

Application of Songs in the Teaching of Swahili Grammar

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Abstract

Background: Songs are instruments that enhance pedagogy of diversity. Songs are appreciated for their pedagogical, cultural, linguistic and entertaining features. Songs also enhance students' receptivity and help students understand the target language. However, empirical research examining the effects of songs as used in children's classrooms remains scarce. In addition, despite their benefits, teachers in many educational settings in Africa have relegated songs to mainly recreation and entertainment part.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the value of songs as a medium of teaching Swahili tense, lexis and negation.

Theoretical Orientation: The study is anchored on the Affective Filter Hypothesis in Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition as an explanation of its practical applicability to English language teaching and learning.

Design, Sample and Methods: The study was carried out from a qualitative perspective. The Kiswahili song "Mchikicho" was purposively sampled to illustrate how songs can be applied in the teaching of vocabulary, tense and negation in Kiswahili. The study also conducted interviews with two linguists in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of songs in the acquisition of Swahili tense, lexis and negation. The interviews and notes arising from the analysis of the Swahili song were transcribed and analysed thematically.

Results: The findings of the study indicate that songs reinforce the teaching of Swahili tense, lexis and negation. In addition, the study found that that songs which are simple, short, interesting, memorable, enjoyable, assist in the teaching of vocabulary, tenses and negation in Swahili.

Conclusions: The study concludes that songs are viable vehicles for teaching Swahili tense, lexis and negation. In addition, when complemented by songs, classroom instruction become enjoyable and interesting, promoting a deeper level of learning.

Key Words: Songs, Swahili tense, lexis, negation

Introduction

Research in language teaching has noted that learners' motivation and interest are among the most important factors for the learning of any language (Kusnierek, 2016; Griffee, 1995). Harmer (1998), for example, notes that "highly motivated students do better than ones without any motivation at all" (p. 8). Songs are enjoyable and are one of the most effective language learning strategies (Kirsch, 2008; Shen, 2009). According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2015, pp. 370–371), songs help students "internalize the sounds, vocabulary, rhythms, and structures of the new language. Similarly, Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Singh, Azman and Souriyavongsa (2011) note that:

... songs are one of the most captivating and culturally rich resources that can be easily used in language classrooms. Songs offer a change from routine classroom activities. They are precious resources to develop students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They can also be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives and adverbs (p.1988).

The above quotation highlights the various ways in which songs can be employed in language teaching and learning. Thus, as noted by Falioni (1993, p.98), "practically all grammar points can be found in music texts, and the texts also offer a wide variety of vocabulary." Research on psycholinguistics also reveals that songs can activate language acquisition and learning in both hemispheres of the human brain (Larsen-Freeman, 1985). Generally, according to Džanic and Pejic (2016), songs are, therefore, tools of dissemination of linguistic, pedagogical and cultural phenomena.

While the use of songs has won plaudits from linguists, few empirical studies have formally assessed songs' actual pedagogical effectiveness on language teaching (Davis, 2017). For instance, Murphey (2002) wonders why it is that although songs and music appear in our daily lives at cafes, in shopping malls, and in our cars, it seems that "the only place music and song is slow to catch on is in schools!" (p. 7). In addition, there is often little emphasis on lexis development, tense and negation in the primary school curricula.

Songs can be employed in the teaching of all languages including Swahili, a language spoken in East and Central African region. Swahili has been considered unique among the African languages of the modern world for the dynamism of its development (Pawliková-Vilhanová, 1996). The Niger-Congo language phylum, which Swahili belongs, "consists of 1436

languages and this makes it the largest phylum in the world” (Heine & Nurse, 2000, p.11). Specifically, Swahili belongs to the Narrow Bantu subgroup which comprises about 500 languages spoken by at least 60 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. Its ability to adapt to changing contexts has contributed to its unique position among languages of East and Central Africa.

According to Rieger (2011), since Swahili is prototypically agglutinative with considerable prefixation and suffixation, one cannot easily equate Swahili tenses with English tenses, as some of the affixes do not specifically refer to time, but rather to some aspect of the action or state. This means that most words consist of a root and one or more affixes. The basic word order in Swahili is Subject - Verb - Object (SVO). The subject is the initial element in the basic sentence. The verb comes next, while the object follows the verb as in the following sentences:

- a) Mwalimu alifundisha wanafunzi. (The teacher taught the students).
- b) Mama alipika chakula. (My mother cooked the food).

The verb root in Swahili carries many different markers such as negation, number, person, and tense and aspect distinctions (Givón, 2001).

The choice of Kiswahili is based on its importance. Kawoya and Makokha (2009), for example, offer a novel perspective on how Kiswahili can be tapped as a resource for mobilizing popular support for the East African regional integration process. Kiswahili contains some of the most complex Tense Aspect Mood systems in the world (Polomé, 1967). Tense in Swahili, according to Polomé (1967, p.115), describes “the time/aspect dimension in the verbal process”. Bantu languages normally have a considerably larger number of Tense, Aspect, and Mood markers than the Indo-European languages, and aspectual markers are especially numerous (Polomé, 1967, p.18). Dahl (1985, p.185) suggests that this complexity might be because Bantu languages are generally prefixing rather than suffixing. Rieger (2011) argues that tense, for example, is the prominent and orienting feature for Kiswahili verbal markers. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to highlight how songs can be used as teaching tools to provide insight into the teaching of tense, lexis and negation in Kiswahili.

Literature Review

This section reviews different views on literature on the use of songs in classroom instruction across the globe. In particular, the section reviews songs and lexis teaching, tense and negation in Kiswahili. Huy Le (2007), for example, a Vietnamese ESL teacher, notes that music is highly valued by both students of English and (ESL) teachers in the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Other researches that underscore the importance of music and music activities in the teaching of English as Second Language include, *inter alia* (Sevik, 2011) in Turkey, (Baez, 1993) in the United States, Mexico (Domoney & Harris, 1993), South Africa (Puhl, 1989), and Kenya (Njoroge & Gathigia, 2013; Gathigia, Njoroge & Ndung'u, 2016). Brand (2007), for example, notes that song lyrics can be used in sensitizing Chinese ESL learners on the importance of effective intercultural communication. He, therefore, advocates the use of song lyrics in helping create a natural speaking environment that more closely adheres to the intercultural communication skills necessary for ESL students to understand English and to be understood by others.

Sevik (2011) explores the views of Turkish state primary school EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers about songs in teaching English to young learners. The views were collected through a questionnaire and the results showed that the Turkish EFL teachers have strong beliefs about the pedagogical value of songs and about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching EFL to young learners. However, Sevik also found out that teachers had challenges in accessing appropriate songs to use in their classes and in measuring students' success when they use songs. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers should be provided with materials to use in their classes.

Tegge (2015) addresses how popular songs can benefit lexical learning in second and foreign language classrooms. Tegge defines lexical learning as the acquisition of new vocabulary as well as the consolidation and further elaboration of familiar words and phrases. The responses of 568 informants in 41 countries indicate that a majority of respondents believe in the usefulness of songs for language learning and that many respondents use songs in class for pedagogical purposes, including the learning of vocabulary. The study also found that teacher-selected songs are short, repetitive and relatively undemanding as far as lexis is concerned compared to other authentic text genres. The study argues that while certain structural characteristics of songs have the potential of rendering text (and the lexis therein) memorable, it

is the way that songs tend to be exploited in the classroom that capitalizes on this mnemonic potential.

In another study, Ayotte (2004) investigates whether listening to songs played a role in the acquisition of second language verb forms when teaching French as Second Language. One of the experiments showed that subjects who listened to songs performed with more grammatical accuracy on the immediate posttests on three verb forms – present, future, and conditional than the subjects who did not listen to songs. The other experiment, however, showed no statistical significance between language taught with music and language taught with no music.

Generally, the reviewed studies inform the current study in terms of the structure, theory and methodology. However, they have not discussed in details the way a prototypically agglutinative language like Kiswahili with considerable prefixation and suffixation and one that cannot easily equate Swahili tenses with English tenses can be employed to teach lexis, tenses and negation. These shortcomings have left research gaps and, therefore, the need to undertake the present study. In the next sub section, the study looks at tense and negation in Kiswahili.

Tense (*Nyakati*) in Kiswahili

Dahl (1985) has pointed out that no standard terminology exists for classifying tense, aspect and modality systems. The grammatical descriptions of Bantu languages are no exception. This has given rise to numerous so-called tenses with different interpretations, both temporal and aspectual. Kang'ethe-Iraki (2004), however, claims that tense locates an event on the axis of time. That is, it determines whether an event is present, past or future. Tense is also defined as “the systematic coding of the relation between two points along the ordered linear dimension of time” (Givón, 2001, p.285). Similarly, according to Chou and Wu (2007), “Tense locates an event or a situation in time with respect to the moment of speaking (speech time) or a reference point (reference time) (p.32). Loogman (1965, p.190) divides the tense aspect markers in Swahili into three temporal systems: the present system, the past system and the future system. His tense markers are *na-*, *li-* and *ta-*, which describe time in reference to a fixed reference point, which is the moment of speaking.

The marker for the present tense (*wakati uliopo*) is “*na.*” Linguists such as Bybee, Revere and William (1994) prefer not to call it present a tense. They argue that the present tense is not primarily a deictic temporal reference. They claim that what we refer to as present actually

covers various types of imperfective situations, with the moment of speech as the reference point. Bybee *et al.* (1994, p.126) state that present includes: ongoing activities, generic situations and habitual situations. Bybee *et al.* argue that a present marker expresses the meaning of present imperfective situations. Similarly, Basha (1989) admits that it is difficult to characterize the present tense, because present is simultaneous to the ST and there is no other RP to anchor it to. Therefore, the simple present tense denotes an action happening in this time. For example

Subject	Present tense (<i>wakati uliopo</i>)	Verb
Ni	na	soma

The tense marker for the future tense [*wakati ujao*] is “*ta.*” The future tense marker is a relative tense marker, in that it takes its reference from the immediately preceding context or the matrix tense when in an embedded clause. The *ta*-marker is the only grammatical morpheme that indicates future tense in a simple declarative sentence, independently of temporal adverbs,

The tense marker for the past tense [*wakati uliopita*] is the *li*-marker. The *li*-marker in Swahili refers to a situation that occurred before the moment of speech (Bybee *et al.*, 1994). *Li* is used in simple past tense contexts and is said to be an absolute tense (Bybee *et al.*, 1994). That is, it can be used as an anchoring tense in discourse and is not dependent on the surrounding context.

The tense marker for the Present Perfect [*wakati uliopo hali timilifu*] is a difficult one to define but is marked by “*me*”. It has also been described as the *past continuous tense* (i.e. something that happened and is still happening). Here are some examples of the tense marker *me* being used,

Amezaliwa

[He/she has been borne].

Mimi n**imesoma** Kiswahili.

[I have read/studied Kiswahili]

Negation

Negation occurs in three positions in the sentence: at the head of the verbal complex, within the verbal complex, and lastly at the end of the verbal complex in the form of a negative final vowel (Krifka, 1995). These three reflexes of negation are not mutually exclusive as most

negative sentences require at least two of these negation positions to be overtly expressed (Krifka, 1995; Vitali, 1981). The negative past tense is expressed by the *ku*-marker (Krifka, 1995; Vitali, 1981). The *li*-marker is frequently followed by the *ka*-marker. In the simple future tense, the negative prefix *ha* is employed.

The tense marker “*na*” for present tense is deleted and the final vowel “*a*” changes to “*i*”. The tense marker for present perfect tense “*me*” changes to “*ja*” and the final vowel does not change. The tense marker “*li*” for past tense changes to “*ku*” and the final vowel does not change. The tense marker for future does not change.

Theoretical Framework

Educationists and scholars have put forward a plethora of theories on language teaching and learning to help teachers to play their roles in the teaching of languages, and learners to become proficient in learning a second or foreign language (Kakule, 2016). The Krashen’s Theory of Second Language Acquisition, which consists of five main hypotheses, is employed in this study. One of the proposed hypotheses is the Affective Filter Hypothesis which represents Krashen’s view that a number of affective variables play a supportive role in second language acquisition (Schütz, 2007). Schoepp (2001) describes the Affective Filter Hypothesis in Krashen’s Theory of Second Language Acquisition as an explanation of how the affective variables relate to language learning. These variables include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

Krashen (1982) claims that students with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low-level of anxiety are better equipped to learn a second language compared with students with low motivation and low self-esteem. The former become more successful to learn a new language while the latter create a mental block which prevents them to learn the language successfully. Shen (2009) argues that listening to songs can knock down the learner’s psychological barriers, such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence and apprehension as well as fire the learner’s desire to grasp the target language. In other words, the Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that for optimal learning to occur the affective filter must be weak. A weak affective filter means that a positive attitude towards learning is present. If the affective filter is strong the learner will not seek language input, and in turn, not be open for language acquisition (Schoepp, 2001). Teachers, therefore, need to provide an environment which is conducive to language

learning. Optimal learning is realized when the affective filter is weak. This results in a positive attitude towards the learning process. If the affective filter is strong, the students do not seek the language input and are not open to language learning as well. The teachers have to provide a positive atmosphere conducive to language learning. And songs are one method for achieving this weak affective filter that teachers need to promote language learning. It is, therefore, the opinion of this study that using songs in the learning process leads to achieving the weak affective filter; thus, promoting language learning.

Methodology

The study was carried out from a qualitative perspective. The Kiswahili song “Mchikicho” was purposively sampled to illustrate how songs can be applied in the teaching of vocabulary, tense and negation in Kiswahili. The song was purposively sampled because it’s short and repetitive. According to Shin (2015), children’s songs are short and repetitive with simple melodies and often rhyme. They have a distinctive rhythm. These songs are appropriate with children because they are catchy and easy to remember. In addition, not only do such songs provide pleasure, but they also enhance language practice and positively affect vocabulary acquisition and memorisation (Kusnierek, 2016).

The study also conducted interviews with two linguists in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of songs in the acquisition of Swahili tense, lexis and negation. Content analysis, which is within the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2008), guided the analysis of the song in order to identify the parts of the songs that were relevant to the achievement of the research objective. The two linguists were supposed to respond to the following interview questions: (1) “What are some of the features of Kiswahili songs that are appropriate in language teaching?” (2) “In your opinion, would you recommend the use of songs in curriculum for the teaching of lexis, tenses and negation? Give reasons for your opinion.

Results and Discussion

The study employs the popular Swahili song below “Mchikicho” to illustrate how Swahili songs can be applied in the teaching of, vocabulary, tense and negation in Kiswahili. The English equivalent is given in italics.

MCHIKICHO**Stanza 1**

Je,
 Ninauona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho
 Siuoni mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho
 A leo ni leo
 A kesho ni kesho
 Teremka pande kwa pande
 Na maua yako siyataki
I see a pepper tree and its flowers blossoming
I do not see a pepper tree and its flowers blossoming
Aa! Today is today
Aa! Tomorrow is tomorrow
Come down side by side
And I don't want your flowers

Stanza 2

Je,
 Nitauona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho
Sitauona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho
 A leo ni leo
 A kesho ni kesho
 Teremka pande kwa pande
 Na maua yako **si**yataki
I will see a paper tree and its flowers blossoming
I will not see a paper tree and its flowers blossoming
Aa! Today is today
Aa! Tomorrow is tomorrow
Come down side by side
And I don't want your flowers

Stanza 3

Je,
Niliuona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho

Sikuona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho

A leo ni leo

A kesho ni kesho

Teremka pande kwa pande

Na maua yako siyataki

I saw a pepper tree and its flowers blossoming

I didn't see a pepper tree and its flowers blossoming

Aa! Today is today

Aa! Tomorrow is tomorrow

Come down side by side

And I don't want your flowers

Stanza 4

Je,
Nimeuona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho

Sijauona mpilipili na maua yake mchikicho

A leo ni leo

A kesho ni kesho

Teremka pande kwa pande

Na maua yako siyataki

I have seen a paper tree and its flowers blossoming

I have not seen a paper tree and its flowers blossoming

Aa! Today is today

Aa! Tomorrow is tomorrow

Go down side by side

And I don't want your flowers

The Swahili song presented above can be made use of in the teaching of Swahili grammar, particularly tense and negation. Songs make learning foreign languages enjoyable especially when the language is new to the student. When learning a foreign language, most learners find it difficult to understand the different tenses in the language. Therefore, they need all the help they can get to understand the conjugation of tenses. When these tenses are taught in form of interesting songs, it makes it easier for the learners to understand and apply tense marking in the grammar of the specific language being learned.

In the Swahili song above, four markers of tense in Swahili have been used:

- a) “*na*”: marker of present continuous tense
- b) “*me*”: marker of present perfect tense
- c) “*ta*”: marker of future time
- d) “*li*”: marker of past tense

“*Ninauona*” in the song has been used to show that the action is taking place at that moment; “*Nitauona*” in the second stanza shows that the action is to take place in the future. “*Nimeuona*” has been used in the third stanza to indicate that the action has just taken place, and finally “*Niliuona*” indicates that the action took place some time back; a day or so. The students will therefore find it easier to understand the complexities of Swahili tenses having been introduced to them in the song. In fact the students can keep on referring to the song when not sure of the formation of a particular tense in Kiswahili.

The song also introduces the students to negation in Kiswahili: the prefix “*si*” introduces negation in the song. The Swahili word “*Sijauona*” means “I have not see it” while “*sitauona*” means “I will not see it”. “*Sikuuona*” means I did not see it. Thus through this song, the learner is introduced to negation and how it changes according to the tense in the sentence.

Many young people are adapting to a culture of listening to music wherever they are since technology has made it possible. With the trends in technological advancement, most gadgets have been introduced in the market for listening to music. Music is portable; one can walk around with his or her music and not feel exhausted because it is not a heavy luggage, unlike books. Hence the learner can get a chance to listen to the music over and over again, thus being able to master the words that express tense and negation in Swahili.

Students can dramatize Swahili songs such as “Mchikicho” to put more emphasis on the formation of tenses and negation in Swahili. While singing, students can use facial expressions and dynamics to show the tenses.

Apart from being used in the teaching of grammar, the same song can be used in the teaching of pronunciation of terms, and vocabulary. For example, words like “mchikicho” and “mpilipili” can be difficult for foreign students to pronounce but once the words are introduced to them through a song which they learn to sing, the pronunciation of the words by the students is bound to improve. The more the students sing the song, the easier the pronunciation of the word becomes. In addition, languages are better learned through saying words aloud. Therefore, when singing, words come out better. For example, the above song has many words, some of which may be new to students; words like “leo” meaning *today*, and “kesho” meaning *tomorrow* are introduced.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings above, the study notes that songs can be employed to teach different areas of a language like lexis, tenses, pronunciation and negation. This is in consonance with various studies in language learning. First, Aguirre, Bustinza and Garvich (2016), for instance, found that using music and songs while learning a new language can be of great benefit to students in aspects such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Second, the same view is shared by other different studies which have found that songs have benefits for vocabulary acquisition (Džanic & Pejic, 2016; Coyle & Gracia’s, 2014; Schunk, 1999; Rodriguez, 2010), retention of information, involuntary mental exercise, grammar (Rosová, 2007), pronunciation (Sigurðardóttir, 2012) or familiarization with the target culture (Salcedo, 2002). Third, songs increase memorability. According to Murphey (1992, pp. 121): “The music ties words and motion together and increases memorability.” He refers to this impact as the “song-stuck-in-my-head phenomenon” (p. 55). In addition, Haghverdi (2015) also argues that the use of songs in a study has a significant effect on learners’ language achievement in their listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar.

However, there are linguists who do not see the value of songs in pedagogy. Mol (2009), for example, notes that there are also a lot of songs written specially for English language teaching, but they lack originality and musical appeal for learners. Murphey (1992) also notes that the vocabulary and expressions in some songs may be too poor and different to the rules of

grammar which can lead to learners instead of improving their linguistic abilities making mistakes.

As far as the one of the questions posed to the two linguists is concerned, they noted that “teachers should pick songs that are well known and available in their environment so that students can also learn the culture of the other community”. The two linguists also agreed that songs “which are simple, short, interesting, memorable, enjoyable, may assist in the teaching of vocabulary, tenses and negation in Swahili.” One of the linguists had this to say: “Classroom instruction should be enjoyable, interesting and scaffolded with meaningful songs”. This is in agreement with Kanita’s (2015) argument that songs can be used as a useful tool of learning because most people can remember the words of the songs regardless of the language. In addition, Shin and Crandall’s (2014) argue that in language classroom, teachers need to motivate young learners by providing meaningful and purposeful activities in a context-rich environment that helps new language become more memorable and useful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings and discussion above, the study has shown that songs may foster the learning of lexis, teach tenses and negation in Swahili. The study, therefore, makes the following conclusions and recommendations: First, the study concludes that songs are a medium of teaching Kiswahili tense, lexis and negation; second, classroom instruction should be enjoyable and interesting and scaffolded by songs that are short, repetitive, and rhythmical. These songs are appropriate with children because they are catchy and easy to remember.

This study recommends the use of songs in curriculum for the teaching of lexis, tenses and negation. Ersöz (2007) and Halliwell (1993) posit that while designing a syllabus for young students in English as a Foreign Language context, the focus should be on the communicative function of the language and should, therefore, include songs. Similarly, Sharpe (2001) argues that in planning the primary language curriculum, attention should be focused on oral and aural ends and, therefore, songs should be included in the curriculum.

This study will be significant for language policy and all related stakeholders like teachers, teacher trainers and curriculum developers since the importance of songs in education cannot be gainsaid. Sariçoban and Metin (2000), for example, note that songs are one of the most interesting and culturally rich resources that teachers and teacher trainers can employ in a

language classroom to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, and rhythm.

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