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An Analysis of Nexus of Language and Gender in Hawker Culture in Kibuye Market, Kisumu County, Kenya

Adhiambo Jackline Ouno
MA Candidate, Department of Languages, Literature and Communication,
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya
Joseph Maina
Lecturer, Department of Languages, Literature and Communication,
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya
Linah Akaka
Lecturer, Department of Languages and Performing Arts,
Daystar University, Kenya

Abstract:
Language is part and parcel of human experience; every aspect of human life depends on communication. Language also defines a person's way of life and the transmission of social and cultural norms, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and values. Language, by extension, facilitates the reinforcement of existing beliefs about group features and distinctions between groups. Language structures and patterns of language use are believed to be responsible for the perpetuation of stereotypes and, in some instances, reifying one group's dominance over the other. It is perceived that men and women use different expressions. Gender is one of the social constructions that have been studied in language use for quite some time now. These studies have, however, not focused on how language dynamics intersect with gender identities and roles, especially in the context of hawker culture. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to analyse the nexus of language and gender in hawker culture in Kibuye Market in Kisumu County in Kenya. This study is anchored on social constructionist theory as proposed by Searle (2007). To obtain data from a target population of one hundred (100) hawkers, we have employed a stratified purposeful sampling technique. The primary data collection methods were interviews and video recording. We have carried out thematic and inferential data analysis methods. This study concluded that patterns of language use in hawker culture revealed cultural norms, beliefs, traditions and values that were useful in the construction of gender identities. These linguistic structures not only demonstrated the persistence of social stereotypes but also group dynamism. Language use in hawker culture represented social constructs outside business operations. The results of this study will enrich academic scholarship on the gendered use of linguistic varieties.

Keywords: *Language use, gender, identity, social constructivism, roles, sociolinguistics, sociolect, idiolect*

1. Introduction

Language is an integral component of human experiences. Every aspect of human life depends on some form of communication. People can express elements of their individual or group identities in varied ways. Many aspects of a person's life define their identity. Language can both give someone identity and allow them to share the aspects of it, such as their age, gender or where they live. In this sociolinguistic study, we rely on language use in hawker culture in the Kibuye market in Kisumu to demonstrate the relationship between language and gender identities.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study benefited from the 'dynamic' or 'social constructionist' theory as proposed by Searle (2007). Social constructionist theory is one of the most contemporary approaches to language and gender. According to Searle (2007), 'standard accounts of language in philosophy of language and linguistics tend to underestimate, and therefore misrepresent, the role of society and social convention' (p. 17). Speech does not fall into a natural gendered category; the dynamic nature and multiple factors of interaction facilitate socially appropriate gendered constructs. In a similar vein, West and Zimmerman (1975) describe these constructs as 'doing gender' instead of the speech itself necessarily being classified in a particular category. In other words, these social constructs, while affiliated with particular genders, can be utilised by speakers as they see fit.

Communication styles are always a product of context, and as such, gender differences tend to be most pronounced in single-gender groups. One explanation for this is that people accommodate their language to the style of the person they are interacting with. Therefore, in a mixed-gender group, gender differences tend to be less pronounced. A

similarly important observation is that this accommodation is usually towards the language style, not the gender of the person. That is, a polite and empathic man will tend to be accommodated based on their being polite and empathic, rather than their being a man.

Ochs (1992), however, argues that gender can be indexed directly and indirectly. Direct indexicality is the primary relationship between linguistics resources (such as lexicon, morphology, syntax, phonology, dialect, and language) and gender. For instance, the pronouns 'he' and 'she' directly indexes 'male' and 'female.' There can, however, be a secondary relationship between linguistic resources and gender where the linguistic resources can index certain acts, activities or stances, which then indirectly index gender. In other words, these linguistic resources help constitute gender. Examples include the Japanese particles 'wa' and 'ze.' The former directly indexes delicate intensity, which then indirectly indexes the female 'voice,' while the latter directly indexes coarse intensity, which then indirectly indexes the male 'voice.'

For purposes of systematic analysis of the data collected, Bo's (2015) six theses were employed:

- The primary function of language is communication rather than representation, so language is essentially a social phenomenon,
- Linguistic meaning originates in the causal interaction of humans with the world and in the social interaction of people with people,
- Linguistic meaning consists in the correlation of language to the world established by the collective intentions of a language community,
- Linguistic meaning is based on the conventions produced by a language community in their long process of communication,
- Semantic knowledge is empirical and encyclopedic knowledge distilled and condensed, and the uses of language accepted by a linguistic community and
- Language and meaning change rapidly or slowly as the communicative practice of a linguistic community does' (p. 87).

The primary focus in this theoretical framework is the relational triad of language, humans (a linguistic community) and the world.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods research design as it synergised both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This choice was inspired by the need to enhance the credibility of the outcomes of this research and reinforce the validity of its conclusions. Creswell and Clark's (2011) typology of 'commonly employed designs' comprises six 'major mixed methods designs.' However, for the purposes of this study, the embedded design or explanatory concurrent design (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) was employed as we intended to collect and analyse both types of data simultaneously. This approach took limited time or did not require a lot of resources. Besides, it is flexible (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). Kibuye Market in Kisumu County in Kenya was the study area. The focus is on hawkers in the market, their interactions with customers, mannerisms, and other paralinguistic elements that define their business culture. The study analyses the utterances and other linguistic features to determine how they facilitate the construction of gender identities and roles. It employed stratified purposeful sampling techniques. The target population for this study was one hundred (100) hawkers. To obtain a stratified purposeful sample, the sampling frame was divided into strata (primarily female and male participants). Other strata included: sex, age, ethnicity and business type. A purposive sample was thereafter selected from each stratum. This sampling design can, according to Miles & Huberman (1994), facilitate analysis of group dynamics, diversity, and comparisons. This technique was used to sample thirty (30) – fifteen (15) male and fifteen (15) female – participants. The interviews were coded as IB1 to IB30. Morse (1994) recommends between thirty to fifty (30-50) sample population for interviews in qualitative research. Another ten (10) hawkers were sampled purposefully for audio-visual recording. The video recordings of speech acts by ten (10) hawkers were marked RA1-RA10. A blend of visual records and participant observation was used to gather paralinguistic features. Participants were chosen based on coinciding availability, as they were not necessarily well known to the researcher, to avoid biases in choices of personality type. The participants, both male and female, were recorded over a period of approximately three (3) to five (5) minutes. Data analysis was carried out thematically and inferentially.

4. Discussion

Language and social identity are closely interwoven. The language(s) we speak and how we use language can reflect and shape our social identities, which are the various ways in which we identify ourselves with others. A person's identity can be influenced by different factors (parents, peers and region) at different ages. These factors can influence a person's language use. During childhood, a person's language will mirror their parents as they are the ones with whom they will interact the most. When speakers reach secondary school, they may start to adopt their peers' language features due to socialising with more social groups. This factor is a little more controversial than the others, as there is a lot of conflicting research on the differences between men's and women's use of language. Some researchers suggest that differences in speech are due to genetics, whereas others think that women's lower status in society has had an impact on their use of language. In this paper, we focus on the intersection between linguistic choices in hawker culture and gender identities.

Female vendors who had ventured into selling clothes were very strategic in their choice of words and target audience. Male vendors appealed to the emotions of female customers, as shown in the excerpt from utterances of RA1: '*Mrembo, chukka hii peeked mzee. Usiabishe mzee. Kama unataka ataboke, mpatie kakitu safi kwanza. Atatoboka. Cheki tu.*

Jama ang'are in and out' (Beautiful, take this to mzee. Do not embarrass him. If you want to get something from him, buy him a nice gift. You will get what you want. Look at this. Your man should look good in and out). From the interviews we conducted, women were convinced that women were likely to buy pants and ties for their husbands and boyfriends because buying such gifts drew them closer to their partners. Pants revived romantically dead relationships. Ties gave them opportunities to look their partners in the eyes and hopefully win kisses in the morning. Women were more concerned about their relationships and were always willing to do anything to attract the attention of their partners. It was easier for them to ask for favours from men by offering these gifts to them.

From the above speech acts, women seem more preoccupied with physical appearance, and appreciating their efforts to make themselves presentable is a significant step towards arresting their attention. They value this kind of feedback. The repetitive use of 'beautiful one' can be understood in this sense. It would appear that women are also responsible for the grooming of their husbands or partners. This excerpt also suggests that they are financially dependent on their partners. The Domain Theory, which was originated by Schmidt (1986), posits that language cannot be studied without the social context in which communication takes place. The way the members of a society choose varieties of a language or switch towards another language determines the influence of social factors on language choice. The differences in linguistic choices of hawkers can be interpreted in this context. Their choices are dependent on the sex of the customers they perform to. In Fishman's (1977) version of the Domain Theory of language, domains are described as constructs that explain language and which are supposed to be a more powerful explanatory tool than the observable parameters like topic, place, and interlocutor (Fishman, 1972, 1977).

Fishman (1977) examines the use of languages in different institutional contexts in a multilingual community. According to him, 'domains attempt to designate the major clusters of interaction situations that occur in particular multilingual settings' (Fishman, 1977, p. 19). Fishman further states that there are five domains of language use, which include family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. The Domain Theory informs this study because hawkers in Kibuye Market, Kisumu County, are most likely a multilingual society, which presents different domains. These domains demand different languages. Related to this approach is the dominance approach, according to which men's and women's language use reflects social power differences. Studies adhering to this approach often suggest that male social dominance is performed through language use, to wit, by means of interruptions (Zimmerman & West, 1975). Then, in the 80s, the difference approach entered the discussion, suggesting that differences between women's and men's language use follow sociocultural differences between women and men as two distinct subcultures (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Thorne, 1993). Studies departing from these three theoretical perspectives often have a priori expectations of finding gender differences in language use. As a counterreaction to the essentialist idea of gender as a fixed factor inherent to biological sex, the dynamic approach was initiated in the early '90s. According to this approach, gender is not determined by sex but rather is a social accomplishment constructed through behaviour and discourse and interacts with other categories such as age, social class, and ethnicity.

To draw the attention of male customers, both male and female vendors appealed to their traditional masculinity, projecting them as home builders and massaging their egos. RA2, a female hawker who vented second-hand clothes meant for women, made this call: '*Nunulilia Brembo kango buda. Pelekea mama nguo. Hii nguo ni maridadi kabisa. Jenga nyumba, bro*.' (Buy this dress for the beautiful one, man. Take this dress to *mama*. This dress is very beautiful. Build your house, *bro*). *Mama* literally means 'mother,' but in the context of this speech act, it is a corrupted Swahili word for 'wife, girlfriend or female partner.' Bro, on the other hand, is a truncated form of the English word 'brother.' '*Mama*' and '*bro*' are sociolectal choices largely associated with young people in Kenya. By projecting men as home builders, language is used to establish, as suggested by Searle (2007), social hierarchies. Men are almost typically expected to buy beautiful gifts to build close relationships with their partners. Fifty (50%) of the hawkers we interviewed regarded this as an indication that women were materialistic. The other half of the interviewees dismissed this as a stereotypical claim. What the second hawker demonstrated was that gifts symbolise different things depending on who presented them or to whom they were presented.

The third recording revealed more intricacies about linguistic choices. RA3, a male vendor, says: '*Unajua uchumi imekuwa ngumu, bwana. Wewe ni mwanaume unaelewa. Haki maze unipromote. Nunua hata ka moja. Usiniache nirudi kwa hao bila chochote. Sijauza chochote na watoi wanaitegea*' (You know these hard times, *bwana*. You are a man, and you understand. Please, man, promote me. Buy even one item. Don't let me return to the house without something. I have not sold any items, and my children are relying on me). Language is used to assert group identity; speech acts are utilised for self-identification (Searle, 2007). The speech acts, in this case, are meant to appeal to masculinity. Masculine identity, therefore, is accorded a broader social interpretation. The hawker is projecting an existing social construct and expects the customer to understand this socially constructed identity. The speaker expected the customer to identify himself with him. He was also expecting the male customers to sympathise with him and even empathise with him and respond to *their* collective shame as men. What it would mean for a man to go back to the house without any coin when children are depending on *them* and have confidence that *they* should be able to provide can be embarrassing. The male vendor, like the male customer we mentioned earlier, is concerned about his ego. He does not want it to be bruised. Not being in a position to provide for the family puts the man in an awkward spot. The speaker is also suggesting that men are more conversant with economic issues. Perhaps this could imply that they give more to their family financially than their female counterparts. It is important to note that the man bought more than one item from the hawker. This is a projection of traditional masculinity, yet men still subscribe to it.

RA4 was a female hawker. Unlike their male counterparts who capitalised on the safety of collective masculinity, their utterances sounded genuine and individualised. She says: '*Nunua kahawa hapa. Bei nafuu. Usikubali kupigwa na*

baridi. Jenga mwanadada. Dada, kuja na mzae mpige vita pamoja' (Buy coffee here. It is affordable. Do not allow yourself to be affected by the cold. Build a woman. Sister, come with your partner and fight this cold war together). The speaker recognises the power dynamics of her society. She also uses language to identify herself as a woman. She is talking to a male customer in the company of his partner. In these speech acts, social realities are created through what Searle (2007) calls 'collective intentionality and linguistic declarations,' but collective intentionality does not override individual identity. Social roles, obligations, and social structures are recognised and maintained through language use. RA4 creates her own social realities and hierarchies through shared linguistic practices and mutual recognition of other social identities.

The interviews conducted during this study revealed that female hawkers dominated food vending. Though men also ventured into this business, it was dominated by women. From the interviews we conducted, twenty-five (25) participants were convinced that many women opted for vending food items. As opposed to their male counterparts who exhibited preferences for processed food such as sausages, smokies, bottled water and soft drinks, women tended to perishable and fresh agricultural products such as fruits, homemade drinks and warm beverages like tea and coffee. The interviewees did not quite delve into the intricacies, such as economic implications; however, several things could be inferred from these business choices. Women were unlikely to take financial risks and preferred food items that were cheaper and did require a lot of capital. Though not overtly expressed in these interviews, female hawkers seemed more economically marginalised than their male counterparts. This generalisation is not absolute, as these barriers did not apply to all hawkers we interviewed.

RA5 is a male pesticide vendor. The vending of pesticides was largely dominated by men. He says: '*Aibu ndogo ndogo isikuaribie starehe na bae wako. Watakuaribia jina hapa nje. Waseme huwezi make. Badala ya kuabishwa afadhali uchukue dawa. Spray moja tu itaua w*rote: Don't allow small embarrassments to interfere with your comfort and your partner's. They will tarnish your name out here. They will claim you can't measure up. Instead of embarrassing yourself, buy pesticides. One spray will kill all of them). This vendor was selling sprays for bedbugs. Understandably, bedbugs can be a nuisance. The sight of a bedbug can easily irritate. The thought of one's partner being bitten by a bedbug in one's house can be humiliating for a man. These speech acts, therefore, like RA3 above, also appeal to traditional masculinity. Virility is the hallmark of masculinity; dysfunctionality is frowned upon. The ego defines manhood. Embarrassment can hurt a man's ego. It becomes worse when a man's sexual weaknesses are exposed. He may find it difficult to handle. A man's reputation is worth a lot more than many other things. Identity construction, as posited by Searle (2007), entails the dynamic process through which individuals and groups define and express their sense of self. According to Searle's (2007) social constructivist theory, language plays an instrumental in identity-related actions. It also establishes social realities that define who people are within their speech communities. The hawker's speech also speaks of blackmail. The male customer is being manipulated. He risks damaging his reputation if he does not buy the pesticides. To sell these products, male hawkers tend to exaggerate things. Men are not wholly truthful.

Men's and women's choices to use culturally shaped 'masculine' or 'feminine' language within certain communication activities or for specific conversational goals, as demonstrated in the aforementioned speech acts, are described as 'indexing gender' (Ochs, 1992), 'performing gender' (Butler, 1993), or 'doing gender' (Speer & Stokoe, 2011). In the 21st century, the most eminent perspective on sex/ gender and language builds on the dynamic approach as it focuses on how women and men use language to (re-)construct and present themselves in interactions in various contexts, as intimated by Coates (2016) and Litosseliti (2006). The biological approach to the explanation for differences in language use between women and men is losing traction. This view assumes that evolutionary processes and brain differences are the cause of differences between women and men, for instance, in pitch range and vowel duration and assertive and affiliative behavior (Hahn *et al*., 2016). Gender identities are not necessarily static, as demonstrated in the above discussion. It is impractical to suggest that typical categorisations exist. This explains why recent studies have argued that human brains are 'unique mosaics of features' and that brain structures cannot be classified as typical for female or male brains (Joel *et al*., 2019).

Male vendors, RA7 and RA8, Burundian by nationality, hawked shoes. They appeared young and physically predisposed to walking long distances in search of potential customers. Both of them carried heavy loads. Dominant discourses about socially desirable male bodies and practices seemingly motivated their 'drive for muscularity' (McCreary, 2002). Carts were also largely driven by men. Unlike women who carried their items in baskets, male hawkers carted their wares in Kibuye Market. They looked comparatively lighter than what their male counterparts carried in the carts. Ninety per cent (90%) of the respondents we interviewed indicated that physical strength determined the type of business a hawker conducted. RA6, RA9 and RA10 were female vendors. The three female hawkers ventured into cosmetics, groundnuts and pillows, respectively. RA6 suggested that identities had changed significantly and, unlike in the past, they received male customers: '*Piny achieve Sani. Chuo suko kendo wicho kokegi*' (The world has changed now. Men do their hair and paint their nails.' The three also used paralinguistic features that distinguished them from the male vendors. They touched themselves, nodded and smiled more than the two Burundians. Unlike the two male hawkers, RA7 and RA8, whose speeches were largely blunt and took a short period of time, the three female hawkers expressed themselves in many words and took longer durations.

Though we were interested in a variety of indicators, our interviews focused on six key areas. To gather the pieces we required, we unpacked the main thematic areas and identified words that were suitable to the respondents. Most of them were not able to respond in English; consequently, the interviews were conducted in Kiswahili or Dholuo. The majority of the interviewees, eighty-three percent to be precise, observed that hawkers used language for self-identification and that self-identification was a business strategy. In twenty-eight out of the thirty hawkers interviewed,

collective intentionality was also a predominant element of identity consciousness. The respondents identified themselves collectively as men or women. In ninety percent of the interviews, the language patterns and gender identities created reflected the wider society. Gender identities were not necessarily fixed, but social stereotypes continued. Younger hawkers contested this view and insisted that society had changed significantly. Age, therefore, was behaviorally manifested in language use. Paralinguistic features, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and body language, added emphasis, emotion and context to the spoken words. Male hawkers wore warmer faces while they interacted with potential female customers, suggesting that women were more excitable than their male counterparts. Male hawkers had 'flatter intonation patterns than [their female counterparts] in pitch range and pitch heights' (McConnell-Ginet, 1983, p. 73). The choice of words was also determined by sex. The results of the interviews can be summarised as follows:

No.	Focus Areas for the Interviews	The Number of Interviewees Who Agreed	Percentages
1	Language use is used for self-identification	25	83%
2	There is collective intentionality in language use in hawker culture	28	93%
3	Language use in hawking reflected what happened in the society	27	90%
4	Linguistic patterns show that gender stereotypes still persist.	15	50%
5	Choice of words is determined by sex	26	87%
6	Paralinguistic features reinforce group identities	29	97%

Table 1

5. Conclusion

The analysis of hawker culture in Kibuye Market in Kisumu County demonstrated that language and gender are intertwined; it was not possible to separate one from the other. Though traditional conceptualisations of masculine and feminine identities persisted, it is worth noting that language dynamics exhibited in hawker culture reinforced the dynamism of gender identities. Male and female hawkers used language to construct and reconstruct their identities as they interacted with or called out potential customers. Language, as posited by Searle (2007), is, therefore, deeply interwoven with power dynamics. Social structures and power relations dictated the hawkers' ability to perform speech acts or to be recognised in specific roles. Not only did hawkers use language to communicate and sell their goods, but they also did so to navigate power relations within their speech communities and with external society. Gender identities were also reflected in paralinguistic choices. The symbolic codes they chose reflected the linguistic choices in the wider society. The gender identities that they projected in the hawkers' speech acts represented social constructs outside the business context.

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