faced by use vernacular languages on media is the claim that these languages promote hatred among Kenyans (Gathigi, 2009). Most of the times, when vernacular languages are used in the media, they are connected to incitement and tribal clashes (Mbeke & Mshindi, 2008; Krieglner, 2008 and Orao, 2009). Such sentiments have ended up affecting use of vernacular languages on media thus affecting development of speakers of these affected languages.

According to Kanana (2013), African development has dragged as a result of important communication being done in foreign languages and those involved in the communication process failing to communicate properly. Therefore, it is not surprising for a government officer to communicate to people at the grassroots in either English or Kiswahili. And finally fail to achieve his or her objective as a result of lack of proper communication which comes about as a result of the audience lacking competency in the languages used. Kanana (2013) further says that many Africans buy things from China, Korea and Japan such as phones, vehicles and home goods which have operation manuals written in those languages. Interestingly, although those manuals are written in languages such as Chinese and Japanese, buyers still buy the products without looking at the languages used. Therefore, the secret behind their achievements is putting development strategies in vernacular languages, something that is lacking in many African countries.

## 2. Methodology

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. It focused on West and Sulwe FM; stations that air their programmes in Bukusu dialect in Bungoma County, Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents. Respondents were purposively selected because of the professional skills they had and specifically listeners who listen to the two radio stations. The specific programmes were also purposively sampled and listened to for purpose of listening to their content and themes. Choice of broadcasters was based on people who would give information about the two radio stations; West and Sulwe FM. One broadcaster was picked from each of the two radio stations and one editor from each of the selected programmes. The selected broadcasters enabled the researcher reach most of the listeners through "snowball" approach. Broadcasters gave information on programmes that are aired using vernacular language. Specialists who are involved in the programmes on social, economic, health and political matters that are aired in Bukusu dialect were also involved. One specialist in each of the areas was involved.

Out of the study population, the target population was purposively chosen. 4 specialists; one each from the following fields; social, economic, health and political were chosen from each of the two radio stations. A total of 4 editors, 4 broadcasters and 140 listeners were involved in the study. Among listeners, 70 were selected from each radio station. In total 154 participants were involved in the study.

The information obtained from broadcasters was informing on issues that are addressed in the FM radio stations using Bukusu dialect and challenges faced by the language when used on radio stations. The broadcasters also suggested ways of addressing these challenges. The editors who were involved were those that edited programmes on social, economic, health and political issues that were aired in Bukusu dialect. These editors gave data on the challenges of using Bukusu dialect on FM stations and suggestions on how to address them. These specialists also gave information on: issues addressed by them on social, economic, health and political, challenges they faced when addressing the issues and possible solutions to these challenges.

The listeners provided data on type of programmes; social, economic, health and political which they normally listen to. They provided information on issues that are addressed in these programmes, the challenges facing use of Bukusu dialect on FM radio stations and possible suggestions on how address the challenges.

The collected raw data was recorded and analyzed with guidance of Functional Grammar and Agenda Setting theories. The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data was analyzed using thematic method then presented by use of figures and explanation. The findings indicated that use of Bukusu dialect on FM radio stations faced several challenges.

## 3. Findings

Even though Bukusu dialect is an asset to its speakers when used on FM radio stations, it is faced with several challenges namely: shortage of relevant terminologies for use, some of the youth not being comfortable with use of the language, negative attitudes among people on use of vernacular languages among others. Shortage of terminologies is also experienced whenever the language is used on FM radio stations. Many things, concepts and traditions that lack terminologies exist among speakers of this dialect.

As a result of need to have terminologies for use, these radio stations have resorted to coming up with terminologies to take care of this shortcoming. For example, they have coined words such as "*esokho*" (mobile phone), "*nakhalongdo*" and "*kumuinda*" (radio station) and "*khukhwikhunara*" (to rape). The terminologies that were coined by the radio stations were as a result of the lack of suitable words that was being experienced by the language as a result of technology. These terminologies initially were not there but were coined by the radio stations to enable them communicate to listeners. The terminologies were coined to fill the gap that existed in enabling communication between the radio stations and the listeners. The coining of new words reflects Kiango's (2003) assertion that

any language adds its vocabularies and terminologies if it is given chance for use in many fields. However, the moment it is not given the opportunity, it ends up with few vocabularies. In this case, the Bukusu dialect through the radio stations that use it has been coining words that initially were not in existence.

To ensure that the listeners were conversant with the new terminologies, they were consistently used. As a result of the continuous use, the listeners were able to know and finally accept them. They were able to understand and embrace the terminologies through contexts of use. What clearly came out was that the terminology *nakhalongdo* was used by Sulwe FM while *kumuinda* was used by West FM. However, the two terms stood for the same item; radio. As a result of this, Bukusu dialect speakers used the terminologies interchangeably as synonyms.

Another challenge that affects use of the Bukusu dialect in media is, many youths are not conversant with it. This was as a result of urban influence which has made most families to prefer use of Kiswahili and English at the expense of vernacular languages. Because of this influence, most of the young stars do not like listening to vernacular radio stations. Therefore, although the radio stations have got educative programmes, most of the youth do not listen to them.

According to one of the heads of the two radio stations, they were aware of the challenge which they had attempted to address. According to this head, they had a programme by the name "*Banjuka*" which targeted the youth. "*Banjuka*" is a "*Sheng*" (Swahili English slang) terminology that stands for dancing music. The programme targeted youth and was presented by a producer who was in their age bracket. The purpose of having a youth broadcaster presenting the programme was to take care of the interests and needs of the youths. The presenter used the youth language and addressed topics that the young people liked as a way of making them listen to the radio station. Among the things that attracted the youth in the programme was the modern music that is liked by the group.

Negative attitude towards listening to vernacular radio stations was also another challenge faced by the two FM radio stations that used Bukusu dialect to air their programmes. The people who looked down upon those who listened to the radio stations looked at the listeners as illiterate and semi-illiterate. This group was mainly composed of the youth. The irony was that some of the participants who had the negative attitude were not fluent in both English and Kiswahili which they valued more. This was as a result of lack of knowledge on importance of vernacular languages, in that through these languages, we can explain our traditions, our understanding of all plants, a collection of animals and the knowledge that we have (Okombo, 2014).

Lack of institutes that can control formation of Bukusu terminologies is also a challenge that is faced by vernacular languages when used on FM radio stations. As a result of lack of these institutes, the radio stations were likely to come up with terminologies without proper guidance. Therefore, although the two radio stations came up with the terminologies to fill gaps that existed, the criteria used to come up with the coined words is something that casted doubts on the terminologies.

Among the specialists who are normally invited to give professional advices to listeners, some of them are not fluent in the Bukusu dialect. This was a challenge in that they could not bring out the issues they were invited to address effectively using Bukusu dialect. The most affected were the health specialists. As a result of them not being fluent in the dialect, they are forced to code switch and code mix to English and Kiswahili, to be able to relay their messages. There were also possibilities of most of the professionals not being involved in the programmes aired as a result of them not being comfortable in articulating issues using the dialect. This comes up as a result of lack relevant books that could help them improve on their understanding of the dialect. Among the literature that was missing are books such as dictionaries in the dialect.

The other challenge is general negative attitude. There has been a fallacy among some people that use of vernacular language in radio stations has spread hatred among many Kenyan tribes. There are those who believe that use of vernacular language on the media has breed tribalism and hatred (Luoch na Ogutu, 2002). However, that was not correct because even in countries like Somalia, the language is one but they keep fighting each other. It is therefore important to realize that the use of vernacular languages is not bad. The bad intentions of using these languages is the issue that should instead be condemned.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has highlighted and presented findings of a study that was done on the challenges that Bukusu dialect faces when used on FM radio stations. It was observed that despite the facts that use of the dialect on FM radio stations, it was faced with several challenges namely: lack of necessary terminologies, negative attitudes from users and non-users and lack of established institutes that can come up with terminologies for use whenever there is a deficiency. Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following: formation of institutes to do research, create and control terminologies used in vernacular languages; universities to teach some of these vernacular languages so as to change their negative publicity; county governments to initiate language policies at the county level and revival of teaching of vernacular languages among others in the Kenyan language policy.

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