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Use of Bukusu Dialect on Fm Radio Stations to Address Political and Health Issues in Kenya

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Abstract:

The paper analyses communications through FM Radio Stations to address political and health issues in Kenya using Bukusu Dialect. Use of vernacular languages has been blamed by some people for promoting tribalism, especially in Kenya. However, these languages can be a great asset to speakers if properly used. This research sought to establish how use of vernacular languages in FM radio stations are an asset for development to its speakers. The study specifically sought to assess how Bukusu dialect is an asset to its speakers in addressing, political and health issues when the language is used on FM radio stations in Kenya.

Keywords: Bukusu dialect, asset, vernacular, FM Radio Stations

1. Introduction and Review of Literature

Developed countries in East Asia like Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Korea have industrially and economically developed by using their vernacular languages (Mudhune, 2002). That is the reason as to why there are names of products such as Samsung, Sanyo, Fuji, Toyota, Mitsubishi and Nissan. These products have been given vernacular names of languages spoken in those countries instead of English names. These countries have proved to the world that development can not only be achieved by use of foreign languages such as English.

If countries in the East Asia have been able to develop without use of foreign languages, it is also possible for African countries to do the same by involving their vernacular languages in many activities. As asserted by Prah (2002), Africa needs its languages not just for purpose of basic education, but for general development of its people. However, the allegations that these vernacular languages are not modern and therefore face serious challenges in their usage are misleading.

According to Mwita (2002), development in rural areas gives a chance and ability for rural habitats to get capital and therefore improve on their ability to be productive. The scholar says, this will create job opportunities to the rural inhabitants. Mwita (2002) says, lack of development in the rural areas is as a result of lack of proper ways of communication. Kenyans who live in the rural areas need information on new technology in farming, education, health and basic structures. In general, there is need for knowledge in business so that these Kenyans can know what is available at markets, how to make them and both the positive and negative effects of the products. This will be impossible if the language used in the rural areas; vernacular will be neglected. This study sought to evaluate how Bukusu dialect is used to pass information to its speakers on health and political issues.

Both community and family investment will be of importance if our professions shall be in a position to communicate effectively to the people they attend to (Mutahi, 2001). The scholar says, if these professionals will initiate debates and communicate effectively with producers and workers, they will end up with an environment that will be suitable for change. However, if the professionals shall not be able to pass knowledge because of language barrier, Kenya shall continue to lag behind in development because we shall continue trying to make people develop instead of making them develop themselves.

Any language can be developed to address the needs of a language community and there is no language that cannot be used for development needs for language community in education and technology (Luoch and Ogutu, 2002). Therefore, claims by some people that African languages especially vernacular cannot be used for development cannot hold water. Vernacular languages can be used to address many issues such as education, illiteracy, poverty, AIDS scourge and democracy (Ongarora, 2002). These languages are of great importance especially in rural areas because they will enable the locals to be more involved in issues that affect them. This study aimed at evaluating how Bukusu dialect is used to address health and political issues that affect the community.

Okombo (2014) asserts that, through our languages, we are able to explain our cultures, understanding of all plants a collection of animals and the knowledge that we have. Therefore, the language that we use in our environment is very important. According to this scholar, we must strengthen vernacular languages for Kenyans living at the grassroots to enable them have knowledge on

development. He says, devolution of national government authority should go to the grassroots where fishermen and farmers sit under trees and discuss developmental issues that affects them directly; educating their children, looking for market for their fish, farm produce and their representation at the Chiefs' barazas.

While emphasizing role of language in acquisition of knowledge, Micheka (2011) says, many people have accepted that ability to understand information depends mostly on the language used. The scholar observes that, even very bright people will be at a loss if information will be relayed to them in a language that they do not understand and the one they are not proficient in. She says that, if people do not understand the political language in their country, they cannot actively participate in the county's politics. She adds, English and Kiswahili to a certain level are foreign languages especially to those people at the grassroots. Therefore, there is need for use of vernacular languages that are not foreign so that people in those areas can participate in political issues.

In reference to the African Union Conference, Quane and Glanz (2010) emphasizes the importance of vernacular languages by saying, these languages complement each other with the international languages at different levels and they should therefore not be avoided for the sake of certain individuals. This implies that vernacular languages can be used to complete tasks that could not be completed using international languages, explaining why vernacular and international languages complement each other. Quane and Glanz (2010) assert that Africa should value growth of African languages to make them a more important means of communication and identification for many Africans. Growth and uplifting of the value of vernacular languages has been promoted in Kenya by FM radio stations.

According to a report by the Media Council of Kenya (2012), 36% of news by media stations that use vernacular languages are grassroots and regional ones, 31% being national news, 7% for Africa and 20% being international. From these statistics, speakers of vernacular languages can get information on all these levels; with grassroots and regional news taking a bigger percentage. It is said that radio stations which use vernacular languages have a big following compared to the national ones (MCK, 2012). As a result of that, the vernacular stations have turned out to be an asset to speakers of the languages in diaspora to participate in issues that affect their communities on the internet. These same stations have been referred to by Kamau (2011) as a 'friend' to their listeners. The scholar has called them a 'friend' because of the role they play to people who live at the grassroots, in that they relay to them information.

Ochieng (2014) while quoting Ngugi wa Thiong'o says, it is through the language that brought you up from childhood to adulthood that one can explain his/her community, its ability, and their objectives clearly. Although this scholar was contributing towards teaching of vernacular languages, he emphasizes the importance of vernacular languages.

While referring to Kithaka wa Mberia, Thatiah (2014) says that, learning of vernacular language helps children to learn many other things. The moment children have a strong background in vernacular languages that involve writing and reading; these skills normally portray themselves in English. This observation emphasizes the importance of vernacular languages especially in enabling a child to master both reading and writing skills.

According to Okoth (2015), radio stations which use vernacular languages, apart from enjoying a large listenership everyday, they continue to expand their scope to international levels. This has been actualised through the internet. He says that radio stations that use vernacular language can be accessed by those in diaspora through the internet. If these languages can be reached by those in diaspora when used on FM radio stations, then they are an asset to speakers because they can participate in discussions that are popular on them.

2. Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The study focused dialect from Monday to Friday between 9.00 p.m. and Mid-night and on Saturdays and Sundays on West and Sulwe FM; stations that air their programmes in Bukusu dialect in Bungoma County, Kenya. Sulwe FM airs all its programmes in Bukusu dialect while West FM has programmes in the dialect between 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, then from 9.00 p.m. to midnight between Monday and Friday. Bungoma County was chosen as the study area because the two FM radio stations are listened to in the county.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents. Respondents were purposively selected because of the professional skills they had. The criteria of choosing broadcasters were to have people who would give information about the two radio stations; West and Sulwe FM. Two broadcasters were picked from each of the two radio stations, one editor of the selected programmes. The selected broadcasters enabled the researcher reach most of the listeners through "snowball". Broadcasters gave information on programmes that are aired using vernacular language.

The information that was got from broadcasters was informing on issues that are addressed in the FM radio stations using Bukusu dialect and how it is an asset to its speakers. Programmes aired on the two radio stations were also listened to. The programmes that were listened to were specifically those that aimed to benefit residents of Bungoma County in health and political areas.

Out of the study population, the target population was chosen purposively. 4 specialists; one each from the following fields; health and political were chosen from each of the two radio stations. 4 editors, 4 broadcasters and 140 listeners were involved in the study. Among listeners, 70 were picked on from each radio station. In total 156 participants were involved in the study. The 156 participants were a figure within the required number (Sankoff, 2001). According to Sankoff (2001), a sample for a Social Linguistics study should range between 20 and 120 and if it is chosen carefully, it portrays the true image of the affect community.

The listeners provided data on type of programmes; health and political which they normally listen to. They provided information on issues that are addressed in these programmes, they gave information on the benefits of listening to the programmes. The editors who were involved were those that edited programmes on health and political issues that were aired in Bukusu dialect. These editors gave the data on the content of the programmes and how they think Bukusu dialect was as asset to its speakers. The broadcasters on the

other hand gave information on the content of their programmes and their views on how Bukusu dialect is an asset to its speakers when used on FM radio stations and when addressing health and political issues.

Specialists who are involved in the programmes on health and political matters that are aired in Bukusu dialect were also involved. One specialist in each of the areas was involved. These specialists gave the following information; languages that they use in presenting the programmes on health and political issues, programmes which they are involved in presentation on the FM radio stations and views on vernacular languages being assets to speakers when used on FM radio stations.

With the aid of the broadcasters, the researcher listed names and cell phone numbers of listeners who normally call the two radio stations to contribute on discussions. Those names were used to get appointments with the listeners. Random sampling of names was used to pick on the listeners who were involved. Out of the list, we were able to pick on a total of 140 listeners; 70 from each radio station. From 5 sub-counties, 13 listeners were selected; 7 males and 6 females. The figures were based on pilot study that indicated that more male participated in the radio debates compared to female. From Kapsokwony sub-county, 5 participants were selected from each radio station; 3 male and 2 females from each. Fewer listeners were selected from Kasokwony because the predominant community in the sub-county is Sabaot.

The collected raw data was recorded and analyzed with guidance of Functional Grammar and Agenda Setting theories. The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data was analyzed using thematic method then was presented by use of figures and explanation. The findings were presented statistics that indicated that use of vernacular languages was an asset to their speakers when used on FM radio stations especially when addressing political and health issues.

3. Findings

The study found that there were many issues on health and political that were addressed on FM radio stations using Bukusu dialect. As a result of that, many listeners were happy with the radio stations and at the same time, they had a lot of faith in the radio stations.

These stations gave listeners enough information on the happenings that affected them and they gave them information which they had missed for long as a result of relying on the radio stations that broadcasted in Kiswahili. The findings were in agreement with the Media Council of Kenya's Report (MCK, 2012) which said that starting up of vernacular radio stations filled the gap that was in existence for long when people at the grassroots relied on national radio stations that broadcasted in Kiswahili and English for information on the happenings within the country and specifically within their regions.

The study found out that vernacular radio stations that broadcast in Bukusu dialect enabled listeners to get information on county politics in details especially through Sulwe FM. Listeners were also able to keep abreast with politics of the western region; Kakamega, Vihiga and Busia county. Many politicians from Bungoma County were invited into the radio stations to debate at length on politics of the county especially that affected the Luhya tribe. It came out that listeners were able to actively participate in the political discussions freely. Listeners were freer to participate because they were more fluent in the language of use.

Bukusu dialect was an asset to its speakers because although Kiswahili was also used to address political issues, they were clearer to the audience. Apart from that, Kiswahili dwelt more on politics of the whole country while the vernacular radio stations focused more on county politics.

Although West FM also addressed politics of Bungoma, Kakamega, Vihiga and Busia County, it used more Kiswahili than vernacular through its programme "Crossfire". The programme "Crossfire" was broadcasted once every week. As a result of that, listeners of both the two radio stations said that they benefited more from Bukusu programmes that were aired on Sulwe FM because within a week, political issues were addressed many times depending on how topical they were.

Politicians were also able to reach voters easily because of the use of Bukusu dialect. As a result of use of Bukusu dialect, these politicians were able to reach the grassroots voters easily because they were using the language that voters were proficient in. This was also confirmed by the advices that the politicians gave to residents of the county at most of the gatherings; to listen to the two radio stations; West and Sulwe FM.

Bukusu dialect also was an asset to its listeners when addressing health issues. The dialect informed listeners on how to improve their health. This was done by the language being used to inform listeners on symptoms of different ailments. Listeners are also advised on where to seek for medication. They could not get that information had Kiswahili or English been used. 57% (80) of respondents said that they benefited a lot from the programmes especially on symptoms of ailments.

Most of the programmes that addressed health issues confined in issues that affected Bungoma County. As a result of that, most of the programmes addressed the issue in details, 93% (130) of listeners saying that use of Bukusu dialect to address health issues was more appealing because listeners understood better the content.

It came out that use of Bukusu dialect to address health issues was of great benefits. The listeners said that use of Bukusu dialect in addressing health issues was better than other languages. However, the professionals who were invited were those who use traditional medicine.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper discussed how Bukusu dialect is an asset to its speakers. The study found out that use of Bukusu dialect on the FM radio stations was an asset to its speakers. The respondents indicated that use of the language on FM radio stations filled the gap that existed when the language was not used to address health and political issues.

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following: Formation of institutes to do research, create and control terminologies used in vernacular languages; Universities to teach some of these vernacular languages so as to change their negative

publicity; County governments to initiate language policies at the county level and revival of teaching of vernacular languages among others in the Kenyan language policy.

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