

Language Use amongst Multilingual Learners and their Teachers in a Pre-School Classroom in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

The Kenyan linguistic context is highly multilingual with over forty mother tongues. Majority of Kenyans are multilingual. As such, children from multilingual settings such as Nakuru County join school when they are already multilingual and are introduced to English that is used as the medium of instruction. However, limited ability in the English language hinders the learners from effective participation in classroom discourse. This paper therefore investigates how pre-school school children manage to learn English as a language and also use it for learning other subjects at the same time. It is based on the hypothesis that learners with the help of their teachers utilize various communication strategies to overcome the problem. The theoretical framework for this work is based on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) classroom discourse model of Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) and is supplemented by Gumperz's 1982 Communication theory and Interlanguage theory by Selinker (1972). The study employed a cross-sectional research design and was conducted at the ACK nursery school in Nakuru County in Kenya. Purposive and cluster sampling methods were used to select the school, which had an accessible population of 52 that included 49 learners, two teachers and a head teacher. Data was collected by use of naturalistic observation method which was supplemented by audio and video recording. An interview schedule and observation notes were also used to collect corroborative information. Data was eventually analyzed by the use of Discourse Analysis, supplemented by descriptive statistics, and then presented in form of tables, figures and excerpts of transcripts (as examples). Conclusions were thereafter drawn from the findings that indicated that code-switching served as a communication strategy, especially in areas where learners experienced difficulties while communicating in English.

Key Words: Language, Learners, multilingual, teachers, pre-school

Introduction

The Kenyan linguistic context is highly multilingual with over forty mother tongues (Whiteley, 1974), with Kiswahili as the social lingua franca and English as the official language. These languages, including English, have interacted with one another for a long time since the coming of the Christian missionaries and the colonial administration in the 19th century. As a result of interaction and exposure to different languages that include the first language, Kiswahili and probably English, a majority of Kenyans are multilingual, with their speech being characterized by a lot of code switching. This is because Kenyans interact in many sectors such as residential areas, educational and health institutions, market places and places of worship.

Concerning the language of instruction in schools, the Gachathi report (1976) recommended that the predominant language of the school 'catchment' area be used as the medium of instruction. However, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) in 2002 reported that some private schools and parents evade the policy by insisting on the use of English as the medium of instruction. This is due to the perceived benefits and prestige of English as an international language. Thus after joining nursery school, the learners are introduced to English as a subject and language of instruction. This hinders them from participating effectively in classroom interaction due to their limited ability in English.

Nevertheless, according to Mercer (1995), teachers help learners to develop their knowledge and understanding and also control their behaviour through what he and Bialystok (1990) call communication strategies. In this respect, Whiteley (1974) and Merit (1987) recommended that the ways in which children in multilingual settings use different languages for different purposes should be investigated. Similarly, Bialystok (1990) argues that an investigation into how young learners with a limited ability use a second language should involve an examination of communication strategies. In this respect, this paper identified and examined the uses to which both multilingual learners and teachers put the different languages in a bid to sustain communication in the classroom.

This paper therefore begins from the premise that limited ability in English language hinders multilingual nursery school learners from effective participation in classroom communication and yet the strategies employed by the learners and their teachers to sustain communication and construct knowledge may not be clear to most stakeholders in the education field. The general aim of this paper was thus to examine the communication strategies used amongst multilingual nursery school learners and their teachers to sustain communication in the classroom. The objectives of the study were to identify and describe the uses of the different languages that learners and teachers use in a nursery school classroom; to establish communication strategies used in the classroom; and to

determine the implications of the use of the different languages on classroom communication.

Nakuru County in Kenya was purposively selected as the research site because it is cosmopolitan and therefore multilingual in nature. The target population was all nursery school learners and teachers in private schools with the accessible population being those in the third level of nursery school education. The sample therefore consisted of two classes of 49 third level learners, two teachers and a head teacher. The learners under study were between the ages of five to six years and were supposed to have been exposed to the formal English language for about three years.

The data used was collected by the use of naturalistic observation method supplemented by audio and video recording of classroom lessons, an interview schedule and observation notes. It consisted of transcripts of the audio and video tapes, responses from the interviews and observation notes. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) and Fraekel and Wallen (2000), naturalistic observation enables a researcher to observe the subjects under a natural setting without manipulating it. The data was analyzed through discourse analysis by the use of the Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) model under the framework of Discourse analysis by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and supplemented by descriptive statistics. While discourse analysis provided for a systematic analysis of data to establish patterns, trends and relationships, descriptive statistics allowed for the description and explanation of the distribution of the uses of the different languages used in the classroom. The analysis of data was based on the objectives of the study. The study sought to identify the different languages and describe their uses by bilingual learners and their teachers in a nursery school classroom. The analysis involved identification and categorisation of the discourse exchanges as IRF, identifying the embedded strategies and language use and getting their frequencies. These had implications for language use between the learners and their teachers.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was guided by the initiation response feedback (IRF) model by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and was supplemented by Gumperz's (1982) communication theory and the interlanguage theory by Selinker (1972). Together, these three theories provided for the examination of how bilingual learners and teachers achieved their academic goals in the classroom by use of different languages. The classroom is seen as a social context in which structured and organised interaction occurs and is guided by very clear rules. This can be seen through the lens of IRF, where the teacher initiated discourse by eliciting information from learners by asking questions (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). The learners then respond to the elicitations and the teacher provides them with

feedback. IRF thus assisted the study in the identification and explanation of the different languages by analysing individual exchanges and exploring their functions in the classroom. However, IRF lacks a social orientation and is therefore unable to explain the power factor that influences outcomes in classroom communication. Due to this, the communication theory by Gumperz (1982) was used to explain the interpersonal communication with its various outcomes, as influenced by the choices of language the learners and teachers made and how they used them.

To further supplement IRF, the interlanguage theory (IL) by Selinker (1972) was used to explain the learner language strategies and the processes involved in producing the language. IL theory thus helped the paper to establish the fact that learners were enabled to participate in the classroom discourse by the use of IL strategies, which helped them in appropriately filling in the slots in the IRF framework thus enhancing communication. Furthermore, through the IL theory, the paper established that the learners' IL was at the lower end of the IL continuum thereby explaining the difficulty they experience in the learning and use of English. Moreover, the theory helped the paper to make various recommendations on language policy, learning and use.

The Bilingual Classroom Setting in Kenya

Kitetu (1988) argues that multilingualism in contemporary Kenya is best explained by Fasold's (1985) concept of societal multilingualism. In this respect, Kitetu (1988), Myers-Scotton (1993) and Kimemia (2001) observe that patterns of language use in most Kenyan communities depict a triadic pattern. This is a state whereby mother tongues are used for ethnic and cultural identification; Kiswahili for national identification and English for official purposes although it also marks economic and social status. Fasold describes this pattern as multiple language differentiation or double overlapping diglossia. Kitetu (1988) further refers to the kind of multilingualism in Kenya as 'triglossia', where Kiswahili is involved in two diglossic systems; Kiswahili is the High (H) language with the various mother tongues as the low (L), and the low language with English as the high as the Figure 1 illustrates.

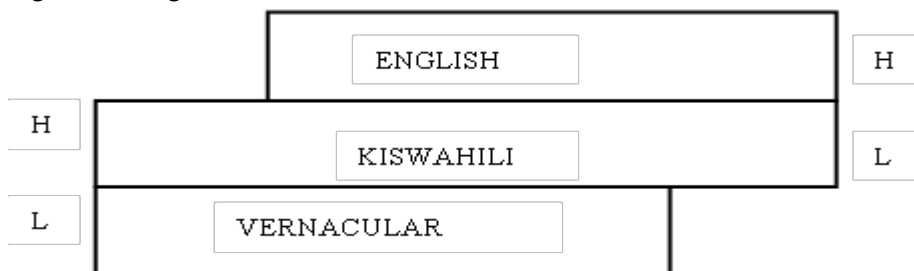


Figure 1: Double Overlapping Diglossia (Triglossia) (Fasold, 1985)

In diglossia, languages that are perceived to be prestigious and consequently used in formal contexts are referred to as High (H), whereas those with a lower status and are used for informal contexts and in every day conversations are referred to as Low (L).

Whiteley (1974) further found out that in Kenya, the acquisition of English and/or Swahili depended on a number of factors. The most significant among them was the language area in which one was brought up and whether it was urban or rural. He therefore recommended that in schools, course content should be taught in the language the child is most comfortable with, and most proficient in. Whiteley also revealed that patterns of language use among school children are constrained by a number of factors, some of which in certain cases are counterproductive. Some schools have policies through which teachers discourage the use of languages other than English. On the contrary, English is disapproved of in some homes in rural areas but used in urban areas. The geographical setting also determines the choice and use of language; for example, the use of English in both rural and urban settings depended on the educational background of the parents. Well educated parents encouraged the used of English. In such circumstances, use of English increased as use of children's mother tongues decreased with time. Language choice was also influenced by the topic of discussion. It is against this background that the urban setting was selected for this study.

Further findings of studies on classroom discourse and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the local scene underscore the importance of instruction as well as interaction with the Target Language. Kasire (2000) found that these activities facilitated proficiency and communicative competence in the language. Merit (1987) further argues that language choice and use have implications on other subjects. These arguments provided a ground for observation of lessons in order to establish how the learners and their teachers managed and interacted with English and other languages so as to sustain classroom communication.

Kioko et al. (2008) have provided another dimension to language use among school children in multilingual contexts in Africa. They observe that many multilingual countries in Africa have tended to favour and adopt Multilingual Education (MLE). This tendency has stemmed from the recognition of the benefits of such a system, which enhance academic achievement. Kioko et al. argue that MLE pedagogy is successful when the curriculum and learning objectives are aligned with the multilingual environment. The languages available to the child should be recognized and valued for their contribution to the child's learning. They further argue that these languages promote an emotional stability and a smooth transition from home to school. According to Kioko et al., this stability further translates to cognitive stability that enhances academic

achievement. They further argue that a familiar language facilitates reading and writing skills, which are essential for long-term school success.

MLE however faces a lot of challenges; particularly opposition from parents, educators, political leaders and society in general (Kioko et al., 2008). Kioko et al. observe that these stakeholders fear that the African languages do not have the capability to cope with the demands of education. They instead prefer the international language for its perceived educational, social and economic benefits. For instance, Kioko et al. found out that the *Tharaka* and *Kalenjin* communities of Kenya preferred the use of English language for instruction in schools. This is the case throughout sub-Saharan Africa where the language of instruction in formal learning is an international language; English, French, Portuguese or Spanish. This is due to the colonial heritage, whereby the colonialists had their language prominent in the curriculum. This practice was depicted by the findings of this paper where English was used as the medium of instruction while the local languages except Kiswahili were relegated to peripheral use.

Among all the Kenyan communities, English is preferred in schools for several reasons. These include the fact that the textbooks available and the exams that children sit for, are in English. Parents are also of the opinion that the use of a mother tongue would make their children take schooling lightly. Furthermore, Kioko et al. (2008) observe that it is also believed that English promotes access to written English medium information and employment opportunities since knowledge of the English language is usually given as an advantage if one applies for a job. English further allows its users to engage in wider communication and have access to higher education. They stress the fact that the international language is significant in the global village that the world has become due to the need to transfer knowledge and skills from one nation to another. Hence, the English language needs to be part of the multilingual curriculum of a country. This will enable her graduates to access opportunities, to participate in and contribute to higher education nationally, regionally and internationally.

Kioko et al. (2008) therefore recommend that in urban and semi-urban linguistically heterogeneous areas, it is important to include a lingua franca in education (the language of wider communication). They note that such a language is already socially acceptable and has national level status and functions. The use of Kiswahili as a lingua franca in Kenya and Tanzania where Kiswahili has been chosen for use in primary and secondary schools is an example of this. They further claim that the language provides social integration without endangering national identity. Thus, the choice is based on socio-political needs and they recommend that MLE in such a situation should include the lingua franca as well as the language used as a medium of instruction in the country.

The language policy in Nursery schools lays a lot of emphasis on a child's mother tongue (MOEST, 1984). Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) argues that a child's mother tongue is very important to him/her because he/she uses it to express his/her first thoughts and to develop relationships with people on whom their early life depends. As such, school experience should give the child the opportunity to use the mother tongue both at home and in the school with ease. The language policy stresses the fact that education should not be looked at as an independent entity but should provide the opportunity to help the child appreciate his mother tongue. MOEST therefore advises teachers to be aware of the fact that children come to school with varied language abilities and hence they should allow for the children's individual needs by employing various strategies to cater for the children's linguistic diversities to foster total and quality growth and development.

The then Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) argues that learning of a language for children takes place as they talk and discuss with others, particularly adults (KIE,1990). They learn to speak through imitation and therefore adults should talk to them. Children should thus be given an opportunity to express themselves to enable them practice what they have learnt. KIE further asserts that language is an important tool for thinking that would help children to develop ideas and concepts. For instance, as they engage in an activity, they talk about it and this helps them improve and express their thoughts. During the nursery school years, children are expected to develop language skills such as listening and speaking, reading readiness and writing that will help them to learn the content of other subjects.

Use of Different Languages in the Classroom

The findings of this paper showed that the learners and their teachers in the classrooms observes used English, Kiswahili and some mother tongues (namely Kikuyu and Kalenjin) at 83.2 percent, 16.4 percent, 0.2 percent and 0 percent respectively as indicated on table one.

Table 1: Total Distribution Use of the Different Languages

Language	Frequency	Percent
Kiswahili	776	16.4
Kikuyu	10	0.2
Kalenjin	1	0.0
Kiswahili/Kikuyu	8	0.2
English	3940	83.2
Total	4735	100.0

The difference in use was found to be significant and was attributed to various factors which can be explained by the scenario in the larger Kenyan linguistic context. The distribution of use depicted a triadic pattern. The pattern shows an overlapping functional language differentiation; what Fasold (1985) and Kitemu (1988) call double overlapping diglossia and triglossia respectively. Kiswahili functioned as the Low with English as the High, but it was the High with mother tongues as the Low. However, it was observed that the different languages were put into specific uses as presented in the following sections.

The Use of English Language

The findings revealed that English was the most frequently used language in the pre school classroom despite the fact that many pre-school learners have a limited ability of the language. This was attributed to the school language policy, which stipulates that English should be the language of instruction and communication in school. The policy contradicts the MOEST guidelines on the medium of instruction (MOEST 1984), which directs that the predominant language in the school's 'catchment' area be used for instruction particularly in nursery and lower primary schools. This language is intended to provide continuity from home to school thus providing a transitional tool for the child. In Kenya, English functions as the international language and therefore enjoys a lot of prestige. It is also the official language of communication together with Kiswahili (Kimemia, 2001). However, the paper established that English was the official medium of instruction in the classrooms under observation, posing difficulties for the learners who had limited ability in the language.

For the learners in the school, English served various functions. It was used as the language of instruction in subjects except Kiswahili during which it was sparingly used. It proved to be useful particularly with the use of technical terms in subjects such as Mathematics and Science. For example, a teacher teaching addition in Mathematics said 'four plus box equals'. The word 'plus' stands for addition, 'box' for the missing number and 'equals' for the 'total' sign. This finding confirms Fasold's (1985) claim that English as an international language usually enjoys prestige and superiority in terms of curriculum instruction. English was the preferred language of instruction in the pre-school classroom by teachers despite the fact that Kiswahili was the national language spoken by a large number of Kenyans. English therefore functioned as the High compared to Kiswahili. Curriculum instruction mainly followed the conventional question and answer form of the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) IRF model of classroom discourse. For instance, majority of the Initiations were in English. If the learners appeared not to understand, the teacher would give a cue. If the difficulty persisted, the teacher would reformulate the question occasionally in Kiswahili as in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1

Teacher: Okay. (Points at a picture on the blackboard) We have the plant... (Pauses) *yenye tulichora. Tulichora?* (Kiswahili for: The one we drew. We drew)

After reformulation, the learners would then take the cue and respond to the question. In this regard, Kiswahili supplemented English as seen in excerpt two.

Excerpt 2

Teacher: Read these, eeh? Read these ones (showing). Hesabu hawa. Hawa, wachana na woa, tunahesabu wenye wako juu. Tunahesabu wenye wako wapi? (Count these ones. These, leave those ones, we are counting the ones above. We are counting the ones which are where?)

Pupils: Juu (above)

Teacher: Wenye wako wapi? The ones which are where?

Pupils: Juu (above)

When the teacher needed to probe, she persisted in using English through elaboration, repetition, reformulation or recaps. In order to make emphasis of an idea, the teacher mainly used repetitions. To clarify a point, the teacher mainly elaborated or reformulated her idea/s or the responses given by the learners. The teacher did this mainly in English as already seen in the first two excerpts.

When the teacher needed to describe shared experience, she would use mainly the 'we' statements and occasionally, recaps and reconstructive recaps. The 'we' statements comprised the use of the pronoun 'we', 'us' and 'our' all of which pointed at learning as a collective venture. Even when the 'we' statements appeared in Kiswahili, they achieved the same objective. Thus, English was instrumental in describing shared experiences which would be incorporated in learning the current topic. For example when teaching about the 'plants', the teacher used the 'we' statements to reach out to the learners and was able to share their experiences as in the following example:

Excerpt 3

Teacher: Where do we get plants? Where can we get a plant? *Mimea huwa inapatikana wapi?* (Kiswahili for: Plants are usually found where?)

It was further observed that English was the main language of communication in the school, both within and outside the classroom. Most of the time, teachers communicated with the learners in English in compliance with the school language policy as previously indicated. However, the rule was occasionally

flouted during out-of-classroom activities such as Physical Exercise (PE). It was however observed that when the teachers were involved in the instruction of the PE lesson, they mainly used English. This finding confirms what Kioko et al. (2008) say about the use of the international language and its perceived benefits. Most Kenyans prefer that their children use English in school even where it was expected that Kiswahili would be more popular especially in such situations as out of classroom activities like PE and sports.

However, in the absence of the teacher in the classroom, although this rarely happened, it was noted that learners resorted to the use of Kiswahili. They thus flouted the school rule of using English as the medium of communication. The learners used Kiswahili in and outside the classroom physical boundaries. In the classroom, they only used Kiswahili when they digressed from the lesson. Such use of Kiswahili by the learners may be attributed to the need to maintain and express solidarity. This finding confirms the argument by Baker (1993) that code switching can be used in this way. The language the learners used to respond to the teacher depended on the one that the teachers used: English or Kiswahili. However, since the initiations by teacher were mainly done in English, the learners mostly responded in the same language. When the learners had an opportunity to describe shared experience, they would switch from English to Kiswahili. They would find it difficult to communicate in English because they were required to make spontaneous speech and yet their mastery of the language was very low. This is despite the fact that both the school and Parents considered us of English prestigious and important for the learners.

It was further observed that learners' responses in English tended to be short. They usually consisted of one word while those in Kiswahili were longer. The responses in Kiswahili usually served the strategy of paraphrasing as defined by Bialystok (1990). In this regard, it was found that when communicating in English and they wanted to paraphrase, both the learners and the teachers always switched to Kiswahili as illustrated by the following example.

Excerpt 4

Teacher: Read these ones. Eeh? Read these ones. (Showing) *Hesabu hawa. Hawa, wachana na wao, tunahesabu wenye wako juu. Tunahesabu wenye wako wapi?* (Kiswahili for: Count these ones. These, leave those ones, we are counting the ones above. We are counting the ones which are where?)

Pupils: *Juu.* (Above)

Teacher: *Wenye wako wapi?* (Kiswahili for: The ones which are where?)

Pupils: *Juu.* (Above)

Generally, it appeared that the teachers and learners used English for the more official functions such as curriculum instruction. Also, the school administration communicated with learners and teachers in English. This rule was supposed to be strictly observed as a school policy. This practice may be attributed to the perception held by parents in Nakuru municipality that 'good' nursery schools are those where English is used for instruction and communication. As observed, the practice is prevalent in most private schools and actually makes them popular among parents, particularly the elite who can afford to have their children in such schools.

Further, teachers also used English in giving directions and instructions. They used the language to maintain order in class by regulating the learners' behaviour, particularly when they digressed from the topic of discussion. Mercer (1995) made the same observation when he claimed that teachers use guided strategies to control classroom behaviour. For instance, when the learners made noise in class, the teacher would tell them to fold their hands at the chest. She would sometimes demonstrate that elicitation by folding her own hands to accompany the verbal directive. The learners understood that they were supposed to keep quiet and always did as directed. For example, 'Fold your hands like this' meant 'stop making noise'. English was also used to give instructions that required the learners to respond by carrying out an act, rather than giving a verbal response. For instance, doing some task on the blackboard, in exercise books and removing story books from their bags. This finding supports Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) finding that a directive act elicits a non-linguistic response.

Further, when the teacher realized that the learners were tired and thus losing concentration, she would direct them to move out of the classroom. For instance, the teacher would always instruct the learners to go to the toilet. The learners always understood it to mean 'take a break' during which those who needed to answer the call of nature did so. This instruction would also be given in class when there was tension, particularly arising from a game. For example, one group lost a spelling game and they were so upset and started crying. The teacher asked the winning group to go to the toilet. They would actually jeer the losers. The teacher used this instruction to ease the tension. In this case, the teacher attempted to mend the broken relationship among the learners. Teachers thus used language to not only control the behaviour of the learners, but also to establish relationships which had a bearing on classroom communication.

It was also noted that teachers used English to assert their authority in the class with a bid to control the class. It was observed that it is mainly through English, that teachers exercised power by directing the discourse according to their desire. They were also able to construct their identities as authorities and powerful entities superior to the learners. They could do this because of their ability to speak English competently, which the learners could not. This finding

supports Fairclough's (1992) argument that language can be used to construct identities, exercise authority and mark boundaries as seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5

Pupil: Amenichuna (he has pinched me)
 Teacher: (Ignores the pupil despite the pupil's insistence)
 Pupil: (Name of 'accused' learner) anani...
 Teacher: Speak English

The pupil in excerpt four switched to Kiswahili to express himself, but the teacher restrained him by insisting that he should speak in English. The pupil could not proceed since he was unable to express himself in English.

Teachers also used literary activities such as songs, stories, poems and news telling activities in the different languages used in the classroom. Table two shows the distribution of use of the languages in the different activities.

Table 2: Total Distribution Use of the Different Languages in Literary Activities

Item	Kis	Eng	Eng/ Kis	Kis/ Kik	Eng/ Kis/ Kik	Total	
						Frequency	%
Song	5	37	3	1	1	47	64
Poem	3	2	2	0	0	7	10
Story Telling	1	7	1	0	0	9	12
Story Reading	2	2	0	0	0	4	5
News Telling	0	3	0	0	0	3	4
Bible Verses Recitation	1	2	0	0	0	3	4
Total	12	53	6	1	1	73	100
Frequency							
Percentage Use	16.4	72.6	8.2	1.4	1.4	100	

Key: Kis – Kiswahili; Eng – English; Kik - Kikuyu

It was further observed that most of the literary items that were incorporated into the lessons were in English and were mainly used for entertainment, to break the monotony of lessons and also to set the tempo. Of all the literary activities carried out in the classroom, 72.6 percent were in English followed by Kiswahili at 16.4 percent. This was attributed to the fact that English was the language of instruction and communication with considerable number of switches to

Kiswahili and seldom to mother tongues, as previously pointed out. English therefore served not only curriculum and socialization functions but also recreation by providing comic relief. This finding confirms the claim by Kioko et al. (2008) that the international language, in the case of English in Kenya, enjoys prestige over the local languages (especially mother tongues) that are relegated to peripheral use.

The Use of Kiswahili Language

Kiswahili was found to be the second most used language in the school after English. It was the lingua franca of the school contrary to the school policy and of great significance in enhancing communication in and outside the classroom. Kiswahili was used for official purposes and instruction in the school at 16.4 percent. This reflects what happens in most municipalities in Kenya, where the residents use Kiswahili for communication in most spheres of life. This finding supports Whiteley (1974), Kitetu (1988) and Kimemia (2001) who observe that Kiswahili is also the national and official language of communication in Kenya. It is the social lingua franca that is very useful particularly where the community is multilingual.

Although Kiswahili is a second language to most Kenyans, it acts as a mother tongue to a very small population in the country. However, Kiswahili was found to be quite important for most of the children who joined the nursery school. During play and when on their own, children used Kiswahili. It enabled them to play together and explore their new world in school and at home, during PE and 'Free' activities. For example, during free activities, they were grouped by gender and freely chose what to do. Thus, Kiswahili also enabled learners to mark solidarity and to socialize. Occasionally, during academic lessons, they digressed and would use Kiswahili to discuss their own ideas hence excluding the teacher. As was observed (and as in the next excerpt), when parents came to pick their children after school, they would communicate with them and teachers in Kiswahili. This also gave evidence of the fact that the children used Kiswahili even at home.

Excerpt 6

- Parent: (Parent gets into the classroom and interrupts the lessons. She wants to talk to the teacher) *Habari yenu?* (How are you?)
- Pupils: *Mzuri.* (Fine)
- Parent: *Nani hanijui? Mkono juu.* (Who doesn't know me? Hand up)
- Pupils: (Some raise their hands)
- Teacher: *Mmesahau* (You have forgotten) teacher?
- Parent: *Kwa nini?* (Why?) Eeh?

Thus, through the use of Kiswahili, the learners were able to establish various relationships with their parents and teachers as the situation demanded. In this regard, Giles (1979) and Fairclough (1992) claim that language is used to mark boundaries, establish and maintain social relationships.

It was also observed that Kiswahili aided teachers in curriculum instruction. When terms were difficult for the learners to understand, they would switch from English to Kiswahili. It was observed that in many cases when Kiswahili was used, it was a switch from English. The language helped them to employ the strategies of mainly code switching, reformulation and elaboration to explain difficult concepts. In the following excerpt, the teacher struggles to explain 'silent' letters in English by switching to Kiswahili.

Excerpt 7

Teacher: For the word 'listening', 't *anasilent*' or '*ananyamazanga ukisoma lakini ukiandika anaamka*' (which means 't 'sleeps' when you say the word but 'wakes' up when you write it).

This finding supports Gumperz (1982) and Schiffrin (1994) who argue that code switching is a discourse strategy that is used to achieve various functions such as disseminating information and controlling the class, amongst others, as teachers do in schools. Further, Table 2 indicated that Kiswahili was used in literary activities such as songs and poems and this stood at 16.4 percent. Excerpt 8 for instance is a situation where the teacher used the song to explain the theme; 'importance of plants'.

Excerpt 8

Teacher: (They jump as they say the line)
Na ndege wa aangani wanaruka
Na mimi na wewe Twafurahia mwokozi
(They repeat and dramatise the song)
Maua ya shambani yanamea
Na ndege wa angani wanaruka
Na mimi na wewe twafurahia mwokozi
Na mimi na wewe Twafurahia mwokozi

(Translation of the song)

Flowers of the shamba
And the birds of the air
And me and you

Are happy in our saviour
And me and you
Are happy in our saviour

Songs and poems were thus used to enhance and highlight the theme(s) of the lessons. The songs and poems also acted as a prelude or signal to the next lesson. For example, the song on excerpt 6 was used to introduce a Science lesson. It was observed that the learners really enjoyed the songs/poems since they were able to identify with the ideas they conveyed because they understood them.

However, since Kiswahili is the predominant language in Nakuru municipality, the expectation of the paper was that it would have been used for instruction in the school. Yet, its use in the classroom remained on the periphery complementing English for the purposes of instruction. The claim by Kitemu (1988) and Kimemia (2002) on the ambivalence concerning the use of Kiswahili in Kenya is confirmed by this finding. However, it was the second most significant language after English in curriculum matters and other activities in the classroom.

The Use of Mother Tongues

The paper established that two mother tongues featured in the classroom. These were particularly Kikuyu and Kalenjin, which featured at frequencies of ten and one times respectively. It was also noted that Kikuyu overlapped with Kiswahili in the same exchanges eight times (see tables one and table two). Kikuyu was used more times than Kalenjin probably because the two teachers for the top class came from Kikuyu ethnic background. Kikuyu was exclusively used by the teacher to mainly make fun, or make a polite comment on a learner's mistake. For example, when a learner made a mistake the teacher would comment that what the learner did was 'mathogothanio' that means a scribble in English. The teacher would use it to comment on a bad handwriting without offending the learner. The learners would laugh it off and the lesson would proceed.

Teachers were however cautious with the use of mother tongues to avoid jeopardizing communication because of the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the learners. They would only use expressions in mother tongues that the learners were familiar with. They were thus cautious to avoid creating distance and probably destroying their relationship with the learners. Further, this finding confirms the arguments by Giles (1979), Baker (1993) and Fairclough (1992) that code switching can be used to create distance and violate relationships. The mother tongues were seldom used in literary activities such as songs and poems. In this regard, only one case was cited. However, it was observed that the song was not exclusively in Kikuyu but was a combination of the three languages as illustrated by the following example.

Excerpt 9

A Song in Kikuyu

(Ngwenda kuhana Jesu

Muno thiini wakwa

Ngwenda kuhana Jesu

Muno thiini wakwa

Muno Muno

Thiini thiini

Muno Thiini Wakwa

Muno Muno

Thiini thiini

Muno Thiini Wakwa)

(The following stanza is a direct translation of the song to English and Kiswahili from Kikuyu language) below.

Pupils: *(All)*. I want to be like Jesus
Deep in my heart
I want to be like Jesus
Deep in my heart
So deep deep
So *ndani ndani* (so deep deep)
So deep in my heart
So deep deep
So *ndani ndani* (So deep deep)
So deep in my heart

It was further observed that mother tongues were used to describe shared experience although sparingly. For instance, the Kalenjin language was used only once in reference to grandfather as ‘gogo’ when learning about the family. In the same respect, the Kikuyu word ‘cucu’ was used to refer to a grandmother when discussing the sources of water. In such cases, the mother tongues were used in curriculum instruction as the following example illustrates.

Excerpt 10

Teacher: *Unafungulia tap, unaweka maji kwa...* (You open the tap, you put water in a... (Mispronounces the word) *bashin. Halafu unakimbishia...* (Pauses) *cucu...*

- Pupil: (A few cut in with another suggestion)
Mami... (Mother...)
- Pupils: (Are excited by that experience and would like to continue)

It was established that the use of mother tongues was minimal. This was despite the fact that majority of the languages of Kenya such as Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, Luhya, Kamba and others were represented in the class. This could be attributed to the fact that even though most children could understand their mother tongues, they rarely spoke it. They only used mother tongues with a cue from the teacher who tailored their use to fit in her pedagogical programmes. Apparently, only two mother tongues featured namely Kikuyu and Kalenjin at frequencies of 18 and one time respectively (see table 1). However, their use was significant. This can be attributed to the attitude of the Kenyan community towards the use of mother tongues as explained by Kioko et al. (2008). They found out that most parents think that the use of mother tongues in schools would make children take their studies lightly. They thus prefer the use of English because of its perceived prestige and benefits. The use of mother tongues was therefore significant to some extent in sustaining classroom communication and hence construction of knowledge.

Generally the findings revealed that the three languages; English, Kiswahili and mother tongues all served important functions for the learners in and outside school. Their use was found to be complementary and had positive implications on every domain of the learners' lives, mainly educational and social. It thus contributed to their academic, social and emotional development, which are some of the major goals of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme in Kenya. The findings also revealed that the learners switched from one language to another for various purposes which included mainly construction of knowledge and identities, establishing relationships and expressing solidarity. The language switches were therefore considered as a strategy.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of this paper, a number of conclusions were made. It was concluded that multilingual learners and their teachers used the three categories of language as a resource in the classroom. The main language of instruction and communication in the classroom and the school as a whole was English. However, the learners and teachers switched from one language to another for various reasons. The switches were actually used as communication strategies. Further, the functions of each of the languages overlapped but they were also assigned specific roles.

English, on the one hand, was the official language of instruction and communication in the classroom and school. It was also the language teachers

and the school administration used to assert their authority and exert control on the students. Kiswahili, on the other hand, supplemented English in academic activities. It was the lingua franca amongst the learners. For the learners, it was the language of socialization amongst them and also with the teachers. Teachers used it to establish and express solidarity with the learners in a bid to reach out to them. The teachers were therefore enabled to establish cordial relationships with the learners and an environment conducive to teaching and learning. However, Mother tongues played a completely marginal role. Though the majority of the mother tongues were represented in the class, they were hardly used. It was therefore concluded that the learners experienced difficulty communicating in English language and yet it is the medium of instruction and communication. However, the use of code switching, in which case the use Kiswahili and in some instances, the minimal use of mother tongue was a communication strategy that helped them overcome this difficulty.

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