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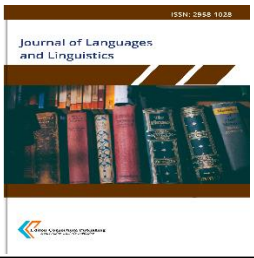

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Phonological Basis of Swahili Mispronunciation Among Kabarasi-Speaking Secondary School Students in Kakamega North Sub-County

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Abstract
The study aimed at investigating whether Lukabarasi phonology affects the quality of spoken Swahili in secondary schools of Kakamega North Sub-County, where the Kabras dialect is spoken. This is because of the mispronunciation of Swahili words among the students in school festivals, games, sports and symposia. The study adopted Contrastive analysis theory by Selinker and Gass (1992) because it explains how the contrast between the two languages exhibits the errors in a second language and impedes communication. A descriptive research design was applicable because the current study is qualitative. The sample size was 89 students from 17 schools that participated in school festivals and symposia from Kakamega North sub-county who speak Lukabarasi as their native language. It was regardless of whether they were boys or girls. More girls than boys participated in elocution and symposia, and so most girls had more accurate Swahili pronunciation than boys. It was found that due to a mismatch between Lukabarasi and Swahili sounds, the errors in second language (L 2) were as a result of substitution of Swahili sound with Lukabarasi, their first language (L 1), devoicing of Swahili voiced sound, Over-generalisation of Swahili voiced sounds and vowel insertion between Swahili consonants where no vowel exists. Therefore, Kabarasi phonology affects the Swahili spoken language negatively by transferring rules that lead to multiple errors in the pronunciation of Swahili sounds. The study therefore recommends that students should be exposed to extensive experience in Spoken Swahili by being involved in symposia, workshops and elocution to minimise the errors in spoken Swahili.

Key terms: Dialectal, elocution, first language, insertion, Lukabarasi, second language, substitution.

INTRODUCTION

The study unearthed that during educational settings such as drama, music festivals, and symposiums, some students exhibit multiple errors in spoken Swahili. Therefore, the current study sought to investigate whether the Kabarasi dialect affects spoken Swahili among the Kabarasi-speaking students.

Kabarasi, also called Kabras or Lukabarasi, is one of the 19 Luhya dialects with varied degrees of intelligibility (Mudogo, 2018). It is widely spoken in Kakamega North Sub-County as a native language. On the other hand, Swahili belongs to the Bantu group of languages and is widely spoken in Kenya as the language of communication in various social settings (Chenenje, 2024). Elocution involves oral presentations, which include public speaking, recitations and singing in either language to promote spoken language among secondary students. It is expected that Swahili and Kabras share similarities because Kabras is one of the Luhya dialects, which belong to the Bantu group of languages.

Mtallo and Mwambula (2018) found that Swahili has 27 consonants, while Chenenje (2024) found that Kabarasi has 23 consonants. This, therefore, implies that there is a mismatch between Kabarasi and Swahili sounds. The current study aimed to investigate whether the variation leads to errors in spoken Swahili. Selinker (1972) explains that if the speaker of the L1 has the rules of L2, there is a likelihood of positive transfer where the mastery of L2 is acquired faster than if there were a variation between the two languages. The study investigated whether Lukabarasi phonology and that of Swahili exhibit a significant variation to affect the students in secondary schools of Kakamega North sub-county, where Lukabarasi is widely spoken as the native language.

In Kenya, Swahili is widely spoken as a national language in both rural and urban social settings, which include schools, places of worship, parliament sessions and cultural events, among others. However, the quality of spoken Swahili is below the standards required by the secondary school students, which can compromise communication. The study sought to investigate the cause of such an anomaly to scientifically seek a resolution to improve the quality of spoken Swahili. The study aims to explore two primary objectives. First, it seeks to compare and contrast the consonants of the Kabras language with those of Swahili. Second, it endeavours to determine whether the phonology of Kabras influences the spoken form of Swahili.

Swahili is a national language in Kenya, yet it faces severe problems, including mispronunciation of words and mixture of both English and Swahili or Kabras with Swahili, hence lowering its quality. If its quality is compromised, there is a danger of miscommunication in a social setting (Chenenje, 2024). The study tends to solve the problem by establishing measures to restore the quality and originality of Swahili through scientific study, and further recommends that the curriculum implementers restore sanity in the language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chenenje (2024) compared Kabras sounds with those of English and found that there was a variation in the consonants of both languages that led to errors in spoken English, hence impeding communication in various social settings. The current study then sought to investigate whether such variation can also have a significant effect on spoken Swahili, given that the two languages share some Bantu language group structure and lexical items (Chenenje, 2024).

Jeptoo (2016) revealed that spelling errors that occurred in the written English of Nandi students are a result of phonological mismatch between English and the Nandi language, where the Nandi students substitute English sounds with those of Nandi sounds that were absent in English. Such a study has necessitated a study on whether variation between the sounds of Kabras and Swahili can cause a significant effect on spoken Swahili.

A similar study on the phonological basis of errors transferred from L1 to L2 has been done by Ontieri (2015) and found that errors are transferred from Bantu language groups to Swahili as a result of deletion, insertion and phoneme substitution. It has paved the way for the current study and only differs in that it dwells on orthography by analysing the written Swahili composition. In contrast, the current study sought to examine the effect of L1 on spoken Swahili.

The study digs into the Lukabarasi language specifically, but Ontieri (2015) was too general to all Bantu language groups, yet they have different phonological rules and structures. For instance, Kabras has been proven to be the only language with only voiceless consonants but lacking voiced consonants (Chenenje, 2024).

From the above examples and discussion, Swahili emerged from the Bantu group of languages, yet it exhibits phonological mismatch with other Bantu languages. Even the Bantu language group structure differs. Luhya has dialects which have various degrees of intelligibility, hence the need for the study of such languages.

The study adopted Contrastive analysis theory by Selinker and Gass (1992) because it shows the contrasting features that make it difficult for the speaker of the L1 to be proficient in L2 due to the influence of the L1. There is a high possibility that the Kabarasi language will influence the Swahili language and lead to communication errors. The theory is relevant to the existing literature review.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was applicable because it is within a qualitative research paradigm that analyses the data as it exists in its natural setting (Kumar, 2011). The study was carried out in the schools of Kakamega North Sub-County, where the Kabras dialect is spoken. The population included the students within Kakamega North sub-county secondary schools who speak Kabarasi as their native language. The study sampled 89 students from 17 schools that participated in school festivals and symposia who were native speakers of Kabras. The samples were collected based on convenience and snowballing techniques. This is so because the Kabarasi speakers would be identified by their peers who were being interviewed. It was done until the saturation stage was attained (Kothari, 2004)

Data collection was done using an unstructured oral interview because it involves gathering information by interacting with informants to yield first-hand information (Chenenje, 2023). An unstructured oral interview is flexible enough to allow informants to answer questions without being restricted to the marking guide or multiple choices, and they are free to express themselves in any direction (Kothari, 2004).

The researcher also observed students as they socialised in both formal and natural settings. The students were engaged in Swahili conversation and tape recorded. The process was done for 6 months until the saturation stage was reached (Wanjohi, 2014). The saturation stage is where the interview yields no new results beyond what has been previously mentioned. It keeps repeating itself. The data collected was recorded and analysed in tables and textual form.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Kabarasi Consonants

	Bilabial	Labia-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop/plosive	P		T		k	
Nasal	M	ɱ	N	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	ɸ	F	s/ʃ		x	h
Affricate			t͡s	ç/t͡ʃ		
Lateral			L	ʎ		
Approximant	W		ɹ	J	ʍ	

(From Chenenje, 2024)

From Table 1 above, Kabarasi has 23 consonants without voiced sounds.

Table 2: Standard Swahili Consonants

Manner of Articulation	**Place of Articulation**						
	Bilabial	Bilabial-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosives/Stops	**p b**			**T d**		**k g**	
Fricative	**ɱ**	**f** **v**	θ ð	**S z**	**ʃ ʒ** **t͡ʃ d͡ʒ**	**X ɣ**	**h**
Affricates							
Nasal	**M**			**N**	**ɲ**	**ŋ**	
Lateral				**L**			
Trill				**R**			
Approximants	**W**				**j**		

(Source: Mtallo & Mwambula, 2018)

From the above data, Swahili has 28 consonants. The Swahili consonants which are not in Kabarasi included all voiced sounds, dental fricative and bilabial fricative. Kabarasi consonants that are missing in Swahili include bilabial fricative, alveolar affricate and palatal affricate. The following table summarises the findings revealed during the interviews with students. It has the erroneous Swahili and the correct version.

Table 3: Variation by Gender

Gender	**Boys**	**Girls**
Interviewed	35	54
Many errors in spoken Swahili	20	10

The above Table 3 shows that boys are more susceptible to errors than girls in the Kabarasi speaking community.

Table 4: Sources of Errors in Spoken Swahili

Erroneous Swahili word	**Correct Swahili word**	**Source of error**
Tarasa	*Darasa*	Devoicing
Makitaba	*Maktaba*	Vowel insertion
Malasi	*Malazi*	Devoicing
Mukulima	*Mkulima*	Vowel insertion
Wagaguzi	*Wakaguzi*	Overgeneralization
Mukalimani	*Mkalimani*	Vowel insertion
Kupika	*Kupiga*	Devoicing
Kidede	*Kidete*	Overgeneralization
Katsalika	*Kadhalika*	Substitution
Metsali	*Methali*	Substitution
Alitinda	*Alidinda*	Devoicing
Kuliendache	*Kulienda aje*	Devoicing
Machambasi	*Majambazi*	Devoicing
Muchezo	*Mchezo*	Vowel insertion
Mavatsi	*Mavazi*	Substitution

Mjeshi	*Mcheshi*	Voicing
Kitavu	*Kitabu*	Substitution
Taraja	*Daraja*	Devoicing
Muchele	*Mchele*	Devoicing
Mutu	*Mtu*	Vowel insertion
Tagataka	*Takataka*	Voicing
Vichana	*Vijana*	Devoicing
Banda	*Panda*	Voicing
Mocha	*Moja*	Devoicing
Itameswa	*Itamezwa*	Devoicing
Zikilisa	*Sikiliza*	Voicing
Papa	*Baba*	Devoicing
Mjele	*Mchele*	Voicing
Msoso	*Mzozo*	Devoicing
Mcheso	*Mchezo*	Devoicing
Machani	*Majani*	Devoicing
Tata	*Dada*	Devoicing
Kigombe	*Kikombe*	Voicing
Chiwe	*Jiwe*	Devoicing
Karadasi	*Karatasi*	Voicing
Mukagusi	*Mkagusi*	Vowel insertion
Mderemezi	*Mteremezi*	Voicing
Kumchali	*Kumjali*	Devoicing
Mjoro	*Mchoro*	Voicing
Mdaji	*Mtaji*	Voicing
Malibo	*Malipo*	Voicing
Udingo	*Utingo*	Voicing
Ukali	*Ugali*	Devoicing
Mazomo	*Masomo*	Voicing
Ukadili	*Ukatili*	Voicing
Samani	*Zamani*	Devoicing
Mkurukenzi	*Mkurugenzi*	Devoicing
Madambara	*Matambara*	Voicing
Jama	*Chama*	Voicing
Machi	*Maji*	Devoicing
Msalendo	*Mzalendo*	Devoicing
Nchama	*Njama*	Devoicing
Ukanga	*Uganga*	Devoicing
Mchane	*Mjane*	Devoicing
Kawa	*Gawa*	Devoicing
Dafuta	*Tafuta*	Voicing
Zote	*Sote*	Voicing
Bole	*Pole*	Voicing
Mchomba	*Mjomba*	Devoicing
Chulisha	*Julisha*	Devoicing
Zamahani	*Samahani*	Voicing

Wakupwa	*Wakubwa*	Devoicing
Pipi	*Bibi*	Devoicing
Pwana	*Bwana*	Devoicing
Kitole	*Kidole*	Devoicing
Shemechi	*Shemeji*	Devoicing
Kichichi	*Kijiji*	Devoicing
Mtomo	*Mdomo*	Devoicing
Kichasho	*Kijasho*	Devoicing
Chenga	*Jenga*	Devoicing
Kidongoji	*Kitongoji*	Voicing
Faita	*Faida*	Devoicing
Fija	*Ficha*	Voicing
Athabu	*Adhabu*	Substitution
Tharau	*Dharau*	Devoicing
Chiusulu	*Jiuzulu*	Devoicing
Mdoko	*Mdogo*	Devoicing
Mukuristo	*Mkristo*	Vowel insertion
Mgono	*Mkono*	Voicing
Akiti	*Akidi*	Devoicing
Mgarimu	*Mkarimu*	Voicing
Mdoni	*Mtoni*	Voicing
Dwende	*Twende*	Voicing
Savavu	*Sababu*	Substitution
Kiogode	*Kiokote*	Voicing
Muta	*Muda*	Devoicing
Mkala	*Mgala*	Devoicing
Ufakio	*Ufagio*	Devoicing
Chembe	*Jembe*	Devoicing
Uchusi	*Uchuzi*	Devoicing
Ugalimani	*Ukalimani*	Voicing
Teni	*Deni*	Devoicing
Machukumu	*Majukumu*	Devoicing
Mkonjwa	*Mgonjwa*	Devoicing
Rutisha	*Rudisha*	Devoicing
Nachua	*Najua*	Devoicing
Bamoja	*Pamoja*	Voicing
Kari	*Gari*	Devoicing
Ndeke	*Ndege*	Devoicing

The above table is a summary of the findings from the informants, which revealed that Lukabarasi phonology affects the quality of spoken Swahili. The study found that several students who participated in elocution had minimal phonological errors compared to those who did not. More girls than boys participated in school festivals and symposia, which is a clear indication that girls are significantly better than boys in spoken Swahili.

There was a mismatch between Lukabarasi and Swahili sounds, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Although some sounds had a resemblance, the variation significantly affected the L2 adversely. Some errors were due to the tongue slip caused by Lukabarasi having only

voiceless consonants, but Swahili having both voiced and voiceless consonants.

Table three revealed that the courses of error in spoken Swahili of Kabras students included vowel insertion, Devoicing, Overgeneralization and substitution. Most errors occur as a result of devoicing, but voicing was minimal. Swahili consonants that faced substitution were /v/ by the Lukabarasi sound bilabial fricative /ɸ/ and the voiceless dental fricative consonant /θ/, which is replaced by /ts /, a voiceless dental fricative consonant sound in Kabras.

Contrastive Analysis theory by Selinker and Gass (1992) expounded that if there is a mismatch between L1 and L2, there can be a negative transfer where the transfer causes errors in L2. It is deduced that there is a negative transfer due to phonological variation between the sounds of Kabras and Swahili. Kabras has only voiceless sounds without voiced sounds (Chenenje, 2024), whereas Swahili has both voiced and voiceless sounds.

In addition to that, where the Swahili sound was missed in Kabras, it was substituted by the Kabarasi equivalent. The variation in sounds resulted in the substitution of a consonant. Variation between voicing and devoicing resulted in Overgeneralization of phonological rules, leading to mispronunciation. Kabras, like other Bantu languages, tends to insert vowels because in Bantu languages, all syllables have vowels. In Swahili, some syllable structures have a coda, but Kabras syllables have no coda. Such a difference results in vowel misplacement in Swahili, and consequently, mispronunciation occurs.

The study aimed to investigate whether Lukabarasi phonology affects the quality of spoken Swahili, in the framework of Contrastive Analysis Theory by Selinker and Gass (1992). It was found that Kabarasi phonology affects the quality of spoken Swahili negatively as a result of the mismatch in sounds of the two languages. Therefore, the causes of errors in spoken Swahili are the insertion of vowels, Overgeneralization of sound combinations, substitution and devoicing of voiced consonants. Where the Swahili sound was missed in Kabarasi, it was substituted with the one in Kabarasi, and due to the lack of voiced consonants in Kabarasi, they tended to devoice most consonants in Swahili.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: There is a mismatch between Lukabarasi and Swahili consonant sounds as a result of Lukabarasi having only voiceless consonants, but Swahili has both voiced and voiceless consonants. Moreover, Kabarasi affects the quality of spoken Swahili negatively due to a consonant mismatch that resulted in the error occasioned by vowel insertion, consonant substitution, Overgeneralization of voiced consonants and devoicing of the voiced Swahili consonant sounds. According to Selinker and Gass (1992), if there is a variation between the two languages, there is a possibility of negative transfer, which occurs when the L1 learners apply the rules and principles of L1 to L2, resulting in errors. The two languages share most of the sound system, morphological processes and syntax due to their Bantu origin, but differ significantly in terms of phonological rules (Chenenje, 2023).

Recommendations: The study found that Kabras phonology affects Swahili spoken language negatively by transfer of rules from L1 to L2, but the students who participated in elocution had an improved version of spoken Swahili. The study recommends that students should be exposed to situations that impel them to speak Swahili, such as recitations, public speaking competitions, Drama festivals, reading, and conversation in Swahili. Additionally, Teachers of Swahili should emphasise the use of Swahili in and outside classes, such as in cultural events, social organisational ceremonies, debating and symposiums, in their communication for the learners to find role models in the language. Schools should expose the students to elocution and group discussions in Swahili without assuming that it is easy and mostly spoken in official settings.

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