Lexicalization in Sheng

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Introduction and Literature Review

This is an investigation into the way lexemes are created and how meaning (hereafter referred to as lexicalization) is encoded in Sheng. This unstable language variety has existed in Kenya for almost two decades. Various theories exist about its origins. For instance, Osinde (1986) and Abdulaziz & Osinde (1997) suggest that Sheng emerged as a peer youth code in the low socio-economic eastern suburbs of Nairobi in the 1970s. Kembo-Sure (1992: 26-27) claims that Sheng arose in the low-class estates of Nairobi where children coined a code to conceal their secrets from parents. Mazrui & Mphande (1990) and Mazrui (1995) suggest that a Sheng-like code came to exist in Nairobi in the 1930s among pickpockets. Further, Spyropolous (1987:130) posits that Sheng was used in the 1950s but became pronounced in the early 1970s. Regardless of this lack of consensus on the origin of Sheng, it is accepted that Sheng "sounds" like Kiswahili (Ngesa 2002) but has a distinct and an unstable vocabulary.

(1) is a conversation in Sheng[1].

1. [[Hi-*zo digolo* ni poa] [*zi-na-kindwa*
   DET-CL10 sunglasses COP cool CL10-NONPST-sell
   rwabi ngovo duka-ni]]
   hundred five shop-in

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[1] In all examples, Sheng is presented in ***bold italics,*** Kiswahili is in **bold** face while English is in normal font. Given that there is no standard Sheng orthography, I spell Sheng words the way they are spoken in Kiswahili.

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'Those sunglasses are really nice. They go for five hundred shillings in the shops' (Waithira 2001:37).

Studies on Sheng have either concentrated on its sociolinguistic aspects (Shitemi 2002), word formation processes (Echessa 1990, King'ei 2001) or attempts to unravel its matrix language (ML)[2] (e.g. Mazrui & Mphande 1990, Kiessling & Mous 2001, Ogechi 2002). Concerning the ML, most scholars follow Myers-Scotton (1993:39) that Sheng is based on Kiswahili grammar:

> In Nairobi it is especially common in the Eastleigh area, a working class estate. A slang variety called 'Sheng' also exists in such areas; it is an innovative *melánge* of Swahili as a matrix language with English embeddings.

However, Ogechi (2002:89ff) asserts that the ML varies depending on the African language of wider communication in the environment where Sheng is spoken.

It is notable that besides Sheng there exists another language variety, Engsh, which is based on the English ML frame (Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997). The analysis of Engsh lies outside the scope of this article. However, it is worth noting that this variety is spoken in the much higher socio-economic class areas of western Nairobi. Engsh also has a high density of English surface morphemes as may be seen in (2) below:

2.   **Si** you **akina** pass for mwa morrows in your wheels, we do a swallow at them Vuras.

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[2] According to Myers-Scotton (2002), a matrix language in codeswitching is the language which sets the grammar of a clause:

ma-lecturer **wa-me**-strike
CL5-lecturer CL6-PRF-strike
'Lecturers have gone on strike'.
This is codeswitching between English and Kiswahili where Kiswahili is the matrix language (ML). This is because all the system morphemes (class and tense markers) are drawn from Kiswahili.

'Come for me tomorrow in your car so that we can go for a drink at the Carnivore' (*mwa* 'me'; *morrows* 'tomorrow'; *them Vuras* 'Carnivore Restaurant') (Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997: 55)

Sheng sources its lexicon from various Kenyan languages with Kiswahili, English, Dholuo, Kamba and Gikuyu as the prominent lexifiers. Other words originate from Hindi, American western cinema as well as karate and break dance films Spyropolous (1987:128). The borrowed lexemes are usually manipulated while more are continuously coined. Although Sheng has several lexifying languages (cf. Osinde 1986, Echessa 1990, Abdulaziz & Osinde 1997, Waithira 2001, Ogechi 2002), once the lexemes leave their source language(s), they assume a new meaning (sense) in the target language, Sheng.

How this new sense is encoded has, to the best of my knowledge, been rarely studied and when investigated, the description offered is either limited or lacks an in-depth explanation. Thus, even though one can safely argue that there is documentation of the structural and the sociolinguistic features of Sheng, lexicalization in Sheng has been least attempted.

In addition, it has been claimed that Sheng is largely identified at the lexeme level (Waithira 2001:109, Ogechi 2002:100) and that the lexemes are unstable since they keep on changing their meaning (sense). At times, their surface form might resemble that in the source language yet they carry a completely different sense from what they mean in the source language. Given this scenario, can one diagnostically identify the patterns and/or series of different lexemes used for a given concept? If so, in which parts of speech do the words manifest themselves? How is lexicalization achieved in the lexemes? Is serial change of meaning also attested in Sheng categories that are larger than the lexeme? The present article seeks answers to the foregoing questions but limits itself to word semantics[3]. Meaning in Sheng categories larger than single lexemes, e.g., sentence semantics falls outside the scope of my conceptualisation of lexicalization in this article.

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[3] Lipka (1990: 52) argues that word semantics is not confined to isolated items but focuses on lexical fields and paradigmatic semantic relations between words. I restrict myself to isolated items.

Lexicalization

I begin with an operational conceptualisation of lexicalization for two reasons. Firstly, there is no single definition of the term (Lipka 1990:95). Thus linguists do not use the term in the same way. Secondly, if not clearly explained, some readers might not distinguish between lexicalization and lexification.

With respect to lexicalisation, Trask (http: www.linguist.org/~ask-ling/archive-1997.10/msg01859.html. 14.11.03) identifies two senses of lexicalization. On the one hand, lexicalization involves creating a word to express some meaning. Silva (http: www.linguist.org/~ask-ling/archive-1997.10/msg01859.html. 14.11.03) concurs that lexicalization is the process through which concepts are put into words in a given language. In this case, Trask and Silva seem to be subscribing to Saussure's (1916:) dichotomy of 'signifie' and 'signifiant'. In the dichotomy, 'signifiant' is a concept, idea or thing while 'signifie' is a sound of language representing that idea or thing. Lexicalization occurs when humans either deliberately or effortlessly assign sounds of language to express phenomena.

On the other hand, Trask argues that in historical linguistics, the term 'lexicalization' refers to a process where a sequence of words is reduced to a single-word. In this case, lexicalization refers to a process of diachronic change in which a notion that had previously been expressed by more than one word is now represented by a single word. Lipka summarises:

> .....I would like to define *lexicalization* as the phenomenon that a complex lexeme once coined tends to become a single complete lexical unit, a simple lexeme. Through this process it loses the character of a syntagma to a greater or lesser degree. (cf. Lipka 1981b:120). In my definition an essential condition and a prerequisite for this gradual diachronic process is the fact that a particular complex lexeme is used frequently (Lipka 1990: 95).

Lexicalization is also used to show how Sheng vocabulary has been unstable (changed) over time either in form (emergence of new surface morphemes) or meaning (same surface morpheme assuming a new sense).

I return to the distinction between lexicalization and lexification. While lexicalization deals with encoding of meaning to words, lexification

refers to the source and/or processes of creating the words. For instance, two languages lexify (3):

3.   -pata *doo*   *poa*
get money cold 'earn good money'

The source of **pata** and **poa** is Kiswahili. While **-pata** translates to 'get' in Kiswahili, it means 'earn' in Sheng. *Doo*, is sourced from English *dough* whose informal meaning is money. Sheng takes on this informal meaning. Finally, *poa* refers to cool in Kiswahili but lexicalization in Sheng changes its sense to *good*. This signals semantic borrowing from the informal use of *cool* in English to mean impressive or when used with an amount of money, to emphasise a large amount. In summary, it may be said that the Sheng phrase **-pata** *doo poa* 'earn good money' has undergone both the lexification and lexicalization processes.

        In the present study, lexicalization and lexification are adapted according to the following procedure. A list of words used to refer to a concept is presented depending upon the words' diachronic evolution. Next, the words' lexifier(s) are identified. In this regard, I explain the manipulative procedures they undergo as well as how their meanings are encoded. Finally, I explain the condition(s) of use of the words in Sheng.

The Data
Only primary data comprising verbs, nouns and adjectives are analysed.

Lexical category	Number	%
Nouns	93	70
Verbs	37	28
Adjectives	2	2
Total	132	100

Table 1. Distribution of lexical categories in the data

The data was collected in October 2003 at Moi University, Kenya. Two Sheng-speaking university students, a male (aged 22) and a female (aged 21), collected Sheng vocabulary from fellow students. They collected 132

Sheng items and provided the literal glosses. From the translations, only three parts of speech were represented, namely nouns, verbs and adjectives.

The fieldworkers confirmed that regional dialects of Sheng exist. One assistant claimed to have collected Nairobi Sheng words while another claimed his data was from Mombasa. In some instances, two, three or four words were used to refer to the same concept or object. This was attributed to the regional Sheng dialects. However, in some cases, several words referring to the same concept or object could be used in the data collected from the same region. Some words could also be used with the same meaning in different regions. Since I could not concretely establish the dialects, I treated the words as synonyms.

Data Analysis and Discussion
Nouns
Table 1 indicates that nouns constitute the bulk of the items in my Sheng corpus (93 lexemes). Depending on the number of synonyms a word has, the items fall into four patterns. Some words have two, three or four synonyms referring to the same concept while other items have no synonyms:

4.   *dish ? mdemo* 'food'
        doo ? ganji ? manyamoo 'money'
        chik ? dem ? kenge ? manzi 'girlfriend'

The linguistic material on nouns had patterns distributed as shown in Table 2.

No. of synonyms	Frequency	%
1	39	42
2	30	32
3	12	13
4	12	13
Total	**93**	**100**

Table 2. Nouns and the frequencies of number of synonyms

Single Synonym Words
As Table 2 shows, this category constitutes 42% (N = 39). Lexicalization here constitutes a manipulation of the surface form of almost all the words

except direct loanwords from the lexifying language. Subsequently, five sub-patterns based on the processes of lexification and lexicalization emerge:

(i) Reversing of syllables

Sheng speakers resort to the reversal or swopping of syllables in a word (Ngesa 2002) in their attempts to keep Sheng a distinctive code for peers only. *Dika* ('card') is sourced from English *card* that is Bantuized[4] in pronunciation as **kadi**. The word's two syllables swop places so that **kadi** yields *dika*. Its meaning in English is however retained in Sheng.

(ii) Truncation

Truncation of the surface form of words is the most popular practice since it comprises 41% (N = 16). First, a word is borrowed from one of the local languages. Secondly, the word is adjusted to fit the target language frame. Thirdly, the resultant form of the word is truncated either in its initial or final syllable(s) depending on whether it is a compound noun or not. Fourth, the truncated form is either suffixed a coined syllable or sound to complete its marking for Sheng. Thus the meaning of the resultant word cannot be interpreted by the non-initiated speakers unless they learn it from the Sheng speakers. For example, *finje* ('fifty'), *buufee* ('bus fare'), *saaya* ('science'), *tizi* ('practice'), *preezo* ('president'), *hasii* ('husband') and *goe* ('ghost') among others are instances to cite in this category.

    Buufee is borrowed from English *bus fare* and undergoes several processes. First, *buu* is sourced from the English word *bus*. In its spoken form, the word could have surfaced phonetically as **bas** and therefore could have been "Bantuized" as **basi**. However, by surfacing as *buu* in Sheng, the word must have originated in the English written form *bus* and was Bantuized as **busi**. The second syllable is truncated and the remaining syllable takes on compensatory lengthening to yield *buu*. The second portion of the noun *fee* also has an English source *fare* in its spoken form fea. It loses its second syllable *a* while the first syllable undergoes

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[4] I use Bantuization to refer to the process through which a word whose syllable does not follow the Bantu primitive syllable of consonant-vowel (CV) is manipulated and conforms to the CV structure.

compensatory lengthening as *fee*. The final form of these processes is the
Sheng word *buufee*. The word retains its English meaning.

Tizi is an interesting example. While most words sourced from
English lose the suffixal syllables, *tizi* is retained from a prefixal truncation
of *praktizi* sourced from the English noun *practice*. *Praktizi* loses the initial
syllables while the penultimate and final syllables *tizi* are retained.
However, the word does not refer to practice in its entirety. It has a
restricted meaning in Sheng, namely, the physical exercises that one does in
sports.

(iii) Coining
32% (N = 12) of the Sheng corpus consists of coined nouns as listed in (5)
below:

burungo 'things'	*deepa* 'head teacher'
kerende 'crowd of people'	*mnoma* 'genius'
nyagu 'meat'	*rwabe* '200 shillings'
kifungu 'grandfather'	*tenje* 'radio'
blingbling 'jewellery'	*ocha* 'home'
mboch 'house help'	

It is difficult to speculate the basis of coining Sheng nouns. However, two
observations can be made about the nouns. One, some of the coined nouns
have a restricted meaning. For instance, while *rwabe* generally refers to two
hundred, it strictly means a 200 Kenya shilling currency note. In the same
vein, *ocha* specifically refers to one's rural home and not home in its
general sense. (Most African Kenyans, especially those working in towns,
have two homes – place of stay in town and a rural home where they were
raised). Secondly, there is mimicry of the characteristics of an object in the
coined noun, i.e. *blingbling* (jewellery). The reduplication of *bling* in the
noun *blingbling* might be onomatopoeic of the echo made especially by
metal jewellery.

(iv) Borrowing
Borrowing refers to instances where Sheng vocabulary is lexified by an
existing stable language. My corpus has 10% (N = 4) of Sheng nouns
borrowed.

Ngiri is borrowed from Gikuyu where it refers to the numeral *one thousand*. However, in Sheng *ngiri* is restricted in its meaning since it means one thousand shillings.

Stoori is sourced from English 'story'. However, it is Bantuized to *stoori* and the vowel in the first syllable is lengthened so that *stoori* surfaces. Its sense is expanded as follows. Basically, the word means story just as it does in English. However in its expanded meaning it may refer to news. When two people exchange greetings one might for instance ask the other, *Stoori? Stoori* here is a request for new information. *Stoori* also sometimes refers to remarks such as *What's up?* Or *What are your plans for the day?*

(v) Semantic Expansion

Semantic expansion comprises 15% (N = 6) of the Sheng nouns with no synonyms. All the nouns are sourced from either Kiswahili or English. For example, *chuo* refers to 'college' in Kiswahili. In the Kenyan context, *chuo* could refer to post-secondary institutions excluding universities. However, in Sheng *chuo* refers to school (either primary or secondary) and any middle level college where learners and teachers interact. Thus while the composition of learners and teachers in the Kiswahili meaning of **chuo** is retained, the *chuo* in Sheng is semantically expanded to refer to institutions of learning normally not included in the Kiswahili sense.

Semantic expansion is also seen in *keja* sourced from English 'cage'. However, to conceal the noun and fashion it in accordance with Sheng, it is suffixed and Bantuized to *keja*. A cage here refers to a wire mesh cage where domestic birds are kept. The Kiswahili translation of cage is **kizimba** or **tundu**, which figuratively refers to a prison. Sheng has expanded this Kiswahili figurative reference and applied it to an ordinary human abode so that *keja* implies a room that one inhabits in a big house or hostel in a college.

Bi-synonym Nouns

There are fourteen pairs of bi-synonym nouns in the corpus of data, represented in (6) below.

jamaa   ?   *chalii* 'boyfriend'

mathee	?	*masa*	'mother'
ndhom (bomu)	?	*shada* 'bhang'	
njaaro	?	*mchoro* 'plan'	
kobole	?	*ngovo* 'five shilling coin'	
ngoma	?	*mahewa* 'music'	
paoo	?	*bluu* 'twenty shilling note'	
soo	?	*nyanga* 'one hundred shillings'	
beshte	?	*beshti* 'intimate friend'	
ugangaa	?	*sembe* 'maize flour'	
msunye	?	*ngoso* 'white person'	
brathee	?	*bro* 'brother'	
sistee	?	*siz* 'sister'	
kazee	?	*kazoo* 'cousin'	

In line with lexicalization, it is possible to give a diachronic transition in that one of the two nouns was used at an earlier stage of Sheng than the other. For instance, *chalii* (boyfriend) in the pair *chalii ? jamaa* is a predecessor of *jamaa*. *Chalii*, was used at a time when *chik* (girlfriend) underwent transition through several synonyms (*chik ? dem ? kenge ? manzi*). *Chalii* persisted until *jamaa* replaced it. *Jamaa* is sourced from Kiswahili **jamaa** meaning 'fellow' or 'relative'. Only women/girls use *jamaa*. Hence when a lady says *jamaa wa maen* (literally, 'relative of mine') she does not imply her relative; rather her boyfriend.

Part of the *njaaro ? mchoro* pair is Kiswahili-sourced. *Njaaro* is coined while *mchoro* is sourced from Kiswahili where the latter means a drawing. In Sheng, the two words imply a plan - usually arrangements that a boyfriend and a girlfriend make for an evening or weekend outing. In the youth parlance, this is called a 'plot' because of the nature of the outing. That is, seldom is the outing given the parents' blessings. So they "plot" to go out.

Tri-synonym Nouns
My corpus yielded 12 nouns (as seen in 7 below0, which were categorised into four groups with three synonyms each:

ashara	*? ashuu*	*? kindee*	'ten shillings'

doo	*? ganji/ganzi*	*? manyamoo*	'money'
motii/buu	*? dinga*	*? dai*	'vehicle'
mozo	*? fegi*	*? fwaka*	'cigarette'

The *doo ? ganji/ganzi ? manyamoo* (money) synonyms represent an English-Hindi-Gikuyu formation. *Doo* is sourced from English *dough* where it means money. *Doo* was used in Sheng for a long time. At some later stage, *ganji*, which means opium, replaced *doo*. *Ganji* is sourced from the West Indian *ganja*. It is an illegal drug in Kenya but fetches a lot of money in the black market. Hence *ganji* is a metonym for the large amount of money one gets from drug trafficking. *Manyamoo* is sourced from Gikuyu *–nyamoo* ('thing'). However, *nyamoo* takes the class 6 noun marker for plurality and *manyamo*'s expanded meaning in Sheng refers to money.

    Mozo ? fegi ? fwaka represent tri-synonym nouns for cigarette. *Mozo* is sourced from Kiswahili **moto** ('fire') referring to the fire that burns a cigarette. Cigarette smoking is not encouraged among the youths in Kenya. Those who smoke, do so clandestinely. To ensure that the parents do not understand them when they are talking about cigarettes, the youth altered the sound patterning of the word and coined the word *mozo*. When the word was no more a secret, they changed to *fegi*, which is sourced from informal English *fag* (cigarette). This word is not commonly used in Kenyan English. Nevertheless, with time *fegi* became obsolete and a new word *fwaka* came into being. *Fwaka* might be sourced from the Kiswahili verb *–waka* that means 'burn'. This could denote the burning of a cigarette. However, to conceal the word, Sheng speakers have altered it phonetically to obtain *fwaka*.

Quadri-synonym Nouns

A quadri-synonym noun has four equivalents. My corpus has three such nouns (see 8 below):

chik	*? dem*	*? kenge ? manzi*	'girlfriend'
poonyi	*? pai*	*? karau ? koopa*	'police officer'
ushaago	*? shaake*	*? shags ? ocha* 'home'	

In *chik ? dem ? kenge ? manzi*, the equivalents of *chik* and *dem* in English are *chick* and *dame* respectively. The embedding of meaning in these two nouns is interesting. A *chick* is a tender, adored baby of a chicken. One who owns a chick jealously takes care of it so that it can grow to a mature chicken. These traits are applied to one's girlfriend. She is not only loved but also adored and jealously taken care of. Hence she is a *chik* to the boyfriend.

In the course of lexicalization in Sheng, *chik* was replaced by *dem* which is sourced from English *dame*. Dame is a woman who has been given special honour by the British government. Dame is used as a term of reference before the name of such a woman. Thus in Sheng, the characteristic of great honour for a British lady is bestowed on a girlfriend who is adoringly called *dem*.

Dem was later replaced by *kenge*. The word may be traced to the Kiswahili **kenge** ('monitor lizard'). A monitor lizard is not an ordinary reptile; rather it is a rare creature that lives in hot climates and even here, it does not expose itself carelessly. In the same way, a dear girlfriend is not considered an ordinary human being but someone special. Thus she is a *kenge*.

Kenge is often replaced by *manzi*. It is sourced from Kiswahili **manzili** ('house'), which must have undergone truncation of its last syllable –**li** to yield **manzi**. If that is the case, then the characteristics of **manzili** as a place that guarantees one warmth, security and homeliness are attributed to a girlfriend. These attributes are embedded in the lexicalization of *manzi*.

Verbs

Unlike nouns analysed in the foregoing section, verbs appear to have a high level of stability since 73% (N = 27) of those in the corpus have no equivalents. In addition, none of the verbs has changed from an earlier form to a new one. What seems to be happening is that new verbs are appearing where no known Sheng verbs existed before. Three patterns of verbs are identifiable, namely, verbs that are polysemous, verbs that have equivalents (synonyms) and verbs that do not have synonyms.

Verb Type	Number	%
Polysemous	2	5

Synonyms	8	22
No synonyms	27	73
Total	**37**	**100**

Table 3. Verb patterns

Polysemous Verbs

These verbs denote more than one sense. For instance, *-wahi* in Sheng means 'to outsmart' or 'up stage' one. Consider the following example: **Nilim***wahi* **yule** *manzi* (I outsmarted that girl). However, *-wahi* in Kiswahili means to reach a place early. Thus the concept of early arrival is transferred to outsmarting a person. *-wahi* in Sheng also refers to beating up a person as in **Nitam***wahi* **huyu mzee** (I will beat up this old man). The speaker is certain of not only outsmarting his rival but also of beating him up.

Verbs with Synonyms

Some verbs have equivalents as indicated in (9) below:

-hanya ? –katia 'seduce a girl'
-susu ? –nyoora 'urinate'
-wahi ? –samba 'beat up'

With respect to the first example here, *-hanya* preceded *-katia* in the *-hanya ? -katia* synonyms. *-hanya* is coined and refers to seduction (Ogechi 2002:100). However, when reduplicated as in *–hanya hanya* it means roaming around, flirting with men and women. Thus *–hanya hanya*, in its extended form, means 'prostituting oneself'. *–katia* has replaced *–hanya*. *–katia* is the applicative form of the Kiswahili verb *–kata* ('cut'). The act of seduction is associated with persuasion and the "cutting through the ice" (i.e., progressing from the unknown to the known) on the part of the seducer. Persuasion therefore is likened to careful selection of words in the act of seduction.

Verbs without Synonyms

72% (N = 37) of the Sheng verbs studied have no synonyms. These fall into three main patterns depending upon their probable lexifier:

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Lexifier	Number	%
Dholuo	1	4
Kiswahili	12	44
English	8	30
Coining	6	22
Total	**27**	**100**

Table 4. Lexifiers of verbs

Dholuo-lexified Verb

Donjo means 'arrive' in Sheng. The most probable Dholuo (Nilotic language in south western Kenya) equivalent of the verb is also *donjo*. However the Dholuo verb has a different meaning in that it means 'to enter'. For *donjo* to be used, Sheng has lexicalized the Dholuo sense of entering through expanding and associating it with the sense of arriving.

Kiswahili-lexified Verbs

These constitute 44% (N = 12) of all verbs in the corpus. In all cases, the Kiswahili surface form of the verb is retained but the resulting Sheng word has a different sense. *-dara* when used in Kiswahili refers to touching without implying intimacy. However in Sheng *-dara*'s meaning is expanded to denote 'caress in a loving manner'. A similar lexicalization is followed on the verb *-sota*. When used in Kiswahili, *-sota* refers to crawling on one's buttocks using one's hands. It denotes a situation of difficulty and pain. One who has no money can experience this state of difficulty and pain. Thus *-sota* in Sheng refers to 'financial difficulties'.

English-lexified Verbs

These comprise 30% (N=9) of the material studied. Lexicalization of the verbs is based on semantic expansion of the English sense. *chop* when used in English refers to 'cutting', especially a piece of wood to make various shapes such as a cooking stick. Sometimes chop refers to the 'action of eating'. As one chops, s/he reduces a big piece into smaller ones. When used in Sheng, *chop* means 'studying'. Perhaps the act of reading and trying to

learn is likened to 'choping' a big piece of knowledge into small understandable pieces.

Adjectives

My data had only two adjectives: *poa* and *noma*. This scarcity supports claims that most Bantu languages have few adjectives but that they can be used with multiple meanings. For instance, the surface form of *poa* is reminiscent of Kiswahili *poa* for 'cool'. However *poa* in Sheng evokes several senses largely due to semantic borrowing from English:

10. **mtu *poa***   'good, nice person'
11. **pesa *poa***   'good (a lot of) money'

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to take Sheng studies a notch higher than the traditional focus on the sociolinguistics and structural aspects of Sheng. By so doing, I have delved into the lexicalization of Sheng as a preliminary step towards studying the semantics of Sheng.

The analysis of the corpus has shown that at the lexical level, there is a high tendency of forming Sheng nouns followed by verbs and adjectives than any other parts of speech. It appears that largely it is open class items that contribute to and identify Sheng lexicon. Since nouns and verbs are the basic carriers of content in any conversation, it is safe to conclude that Sheng as a peer group language succeeds in isolating the non-initiated speaker because of the language's innovativeness in creating these content words. The analysis has also shown that although the speakers coin, manipulate and use Sheng lexemes unintentionally, there is a high degree of logic involved in the process of lexicalizing Sheng lexemes.

The fact that there are synonyms that have developed over the years (according to my analysis) does not mean that the so-called predecessors are completely no longer in use; rather, some of them are still actively used or are being revived. This shows that Sheng behaves like any stable language that has its diachronic and synchronic aspects. However, the diachronic changes (as shown through bi-synonym, tri-synonym and quadri-synonyms) seem to be overwhelming within the 20 or more years of Sheng's existence.

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This research leads one to identify other semantic aspects of Sheng (such as idiomaticity and sentence semantics) that require investigation. It would also be interesting to unravel the dialects of Sheng spoken in Kenya and the lexical features that distinguish one from another.

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List of Abbreviations

CL	noun class
COP	copula
CS	codeswitching
DET	determiner
NONPST	nonpast
PRF	perfective aspect

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