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To cite this article: Annah Kariuki, Fridah Erastus Kanana & Hildah Kebeya (2015) The growth and use of Sheng in advertisements in selected businesses in Kenya, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27:2, 229-246, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2015.1029879](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1029879)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1029879>



Published online: 22 Apr 2015.



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The growth and use of Sheng in advertisements in selected businesses in Kenya

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For a long time Sheng was perceived as an argot language, a variety restricted in its domains of use. It was seen as a language of the urban youth in Nairobi. However, there has been an emerging trend whereby big corporate companies, such as mobile phone companies, insurances, financial institutions (e.g. banks) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use Sheng to market their products. Therefore, Sheng is becoming a versatile selling strategy in Kenya. The shift in the realm of communication in advertising and awareness campaigns from Standard English and Kiswahili to a non-standard, peer language – Sheng – has thus become common. This draws attention to the fact that Sheng may have apparently shed off the stigma associated with it and has become a necessary marketing tool in the twenty-first century. Based on a sociolinguistic approach, this paper, therefore, investigates the linguistic change in the Kenyan context of advertising and creating awareness by selected businesses, NGOs and government bodies. The paper seeks to establish how selected corporates manipulate and use Sheng to fit their purposes of their business. Sheng lexical words and phrases and other non-standard varieties that are manipulated will be identified and analysed.

Keywords: Sheng; urban youth languages; manipulation; communication; advertisement; awareness; identity

Different hypotheses have been advanced by researchers as to the exact origin of Sheng. Mazrui (1995) points out that it is a variety whose origin in society can be attributed to factors that are extra-linguistic in nature. He further argues that the foundation of Sheng lies in the traditional code-switching between Swahili and English (hence the term Sh-eng). The origin of Sheng is also credited to the demand for a lingua franca in the colonial period during the beginnings of urbanization in the country. Osinde (1986) argues that Sheng sprang up in areas where English and Kiswahili were already established as *linguae francae*. Spyropoulos (1987) observes that the ethnically and linguistically diverse Kenyan workers brought together in plantations and urban centres in the colonial era had imperfect knowledge of both English and Swahili and thus spoke a mixture of broken English and imperfect Kiswahili, mixed with their own vernacular, which their offspring enhanced into Sheng. Many scholars have studied Sheng, its origin and development, and the function it serves in society: Momanyi (2009), Githiora (2002), Muaka (2011) and Iraki (2009), among others.

Language is subject to human manipulation in order to reflect those aspects of experience that sustain it. It reflects people's positions in an abstract, hierarchical society demarcating social class, sex and age group. People in any given society enable a language to thrive from the way it is used.

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In Kenya, the growth of Sheng has not only been enhanced by the youth but also by entrepreneurs, companies, institutions and different organizations. Sheng has been skilfully used by corporate companies, churches and even the government to promote certain ideologies, principles and issues in a bid to reach out to a greater Kenyan audience.

Some few years ago, Sheng was a highly stigmatized variety and viewed as a language used by thugs and young *matatu* touts from low-income neighbourhoods (Muaka 2011). However, this variety has now become acceptable in mainstream society as a way of identifying with the youth who comprise about 60% of Kenya's population. Prominent businesses in the country are today shifting to Sheng to market their products a deviation from societal expected norms where normally they would have used English or Kiswahili.

Sheng has caught the attention of producers of print and electronic media, especially in advertisements (Mutonya 2008). Sheng is perceived to have a social function (Fink 2005) as a medium of social interaction specific to certain in-groups. It is passed down to give identity and pride to a group that maintains its distinct features. Mutonya (2008) addresses different types of contemporary Kiswahili printed advertisements focusing on language use, tone and theme. He observes that using non-standard Kiswahili forms in advertisements helps to associate the products with desirable traits of novelty, change, urban sophistication and youthfulness. He further notes that Sheng can also be used to engage the youth in public dialogue on taboo topics and describes the language as a face-saving tool.

Scholars have argued that linguistic choice takes place as a result of specifiable social and situational constraints and incentives which are quite amenable to analysis (Blom and Gumperz 1972). Mutonya (2008) observes that significant shifts in language use and tone of Kiswahili print advertisements in Kenya began with the advent of competitive advertising in the 1980s. Commercial advertisements in Kiswahili newspapers and outdoor advertising hitherto adhered strictly to the norms of standard Kiswahili. What may have pushed the marketers to incorporate non-standard language forms could be market rivalries, influenced by current social and linguistic trends. Today, Sheng has found a larger mainstream audience as it continues to evolve in the streets and estates of the city of its birth (Nairobi) and is the preferred vocabulary of persuasion by marketers and advertisers, effectively allowing marketers to expand their horizons and to reach new consumers.

In advertisements the issue of language choice is critical in persuasion of clients. Language choice is determined by the source company, the target audience, the product category of the brand, etc. The use of Sheng as a marketing strategy is not well documented but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is common practice. This paper provides examples/evidence that shows that the use of Sheng by corporates is a successful marketing strategy and is a means of reaching out to the youth, urbanites and Kenyans in general. The paper, therefore, attempts to explain the dynamics that are involved in the use of an urban youth variety, a non-standard variety, as an important marketing tool in Kenya.

As we show in this paper, Sheng is being used by leading corporate companies such as telecommunication companies, banks and insurances to market their products. Government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)¹ have also not been left behind. They use Sheng for non-profit advertising to create awareness to the public, lobby for/and market certain policies or ideologies/ideas. Therefore, Sheng, previously described as ghetto language, an argot, an anti-language, is today finding broad use in mainstream society.

Kenya is a multilingual country in which over 50 languages are spoken – English and Kiswahili dominate as they have been given official recognition. Among the languages spoken, there are also the unstable youth varieties, namely, Sheng and Engsh. Ogechi (2005) observes that Sheng has morphosyntax based on Kiswahili grammar and Engsh has English as

the dominant donor language. It provides most of the grammatical framework within which words from other languages are blended (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997).

Before the 1980s, the Kenyan market was dominated by a few multinational monopolies and foreign-owned advertising agencies. Kiswahili advertisements were devoid of any attention grabbing activity and only targeted the working class and the city's underclass (Mutonya 2008). English advertisements, on the other hand, targeted the urban elite and middle class. Non-standard Kiswahili forms were ridiculed and stigmatized and did not gain attention. On the contrary, in contemporary Nairobi, the non-standard varieties are no longer ridiculed; they have gained a lot of popularity.

After the ratification of a regional trade agreement that envisaged a common market for countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, competing products on store shelves saw vigorous marketing strategies for new and old products. The ratification allowed for the uncensored movement of people and goods across regional boundaries. The mode of advertising equally changed; and products and services were promoted using billboards, promotional events and van advertising plus other non-conventional methods such as bicycle and carriage advertising. Mutonya (2008) argues that advertisers introduced non-standard language to promote services and products because such language projected aspects of the city's ordinary speech, that is, code-switching and use of urban slang. Thus, advertisers changed the advertising discourse in Nairobi and heralded a trend that is gradually transforming Nairobi's linguistic space.

McLaughlin (2009) contends that youth varieties become urban languages and even languages of wider communication. Each urban code is shaped by local conditions and a desire to construct identities that reflect the realities of the youth's dynamic lifestyle. The question one would ask is: Why would multinational companies use an urban code in advertisements? What identity would the company be constructing among the youth? The answers to these questions are multi-faced. There is the emotive nature of the codes, that is, the youth codes carry a heavy emotional charge, which the companies have noted; the codes also articulate a new identity and localize the product, thus drawing more appeal to consumers.

According to Labov (1972), non-standard varieties are considered low prestige, but in some situations languages stigmatized by the education system still enjoy a covert prestige among working-class men for the very reason that they are considered incorrect. These situations occur when the speaker wants to gain recognition, acceptance or solidarity within specific and non-prestigious groups of people to signal to other speakers their identification with that group. Non-standard varieties retain their vitality through their use in interpersonal negotiations. Githinji (2008) observes that non-standard languages, though stigmatized in the mainstream, find favourable evaluations, especially among the marginalized groups, due to their perception as indices of local identity, as well as resources of negotiating local solidarity. The use of Sheng (a non-standard variety) in advertising could be as a result of market rivalry. Thus, through advertisements, Sheng allows marketers to expand their horizons and reach new consumers, in this case the urban youth.

The data used in this paper were collected over a period of four months through interview schedules, document analysis and questionnaires. A number of companies and institutions such as government institutions and agencies, local corporate business and multinational companies were randomly sampled. Companies from four different categories, namely, commercial banks, telecommunication, manufacturing and allied companies and media houses were purposively sampled. The sample constituted six telecommunication companies, seven commercial banks, two manufacturing and allied and two media (print) companies. There is massive competition among banks and telecommunication industries to market similar products to Kenyans. Therefore, more companies from these two areas were sampled so as to observe the language dynamics in the adverts. The researchers then collected and analysed selected brochures,

pamphlets, posters and billboard advertisements. In addition, 10 marketing or advertising officers from the selected businesses were interviewed to establish why the companies use the non-standard varieties and how they choose the Sheng words that they use in the advertisements. Three marketing officers were selected from the telecommunication industry and three from the banking industry; and two from each of the other industries. The marketing officers were asked to give the actual meanings of the Sheng words and phrases used in advertisements.

The consumers of these advertisements were also interviewed. Thirty clients (respondents) who buy or use products advertised in Sheng were randomly sampled. They were asked to give their independent interpretation of the adverts. Therefore, they provided the meanings they derived from Sheng words and phrases they encountered in advertisements. Lastly, the consumers were asked to fill out questionnaires that sought to find out their perception on the use of non-standard varieties in advertisements, whom they thought the advertisements targeted and why.

In the following section, data are presented to (a) show how companies manipulate Sheng, (b) explain why they manipulate the code and, finally, (c) to discuss and exemplify the loaded nature of the code.

Data collected from the consumers indicated that 95% of them could easily identify the Sheng or non-standard Kiswahili forms used by advertisers. They reported that the catchy phrases used in advertising enable the clients to recall the products. The use of pictorials was also noted to be a very positive strategy to persuade and convince the consumers – that indeed buying a product would enable one to reap other benefits such as winning a house or lots of money. It was also clear from the respondents interviewed that most advertisements were very emotive. They reported that listening to the winners of a certain promotion who would appear on a TV narrate their success stories appealed to their emotions and encouraged them to participate with the hope that they would be the next winners.

We noted during our research that companies use different words or phrases to advertise similar products and to persuade clients to choose a certain product. However, the derived or underlying message communicated by different words/phrases is the same. As we have pointed out in the first section, language choice in advertisements is influenced by three important factors, namely: the product category, target audience and business rivalry. These factors are discussed in detail in this section.

The following data show how *business rivalry* has influenced *different companies'* marketing of similar products in innovative ways.

The data in [Table 1](#) outline the following: the companies are all local Kenyan banks marketing different types of bank accounts. These accounts are targeting young savers, for example, university and college students, children and small business owners/entrepreneurs. The banks use innovative ways, through choice of words that will appeal to the target audience, to market the accounts. For instance, when Equity Bank launched a students' account with a slogan 'na manage account yangu', Kenya Commercial Bank (henceforth KCB) developed a very colourful advert with the slogan 'Bankika' na KCB. The slogan sounded musical and unique because of the accompanying background melody, which appealed to very many young savers. A manager at KCB acknowledged that this was the most successful account (product) the bank has had in the recent past. They attributed the success of the account to the choice of words 'Bankika'. The words 'poa', 'mdosi', 'bizna' and 'biz wise' have all been used to market other products targeting the young savers and entrepreneurs. Examples of the pictorial adverts targeting university students are shown in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#).

In addition to business/market rivalry, *the product category* is very crucial in determining the language used in the advertisement. When a product is considered a *necessity*, for example, airtime (prepaid telephone service), Kiswahili and Sheng words are the preferred choices,

Table 1. Common products vis-à-vis target audience and code choice.

Company ^a	Product	Target audience	Code choice	Gloss
Equity Bank	Students' account	University students	Na-manage account yangu	I manage my account
KCB	Students' account	Young adults/college students	Bankika na KCB	get banked with KCB
Equity Bank	Junior member account	Children (0–18 years)	Ni poa kuwa junior member	It's good to be a junior member
Family Bank	Junior member account	Children (0–18 years)	Mdosi junior account	A wealthy child's account
Family Bank	Business account	Small-scale entrepreneurs	Jenga bizna account	Expand (a) business account
Cooperative Bank	Business account	Small-scale entrepreneurs	Bis wize loans	Expand business wise loans

^aThe companies listed in this article are large corporates in the country; Safaricom is the largest telecommunication company with over 16 million Kenyans subscribing to its network. Equity Bank is one of the largest Kenyan banks that, at its inception, targeted the 'unbanked' (low-income earners). Today it boasts of being one of the largest local banks in Kenya; Delmonte is a multinational that grows and packages fruits and fruit juices; Nation Media Group is the largest media house in Kenya with both print and electronic media.

probably since the target audience who speaks the lingua franca is larger. In other words, when a company targets a larger market size the use of Kiswahili and Sheng is prominent in the advert; when a product is considered a *luxury*, for example, natural fruit juice, a combination of English and Kiswahili words are used but, usually, English is dominant. Examples are given in Table 2.

In the examples outlined earlier, airtime as a product is considered a necessity by many Kenyans who cannot afford fixed telephone lines in their houses. It enables many people to interact for socio-economic reasons. Therefore, buying prepaid cards is the only way to communicate. For products considered necessities, the companies will use language that is not only appealing to the general audience but also convincing. For example, the advert by the YU Mobile Company (a telecommunication company) is meant to leverage similar products that other telecommunication companies offer – airtime. Most of these companies have a prepaid billing system whereby customers are charged per minute/second. Therefore, the slogan 'je call rate inakatsia maisha? Hamia YU mobile' is intended to convince customers to migrate to Yu Mobile Company that has a flat rate (note the choice of the word 'katsia' (disrupt) which is in Sheng). On the other

Table 2. Product category vs. code choice.

Company	Product category	Code choice	Gloss
Equity Bank	Luxury	Na-manage account yangu	I manage my account
Delmonte	Luxury	win mara that that with Delmonte	Win instantly with Delmonte
Nation Media Group	Luxury	Nation Hela	Nation money
Safaricom	Necessity	Bamba ubambike	Get/grab it and be happy
Yu Mobile	Necessity	Je call rate inakatsia maisha? Hamia Yu mobile	Does a call rate disrupt life?
Airtel	Necessity	kwachua na Airtel	Migrate to Yu mobile Win with Airtel

ACHIEVERS STUDENT ACCOUNT

Na-manage account yangu

Opening an Achievers Student Account is easy. Open yours today and enjoy the following benefits:

- No ledger fees
- Free HELB processing
- Free financial education on how to manage money
- Discounted Visa debit card
- Access your account through your phone

KARIBU MEMBER EQUITY
Bank - Your Learning, Career Partner

Equity Centre 9th Floor, Hospital Road, Upper Hill, Tel: +254-020-2262000, 0711 026000, 0732 112000,
Email: info@equitybank.co.ke, www.equitybank.co.ke

Figure 1. Equity Bank advertisement (young achievers' account).

hand, Safaricom, also a telecommunication company, has a large customer base that uses the prepaid service. To target the low-income earners, the company introduced prepaid cards that cost as little as KSh 10 (7 pence in the UK). They introduced this product with the slogan 'bamba kumi' (get/receive/take/be happy with a 10) and later it was extended to cover higher denominations such as 50 and 100. To market the entire range of the product, the company launched a marketing slogan 'bamba ubambike'. But, the company retained the billing system which the YU Mobile Company has used as an anti-Safaricom marketing strategy by referring to the billing system as 'call rate' which disrupts ('inakatsia') communication. Airtel, also a telecommunication company, markets its airtime with a 'bit in the mouth'. For example, 'kwachua', which is derived from standard Kiswahili word 'chukua', means 'to win' in the advert. The 'bit' in this advert is the suggestion that buying airtime from the company would win one some money in



Figure 2. KCB advertisement (young savers' account).

a raffle. One of the key findings in this research is that the companies, therefore, come up with different words to market similar products to the target audience.

Delmonte juice is a luxury product thus the combination of English and Kiswahili in the phrase '*win mara that that with delmonte*' – English is dominantly used. The use of 'that that' in this construction needs clarification. It is not an ordinary construction in English or everyday Kiswahili. However, it is suspected that the 'that' is a literal Kiswahili translation of the reduplicated demonstrative 'hiyo hiyo'. There were no other examples in our data and therefore such literal translations would not be considered a common trend or a productive process. Delmonte juice in the Kenyan market targets the middle and upper class, since its pricing is above what an average- to low-income earner in Kenya can afford, hence the category 'luxury'.

The last factor that influences the company's choice of codes in the adverts is the *target audience*. Most of the advertisements targeting the youth, young adults and low-income earners will use the catchy words in Sheng, non-standard Kiswahili or standard Kiswahili. English words may be used to give additional details/information about the product. In addition, if a company is targeting university students with its products, there is more use of English than Kiswahili affixes and vocabulary to coin the Sheng words (as we see in the examples by Equity Bank and KCB in Table 1).

Table 3 demonstrates an interesting phenomenon. The advertisements from the companies have at least one word from either Sheng or non-standard Kiswahili, except the advertisement by Cooperative Bank that uses Kiswahili throughout. If we consider the advertisements by Safaricom and Airtel, we notice that they are marketing a similar product and targeting a similar category of clients/consumers. When Safaricom introduced a per second billing system, Airtel, which previously had the largest number of customers, lost most of its clients to Safaricom and other service providers who introduced a cheaper billing system. Later, most of these companies discovered that Safaricom's billing system was still more expensive than what they offered to their customers, and that the secret of Safaricom's success was vested in the company's ability to convince its customers that when charged per second they need not pay for a minute which they had not utilized. In reality, the second billing system ended up being more expensive

Table 3. Target audience vs. code choice.

Company	Product	Target audience	Code choice	Gloss
Coca-Cola	Soft drink	Youth	Wahi kuwahi	Win and win more
Coca-Cola	Soft drink	Middle- and low-income earners	Chota chapaa na Coca-cola	Scoop (win) money with Coca-Cola
Nation Media Group ^a	Sports jacket	Youth	Toklezea na jalee	Be smart/stand out in a (sports) jacket
KCB	Bank agency	Middle- and low-income earners	KCB mtaani	KCB in the neighbourhood
Family Bank	Mobile banking	Middle- and low-income earners	M-kodi powered by pesa pap!/M-kanisa	M-rent powered by money pap! (instantly)/M-church
Family Bank	Savings account	Middle- and low-income earners	Dosika na pesa pap!	Get rich with instant money
CFC Stanbic Bank	Savings account	Middle- and low-income earners	Macash ... leo hustler, kesho sonko ^b	A lot of money ... today you are struggling, tomorrow you are wealthy
Cooperative Bank	Bank agency	Middle- and low-income earners	Coop kwa jirani, karibu wakati wowote	Cooperative at the neighbours, welcome any time
Safaricom	Prepaid cards	Low-income earners	Bamba Ubambike	Get it and be happy
Safaricom	Prepaid cards	Low-income earners	Wika na 2 bob!	Shout with two shillings
Safaricom	Prepaid cards	Low-income earners	Maliza stori kwanza & pay later with okoa Jahazi	Finish up talking and pay later
Airtel	Prepaid cards	Low-income earners	Chanuka na Airtel, usigongwe tena	Become wise with Airtel, do not be overcharged again

^aThe marketing department of this company informed the researchers that they do not use Sheng to market their products but what they referred to as 'Kenyanese', a combination of English and Kiswahili words. Kenyanese, they argued, uses existing Kiswahili words but does not coin new words.

^bThe Sheng form 'sonko' is derived from 'mzungu' (a white person). A white person is expected to be wealthy; this is the perception of the society.

to consumers if a conversation lasted more than a minute. In retaliation, Airtel introduced the slogan 'chanuka na Airtel usigongwe² tena' (become wise with Airtel do not be overcharged). Safaricom hit back by reducing the cost of voice calls to KSh 2 per minute with the advert 'wika³ na 2 bob!' (shout with 2 shillings) to mean talk more at only KSh 2. Safaricom also introduced a product to target low-income earners who often bought prepaid cards from as low as KSh 10 (\$0.125). Quite often, a customer would be disconnected while communicating because the airtime worth KSh 10 is too little to sustain a conversation. To take care of these customers, the company introduced a product 'Maliza stori kwanza & pay later with okoa jahazi' (finish up talking and pay later with save a ship). The message behind this advert was 'save a sinking/capsizing ship/boat'. The customers would 'borrow' voice calls from Safaricom, which would be 'paid back' or deducted from their prepaid service when the customer purchased more airtime. The customer would be charged a certain fee for the service.

The banks also use non-standard varieties to target the middle- and low-income earners. For example, the advertisements by Family Bank in Table 3, 'M-kodi powered by pesa

pap!/M-kanisa', are products that encourage customers to pay their rent ('kodi'), or church tithes and offerings 'kanisa' through the mobile phone (hence M-kodi and M-kanisa, respectively). Payment via mobile phones is a product that many banks have introduced in partnership with various telecommunication companies. 'Dosika na pesa pap!' (get rich instantly) has been used by Family Bank to market a savings account. 'Mdosi' is a Sheng word referring to a wealthy person (note the word pap! is onomatopoeic to mean instantly in this context). CFC Stanbic Bank also introduced a similar account to target middle- and low-income earners, with the slogan 'Macash ... leo hustler, kesho sonko' (a lot of cash ... today you are struggling, tomorrow you are wealthy). In this advert, the company uses a Kiswahili plural prefix {ma-} with cash (an English word) to mean a lot of money; 'hustler' in this context means a poor person (a common term in Nairobi and its environs), and 'sonko' is a Sheng word for a rich person, probably borrowed from 'mzungu' (a white person). There is a stereotype that white people are generally wealthy.

In this section, we have outlined the factors that influence the choice of various codes in advertisements, namely, business rivalry, product category and target audience. It is necessary at this point to clarify that when we refer to the codes in the advertisement or marketing slogans in the data, we are only referring to the theme of a particular advert. The details on most of the advertisements are usually in English and Kiswahili, but the 'catchy' words are used very selectively. For example, the advert above, which markets a sports jacket, has the words 'Toklezea na jalee' (shine/be smart in jacket) highlighted in black background and green font, respectively, to attract the attention of the target audience (Figure 3). Once the advert appeals to the target audience (the youth/football fans in this case), the marketer assumes the target audience will take time to read the content thereafter, which is usually in English or standard Kiswahili.

Böllinger (1980) notes that 'language is a manipulator of minds and emotions'. An emotive language is a diction that carries with it a heavy emotional charge. Also known as a *loaded language* or language persuasive technique, it attempts to influence certain audience by using an appeal to emotion, in order to manipulate their views on a topic. Appeal to emotion is seen or contrasted to appeal to logic and reason. One aspect of *emotive language* is that words and phrases are compounded and can acquire *loaded meanings*. Existing words are compounded and given new and different meanings. An observation critical to the present research is that the distinctiveness in the use of Sheng and non-standard Kiswahili may not have been evidenced



Figure 3. An advertisement targeting the youth (marketing a sports jacket which is endowed with the colours of a football team).

in Kenya in the past, since businesses used standard Kiswahili and English in advertising and creating awareness, and in some instances code-mixing/switching between English and Kiswahili. Clearly, as we shall demonstrate in the following sections, companies/corporate advertising manipulate(s) low-prestige varieties to market their products.

Sheng words and phrases used in advertisements and awareness campaigns exhibit the code's loaded nature. The following words/phrases in Table 4 are a good illustration.

The data in Table 4 illustrate how Sheng provides a rich and expressive vocabulary that companies manipulate to appeal to the emotions of the target consumers. For instance, it can be noted that *duplication* is one of the strategies that marketers use to create new meaning. Existing words are added to others to create new phrases and meanings. The phrase 'mamilli chap chap' is formed through *truncation* and *duplication*. 'Mamilli'⁴ is truncated from a Kiswahili word 'mamilioni' or possibly from the English form 'millions', and 'chap chap' is derived from Kiswahili word 'chapu chapu', which means quickly. When the two are combined, a new phrase is created 'millions quickly' and in an advertisement, this is meant to endear the consumer to participate in a promotional event, since they are bound to make money. This creates a new meaning for the buyer who would be persuaded that buying the product would make him/her a millionaire.

The phrase 'tazama chapaa' is a combination of a Kiswahili word 'tazama', which means to look at something/someone, and 'chapaa', which is a Sheng word that means money. The combination of these words creates a new phrase which means look at cash. It has been used in television promotional campaigns where viewers are supposedly viewing people winning a lot of cash by simply watching some specific television programmes and answering simple questions. The combination of pictorials and the Sheng words is intended to appeal to the emotion of the viewers. 'Jisort na hao' is a phrase that is derived through *code-switching* between English and Kiswahili and *truncation*. 'Jisort' is a word formed by adding the English word 'sort' to a Kiswahili reflexive marker {ji-}, 'na' is Kiswahili conjunction 'and/with', while 'hao' is a Sheng word meaning 'house'. This form is truncated from the English word 'house'. The combination of these words create a new meaning to the consumers, which is to own a house once they participate in the promotional event. Thus, 'sorting oneself with a house' means win a house for one self. What is interesting is that the phrase 'angukia hao na Ecobank' means exactly the same as 'jisort na hao'; 'angukia' in Kiswahili means 'fall on' but in this context it means 'to win'.

Other examples

Bamba ubambike

'Bamba' is a Kiswahili word that means to hold; 'ubambike' is a Sheng word formed from the Kiswahili word 'bambika', which means to tenderize or to soften. Thus, 'ubambike' is formed by adding the first-person singular 'u' (you) and changing the final vowel to indicate (subjunctive) mood. The combination of these words brings about a new meaning – that once a consumer

Table 4. Loaded nature of Sheng.

Sheng	Gloss
Mamilli chap chap	Millions quickly
Tazama chapaa	Look at money
Jisort na hao	Sort yourself with a house
Angukia hao na Ecobank	Win a house with Ecobank
Bamba ubambike	Get/grab it and be happy/satisfied
Chanuka na Airtel	Be wise/win with Airtel

buys the product, he/she will be delighted from the services received. In this example, one can argue that there is Swahili-Sheng code-switching. *Bamba* is an ordinary Kiswahili word, but when used in Sheng it bears a new meaning ‘to be happy’.

In some instances, and this is often the case, words/phrases change meaning as they are manipulated to fit the context of advertising, for example, ‘chota’, which means to scoop in Kiswahili changes to ‘win’; ‘chanuka’, which means to ‘blossom’ in Kiswahili, now means ‘get wise/start using’ airtel in the advert.

The examples in Table 5 further highlight the loaded nature of words used in advertisements.

In Table 5, we note that companies manipulate standard Kiswahili or Sheng words to provide a rich and expressive vocabulary in advertisement and awareness campaigns. All the words in **bold print** are different standard Kiswahili forms which mean the same thing in the English gloss. On the other hand, the words in *italics* are Kiswahili or Sheng forms which also mean the same thing in the English gloss. Thus, the forms ‘angukia, chota, wahikuwahi, kwachua,⁵ tetemesha, tazama and kunacha’ all mean ‘to win’ in the English gloss (see their literal translation in the underlined segments in the table). The forms that refer to *money* and *millions* in Table 5 (with additional examples) are as follows:

• Doh	• Mkwaja
• Chapaa	• Coins
• Mamillioni	• Maniado
• Milli	• Ganji
• Hela	• Dollare
• Pesa	

The discussion earlier has demonstrated how the companies manipulate Sheng words, by first providing a rich and expressive vocabulary for writing used in advertising and awareness campaigns and then formalizing word descriptions in the contexts they are used. It has provided an account of basic words giving rise to same meanings in different contexts.

The examples given are an illustration that language offers a rich and expressive vocabulary for expressing new and known meanings. The lexicon cannot be presented as a static group of words; the vocabulary of any language evolves constantly. Therefore, the lexicon of a language

Table 5. Literal and derived meanings in selected adverts.

Forms	Literal translation	English gloss
Angukia hao na Ecobank	<u>Fall on</u> a house with Ecobank	Win a house with Ecobank
Angukia <i>doh</i> na Ecobank	<u>Fall on</u> money with Ecobank	Win <i>money</i> with Ecobank
Chota <i>chapaa</i> na Cocacola	<u>Scoop</u> money with cocacola	Win <i>money</i> with Cocacola
Wahikuwahi na Cocacola	<u>venture/be prompt and manage be</u> with Cocacola ^a	Win & Win with Cocacola
Kwachua <i>mamillioni</i> ^b	<u>Take</u> millions	Win <i>millions</i>
Tetemesha na Safaricom	<u>Shake/tremble</u> (causative) with Safaricom	Win with Safaricom
Tazama <i>chapaa</i>	<u>Look at</u> money	Watch & win <i>cash/money</i>
Kunacha acre na <i>milli</i> tatu pap!	<u>Be wise</u> with an acre and three million instantly	Win an acre and three <i>million</i> <i>shillings</i> instantly

^aThe translation of *wahi here* (venture/be prompt) gives the advert a loaded meaning or immediacy and urgency, that is, if one ventures or promptly participates in the promotion they are likely to win millions.

^bSee Note 4.

should be able to infer systematically new uses of known words and their properties. It is open-ended in nature and accounts for the novel, creative uses of words in a variety of contexts. Besides, the speakers of a particular language or a variety of language are capable of generating semantic expressions for words in particular contexts through various linguistic procedures and processes.

In the following section, the paper demonstrates how words are manipulated through various linguistic processes to come up with the marketing slogans used in the adverts. Sheng lexicon is noted to evolve rapidly due to its fluid nature. The section will demonstrate how words are arrived at and what meanings are derived.

The advertisers employ mixed strategies to come up with advertising words. As will be exemplified in this section, in some cases they innovate new words, and in other instances they make choices from the available Sheng material and then modify or manipulate it to suit their advertising needs. There are also cases of code-switching and mixing between languages. Therefore, the advertisers are constantly changing their word generation approaches to ensure that their adverts remain relevant in a thinly spread and competitive market.

The linguistic strategies that have been used by companies to manipulate language used in advertisement and awareness campaigns include borrowing, coining, truncation, metathesis, compounding and nativization. These are some of the processes that Sheng speakers also use to come up with new vocabulary. The productivity of these processes differs on the context and purpose for which the words are to be used. These morphophonological processes will be discussed briefly in the following sections.

Borrowing

Several examples that have been used in this paper have been borrowed from English and Kiswahili. These forms are then manipulated to fit in the context of the advert.

Following are some examples of borrowed words:

1.	Na Am (TNS ⁶)(Kisw ⁷) (I manage my account)	manage manage (Eng)	account account (Eng ⁸)	yangu mine (Kisw)	
2.	Timiza Accomplish (Kisw) (win/accomplish with M-Pesa)	na with (Kisw)	M-Pesa ⁹ M-Pesa (Eng/Kisw)		
3.	Ji Oneself (Reflex) (sort yourself with a house)	sort sort (Eng)	na with (Kisw)	hao house (Eng)	
4.	Maliza Finish up/complete (Kisw) (complete the story)	stori story (Eng)			
5.	Unataka kuwa pero? u- You (Kisw) (would you like/want to become a parent?)	na TNS (Kisw)	-taka want/like (Kisw)	kuwa become (Kisw)	pero? parent (Eng)

Examples 1–5 show the creativity of the companies in using the Sheng words in a way that would appeal to consumers. Once the words have been borrowed from English and Kiswahili they go through further modification to nativize them to *Sheng*. For example, *pero* (parent) is a Sheng word borrowed from the English form *parent*; *hao* (house) is also a Sheng word borrowed from English.

Truncation

Truncation involves the reduction of a word to one of its parts. It is also known as clipping or shortening. Clippings are usually not coined words because the words that are clipped belong to a standard vocabulary of a language already. Truncation is a very common process used to come up with Sheng words or phrases used in marketing and awareness campaigns. Some examples are given in Table 6.

The examples in the table show that truncation may occur initially, medially or finally. For instance, the words ‘tokelezea, katizia’ have the vowels in the second syllable clipped to generate ‘toklezea and katsia’, respectively. The motivation for devoicing /z/ after truncation in the latter example is not clear. However, we suspect that the sound is devoiced because it is preceded by a voiceless consonant. The examples in the table also display instances of fore- and back clipping. *Fore-clipping* involves the retention of the final part of the word and *back clipping* involves the retention of the initial part or the beginning of a word. Back clipping is the most common type of truncation. Examples that are back clipped in the table include *hao* (**house**), *milli* (**millioni**), *tunawesmake/wait* (tunawe**za** make/wait), *bis wize* (**business** wise). The bold print in the examples shows the part of the word that is clipped. We also observed an interesting type of back clipping in the examples given. In *tunawesmake/wait* (tunawe**za** make/wait), a slogan that was used by a presidential aspirant during the 2013 political campaigns in Kenya, only the final vowel [a] is clipped and the consonant [z] devoiced; the English forms that form part of the slogan are retained. In *bis wize* (**business** wise), the word approximates its pronunciation in the Kenyan variety of English, thus *business* after truncation becomes *bis* and *wise* is pronounced as [waiz], hence the written form *wize*. Only, the form *business* undergoes back clipping.

Fore clipping ideally retains the final part of the word, for example, *chute* (parachute), *roach* (cockroach) and *varsity* (university). In our data, there is a peculiar kind of fore-clipping where the initial segment of a word is retained, which is then combined with different forms to derive its meaning. Some examples include the following:

Truncated form	Full form	Gloss
M-Pesa	Mobile-Pesa	Mobile-Money
M- Kodi	Mobile-Kodi	Mobile-Rent
M-Kanisa	Mobile-Kanisa	Mobile-Church
M-Shwari	Mobile-Shwari	Mobile-??
M-Banking	Mobile-Banking	Mobile-banking

Table 6. Truncation.

Form in source language	Form after truncation	English gloss
Tokelezea (Kisw)	Toklezea	Shine/be smart
Hause (Eng)	Hao	House
Tunaweza make/tunawe za wait (Kisw/Eng)	Tunawesmake/ tunaweswait	We can make it/we can wait
katizia ^a (Kisw, Causative)	Katsia	Disrupt
Business wise (Eng)	Bis wize	Business wise
Millioni	Milli	Million
Mobile -Pesa, Mobile -Kodi, Mobile - Kanisa (Eng/Kisw)	M-Pesa, M- Kodi, M- Kanisa	Mobile money, mobile rent, mobile church

^aThis form is derived from the Kiswahili verb *Katiza* (interject, interrupt, postpone). Hence, the meaning generated in this advert is ‘call rate interrupts life’.

The introduction of mobile phones in Kenya brought about changes in communication and the mode of banking. Telecommunication companies introduced mobile banking, a product that was not known in the county. The most popular to date is a Safaricom product branded M-Pesa (mobile money). Through this service, customers can deposit or withdraw money from their mobile phone accounts through authorized agents. When this product became popular in Kenya, the banking system became revolutionalized. One did not need to queue in a banking hall to pay utility bills, such as water and electricity, school fees, house rent, etc. The banks lost many customers, especially the low- and middle-level income earners. Most banks, in an attempt to win their customers back, partnered with various telecommunication companies to come up with products and banking services that customers could access through their mobile phones. The name of the product was derived from its primary purpose, for example, *M-kodi* is a product that facilitates customers to pay rent (*Kodi*); M-Kanisa facilitates payment of church (*kanisa*) levy, taxes and other contributions through mobile phones; M-Shwari improves/straightens one’s life (*shwari*) through saving – it is a service that allows customers to save and get bank loans based on their savings (without a guarantor); M-banking facilitates customers to be connected to their banks – through this product one can transfer money from a mobile phone account to a bank account or vice versa.

Compounding and reduplication

Compounding is a morphological process that puts together two free forms to give rise to a new word. *Reduplication*, on the other hand, is a double occurrence of a morphological constituent that shares a semantic and phonological generalization. The root or the stem of a word or part of it or even the whole word is repeated exactly or with a slight change. These two processes were observed in some cases in our sample. The examples given earlier, *M-Pesa*, *M-Kanisa*, *M-banking* and *M-Kodi*, can be considered as cases of compounding, too. If one considers {M-} as an independent word ‘mobile’ (phone) which is added to a second independent form (e.g. ‘kodi’) to derive a new form and meaning, then ‘M-Kodi’ would be a perfect case of compounding. In the intuition of the users of these forms, they do not see a grapheme M, but a word with full meaning. The example, *Mamilli chap chap* is a clear case of reduplication. The word *chap chap* is derived from the Kiswahili form ‘chapu chapu’ (quickly), thus, in our example it means ‘millions quickly’. There are also a number of cases that we can consider as partial reduplication.

The phrases *wahi ku wahi* (win and win) and *bamba ubambike* (get it and be happy) are some of the forms we consider to have undergone a partial reduplication, if one views *wahi* and *bamba* as repeated in the phrases. While *wahi ku wahi* accomplishes the semantic goals of reduplication from Sheng’s donor language – Kiswahili – (its meaning of win and win is repeated), *bamba ubambike* is a bit problematic. *Bamba* is a Kiswahili word with Kiswahili semantics (it means to fill up a place), but *ubambike* has Sheng semantics (i.e. to be happy). People familiar with Sheng and Kiswahili will easily recognize the differences, but one who is not familiar will only see the work structure, thus:

u-	bamb	-ik	-e
Sm	-stem	-Asp	-FV

Therefore, the partial reduplication in *bamba ubambike* is realized through the reduplication of the stem material and affixation (bamba + u + bamb + ik + e), and a change in meaning. The final generated form has Sheng semantics.

Metathesis

This is a process whereby morphemes are interchanged within a word. Companies and organizations that were used as the sample for our research rarely used this process in coming up with words for advertisement. Nevertheless, we found peculiar cases, forms that even the target consumers/audience could not decipher the meaning of the words, or the intended meaning by the source company. Examples are the following:

Kunacha acre na milli tatu pap!

Kwachua na Airtel

Kunacha is derived from the Kiswahili word ‘chanuka’, which means ‘to blossom’ (e.g. of flowers), or ‘to become wise’. In the context of the advertisement, it means **win** an acre (piece of land) and three million shillings instantly (note the onomatopoeic sense in which ‘pap!’ is used; it mimics the sound made by the middle finger and the thumb to bring out the message ‘instantly’ (Figure 4).

The audio presentation of the advert combines the pictures on the billboard above with the click of the fingers to bring out the message ‘instantly’ in the onomatopoeic word ‘pap!’.

The second form that we found to have undergone metathesis is *kwachua* in the phrases ‘kwachua na Airtel’ (win with Airtel) and ‘kwachua mamillioni’ (win millions). The form is derived from a Kiswahili word ‘chukua’, which means ‘to take’.

Metathesis was not a productive process in the language used in advertisements and awareness campaigns that we sampled.

Nativization

Nativization in this paper refers to instances where forms are borrowed from an existing language and then modified to sound like native words in a particular language. We found a number of words that are borrowed from English or Sheng. These would undergo restructuring to generate a syllable structure consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel (CVCV) that is common in many Bantu languages spoken in Kenya.

Examples are the following:

Form	Gloss
Digitika (na Gotv)	Become/get digital(ized) with Gotv
Bankika (na KCB)	Get banked with KCB
Dosika	Get rich

The forms *digitika* and *bankika* are borrowed from the English words ‘digital’ and ‘bank’, respectively, and *dosika* is borrowed from the Sheng word ‘mdosi’ (a wealthy person). Once the words are borrowed they are nativized to sound like Kiswahili words or words from other Kenyan Bantu languages. They change the syllable structure to reflect CVCV structure. The suffix **-ika** is added to the words to derive the new form. This suffix is found in Kiswahili and a number of Bantu languages spoken in Kenya. The suffix (**-ika**) indicates an intransitive state or condition, or a capability/potentiality. If we consider the examples above as nativization into Kiswahili or any Kenyan Bantu language structure, the **-ik-** in this context is the stative form and **-a** is the final vowel.

The examples given earlier could also be viewed as classic examples of coinage and nativization. These are forms that originate from the corporate word and are not used in daily Sheng discourse although they exploit Sheng manipulation processes. In their innovation, the advertisers manipulate lexical items in their discourse and use the linguistic resources employed by Sheng

Kunacha Acre
na Milli Tatu Pap!

Transform your life now with Family Bank.
Win great prizes! To participate, top up your existing Family Bank current or savings account with a minimum of Ksh. 5,000 or open a new account and wait for the draws.
The more you save the more your chances of winning.

GRAND DRAW PRIZES
1st prize: 1 acre of land plus Ksh. 3M
2nd prize: 1/2 acre of land plus Ksh. 1M
3rd prize: 1/4 acre of land plus Ksh. 500,000

MINI DRAW PRIZES (5 draws)
a) 1/4 acre of land per draw
b) Ksh. 100,000 per draw
c) Ksh. 50,000 per draw
d) One TVS Motorcycle per draw
e) Five prizes of Samsung Galaxy Pocket phones per draw

WIN 1 ACRE
Plus
Ksh. 3M CASH
1/2 acre and 1/4 acre
In the Grand Draw

Plus Five 1/4 acres in the Mini Draws

The land to be won is in Kitengela (Oloolokitoshi)

BCLB NO: 001902

Act now!

www.familybank.co.ke

Family Bank
With you, for life

Figure 4. Advert illustrated.

speakers to come up with what they perceive as Sheng. These words may be viewed as cases of perception (they sound Sheng) to Kenyan consumers of the products but may not be the ordinary words used by ‘core’ Sheng speakers. The advertisers therefore coin and nativize them to be perceived as Sheng.

Coining

Coining is a process through which a word is formed (not sourced from or based on another existing word) to express a concept or object. The forms that we considered coinages in our sample are Sheng words that are based neither on English nor Kiswahili as matrix languages. We observed a few cases in the data.

Examples are the following:

Sheng	Gloss
Chapaa	Money
Doh	Money
Mdosi	A wealthy person

These examples are not coined by advertisers themselves but by Sheng users. The advertisers simply borrow and contextualize them in specific adverts.

We can conclude by stating that the most common processes used by organizations and companies to come up with marketing slogans are truncation, borrowing and compounding of words mostly derived from Kenyan languages and Sheng. Once the words have been adopted they acquire new meaning depending on the context in which they are used. From the discussion, it is also clear that the advertisers are not necessarily the source of all the words that they use. They may select (probably consciously) or directly borrow certain Sheng words and modify them to suit their needs.

A shift in the advertising trend in Kenya is clearly evident. From the discussion in this paper, it is obvious that companies are increasingly using Sheng and non-standard varieties to advertise their products in order to reach their target audience. This paper offers an analysis of how commercial companies are using Sheng to reach their audiences. Owing to the transitory and ever-changing nature of Sheng, it is necessary to analyse the meanings of words and phrases used in the advertisements. The use of Sheng in advertising in Kenya articulates a new identity and localizes the product and its consumers.

The use of Sheng and other non-standard varieties in advertising has a clear intention, which is interpreted by attaching certain specific meanings to the words and phrases used. Communicative success is achieved if the speaker chooses his or her words in such a way that the hearer will, under the circumstances of utterance, recognize these intentions. The intention of most of the advertising agencies is to convince consumers and appeal to their emotions to purchase a product or service. Companies achieve this objective through their choice of words and the emotive effect attached to the words in the context in which they are used. In uttering or using a certain word or phrase in a certain context, the words perform a specific function. In the context of advertising and awareness campaigns, the words seek to convince and persuade listeners in order to change their opinion and accept a particular service or offer. The choice of words used in the adverts, therefore, has an effect on the feelings, thoughts and/or actions of both speaker (advertiser) and or the listener (client). Language is not just a medium but a resource in which speakers can draw to increase the likelihood of persuasion. This is a resource that advertisers have learnt how to tap and manipulate appropriately to persuade their target audience.

Acknowledgements

Special acknowledgement to all the authors whose works have been cited in this paper. We would like to sincerely thank the respondents who participated in the research; and the employees, particularly those from the communication and marketing departments of the companies, government institutions, and NGOs, from whom the data were collected. Lastly, we thank the companies whose images and adverts have been used in this paper, and particularly for permission to include the images in this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. This paper limits itself to advertisements; the use of Sheng in awareness campaigns is beyond the scope of the present discussion and will form the basis for another paper.
2. *Usigongwe tena* literally means ‘do not be hit again’.
3. *Wika* literally means ‘to crow’.
4. This may be truncated from the English word *millions* or the Kiswahili form *milioni*. It is difficult to establish whether the form is borrowed from English or Kiswahili since Sheng does not have a conventionally agreed writing standard. However, since the form takes the Kiswahili plural prefix [ma-] we have treated it as a borrowing from Kiswahili in our discussion.
5. This form has undergone some restructuring. It is derived from a standard Kiswahili word ‘chukua’. The same argument holds for the form ‘Kunacha’. They will be discussed later in the paper. In this context and in the discussion here, we will consider them as a standard Kiswahili words.
6. Tense.
7. Kiswahili.
8. English.
9. M-pesa is coined from the initial of the English word ‘mobile’ (referring to a mobile phone) and Kiswahili word ‘pesa’ (money). M-pesa is a money transfer service through a mobile phone.

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