Resolving Optionalities in the Speech of Immigrant Somali Child-speakers in Eastleigh, Kenya

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Language resources refer to a 'repertoire' made up of different languages, dialects, sociolects, registers, and so forth, rather than a set of monolingual competencies. Gumperz (1964) observes that the concept of linguistic repertoire is useful for theories of migration and language, and describes a fluid set of linguistic resources, from which speakers choose in order to convey meaning. Blommaert (2010) argues that no one knows all of a language, not even mother tongue and, even less, the other languages they acquire in their life time. People may acquire language resources through migration and globalization processes, which results in a "truncated repertoire," as in the case of migrants. Blommaert (2010) notes that the super-diversity that arises from globalization processes results in communities of people whose repertoires are structured as truncated complexes of resources often derived from a variety of languages, and with considerable differences in the level of development of particular resources. Parts of these multilingual repertoires will be fairly well developed, while others exist only at a very basic level. Blommaert suggests that these truncated repertoires oblige speakers to engage in collaborative communicative work, and that this results in "something that has a very unfinished character: partial realizations of genres with partially correct bits of language". Blommaert indicates that there is no correct language as such, and that migrants' language may be received as incorrect by native speakers. Native speakers differ from non-native speakers with regard to their fluency in and mastery of their linguistic system. While native speakers tend to achieve full competence in L1, L2 speakers generally exhibit non-target-like structures in phonetics, phonology, inflectional morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Bermanoun, Montrul & Polinsky, 2013). The deficiency in the language of the immigrants is characterised by difficulty in lexical retrieval, code-switching to fill the lexical gaps, divergent pronunciation, morphological errors, and avoidance of certain structures as well as overuse of other structures (Blommaert, 2010). The proposed paper will be an analysis of the language of the immigrant Somali-speaking communities in Eastleigh, Kenya. Eastleigh is a business-suburb to the east of Nairobi central district, which is predominantly inhabited by Somali immigrants, to a point of being called little Mogadishu. These immigrants who mostly come from the war-torn Somali arrive to a linguistic environment where Kiswahili, the national language of Kenya, is the linguafranca that unites the many traders from the various parts of the country. Since many members of the immigrant Somali immigrants are illiterate, they limit interaction with their compatriots to the Somali language. However, they have to also interact with their customers who come from all language communities of Kenya, and so it becomes necessary for them to learn Kiswahili. Having secured the citizenship of Kenya, whether legally or illegally, these immigrants have to enrol their children for free primary education, where these children are further exposed to Kiswahili as a school subject, besides having to use English and Sheng, a Nairobi English and Kiswahili-based pidgin that is popular among the youths. This means that the linguistic repertoire of the Somali immigrant children is a mix of all these languages – standard

Kiswahili, English, Sheng, the broken Kiswahili of their parents as well as Somali, their heritage language which faces the pressure of insufficient input. As such they produce expressions like *gari ga betrol* instead of the standard Somali *Baaburkal shidaal malaha* (the car has no petrol) which reflects the influence from English just as using *jubad* instead of *dhala* (bottle) reflects influence from the Kiswahili *chupa*. The proposed presentation will discuss the Somali output of the immigrant children speakers and how they resolve the optionalities in the linguistic data. Data will be gathered through recording of actual output of Somali children and from Somali speaking informants who can supply more of like data as is manifested around them.

References

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