Abstract
This article addresses the linguistic status of Sheng', and argues in favor of defining Sheng' as a social dialect of Kiswahili. It adopts Critical Discourse Analysis, as a theoretical orientation with the capacity to integrate grammatical knowledge and sociolinguistic information under the umbrella of functional linguistics. Functional linguistics provides a theoretical framework within which findings of sociolinguistic research may be related to situational communication constraints, and the theory of language as a formal and semantic system. The article presents a systematic analysis and description of Sheng' as a variety of Kiswahili, based on correspondence in the formal grammatical constraints at the levels of phonology, morphology, and syntax, but differences in semantic properties. It evaluates some views of language scholars who have defined Sheng' as a pidgin, broadly labeled it a code, or somehow negatively as an argot, providing principled arguments that discredit these views. Notably, the first definition fails to take into account the proliferation of synonymy, the grammatical inflection, and the historicity of Sheng', while the second view can be considered too general to be definitive, and the third view fails to take into consideration elements of prestige in some Sheng' varieties, including tactical use by social organizations in addressing the youth. A case for the more flexible but definitive status of a social dialect is argued, based on a consideration of the symbolic function of Sheng'. This claim derives support from certain studies touching on the sociolinguistics, pragmatics, semantics, and semiotics of Sheng. The rationale for these studies is assumed to depend on the psychological value of Sheng as a social category of language, a symbol of group identity, and an index of self-definition. Since most of the available studies relate to Sheng' rather indirectly by default, this paper winds up by observing a need for more deliberate studies that will systematically address the range of issues involved.

Introduction
Language researchers generally agree that Sheng' emerged in the Eastland's area of Nairobi, and eventually spread to other estates and major towns of Kenya, where it was used for interaction among the youth (see Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003). Today, Sheng' is not just used in everyday social interaction but its role has grown to the extent that it features in mass communication contexts, such as: youth columns of newspapers, oral culture as in the new generation popular song and music genres, commercial advertisements, and public information on matters that target or challenge the youth.

Since the decade of the 1980s, Sheng' has continued to generate a rather polarized debate among language scholars. Notably, a considerable amount of interest regarding Sheng' has come from educationists (see Nyawande 1985). Educationist is a cover term for those scholars who have a practical concern for proficiency in the standard language as taught in schools, rather than an objective desire to understand how Sheng' works. Language educationists, and anybody else who is sympathetic with their concerns, are bound to
view Sheng' negatively. In contrast there is the sociolinguist who is interested in Sheng as a linguistic phenomenon in its own right.

A basic objective of sociolinguistic analysis involves the study of language variation according to social categorization, such as its use by the youth (see Gumperz and Hymes 1989). Notably, it would be near impossible for any study to discuss any theme relating to Sheng' without reference to the youth who speak it. It is therefore odd that current studies define Sheng' loosely as a code. This paper looks at Sheng more specifically as a social dialect, based on a linguistic orientation.

1.0 Theoretical Orientation
Sheng' has continued to attract the attention of researchers from different academic backgrounds, despite the indeterminate state regarding its linguistic status. Partly attributing this interest to the unconventional nature of Sheng', one might wonder what kind of theoretical orientation linguistic research ought to adopt. As a linguistic code, Sheng' may not fall under the rubric of conventional language varieties. It has however demonstrated specifiable linguistic form, and functions dependent on the communicative context. These attributes validate the application of recognized grammatical and sociolinguistic theories to research on Sheng'.

For a coherent and unified approach to language use, this topic requires a sociolinguistic theoretical orientation that can be accommodated within the umbrella of a grammatical framework. As indicated above, questions about the social function of language are central to sociolinguistics. The answers indicated however need to be based on the reality of the grammatical system, and particularly on the semantic component (See Hudson 1980). Since we are addressing the question of language, we need a framework which tells us what language is besides what language does. This kind of a framework is contained in Critical Discourse Analysis.

1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a model of text linguistics in general and sociolinguistics in particular, within the general umbrella of functional linguistics. Sociolinguistics generally sees discourses as linguistic products of social occasions and language functions, encoding the social organization and structures of communicative events and their texts. Text refers to a verbal record of a communicative event.

Initially, CDA was developed as a model of sociolinguistic theory that attempted to analyze samples of language texts in a conflict situation (see Mesthrie 2000). This orientation depended on the assumption that language is the principal medium of social control and exercise of power. It was also based on the conviction that ideology is pervasively present in language use. As such, the ideological nature of language use should be one of the major themes of modern social science.

The CDA model of sociolinguistics has redefined discourses more inclusively as ways
of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, reasoning, believing, speaking, listening, writing, reading, and interpreting, which are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people. Language use is thus normally conventionalized in terms of the contingent structuring of social occasions, the organization of social roles and statuses of participants, their intentions, and purposes. This claim is based on the assumption that the interaction of meaning and participants is subject to closely enforced normative rules.

The principal proponent of CDA is Norman Fairclough (1989), who was particularly interested in the ideological complexities of specific language functions. Focusing attention on political debates, news broadcasting, and advertising, Fairclough (ibid) ultimately developed a model of CDA which brings a more refined linguistic dimension than evident in his predecessors, postulating a three-layered concentric framework of discourse structure as simultaneously involving three dimensions:

- A linguistic text which may be spoken, written, or signed;
- Discursive practices of text production and interpretation;
- Social practices involving wider cultural implications.

Commensurate with the three dimensions of discourse, CDA descriptions commence with the analysis of the grammatical features of the text, to culminate with the evaluation of the contextual, socio-cultural properties of language use.

- The linguistic text is systematically characterized in terms of specific features of grammar that are involved in semantic, pragmatic and syntactic representations.
- Discursive practices are conceived in terms of the structural properties of discourse organization, such as conversation or argument structure, turn-taking, and face-saving strategies of linguistic interaction.
- Social practices involve ways in which verbal exchange derives from and reinforces or challenges the expected norms in the wider society, in terms of discourse production and interpretation.

CDA interpretations are generated through combinations of textual features and the recipient's resources. There are six domains of interpretation of discourse: two relating to context, and four to the interpretation of text.
Interpretive procedures rely on interpret resources, which are based on background knowledge and shared socio-linguistic experience. Interpretive procedures can be reproduced in the process of explanation.

CDA explanations attempt to portray discourse as a social process, and a social practice, by showing how it is determined by social structures. Conversely, these explanations endeavor to determine what reproductive effects discourses can accumulatively have on the relevant social structures. A working assumption of CDA is that any discourse will have determinants and effects at the societal, institutional, and situational levels.

Subject to this interrelationship, CDA permits movements across contexts of situations into the larger society, thus enhancing interpretations and more adequate socio-culturally justifiable explanations. This view mainly derives from acknowledging the inter-textual nature of discourse, and explicitly or implicitly recognizing the historicity of texts.
Significantly, the sociolinguistic concept of discourse has been broadened in CDA, to denote ways of using language and other semiotic systems. Hence CDA involves an eclectic enquiry into the relation between signs, signification, and social meanings, including the cultural and the historical relevance of the conditions that govern the text of discourse. An eclectic approach to language use enhances the descriptive power of CDA, in the quest for the parameters of language organization that are especially linked to the coding of social values.

Though ideally embracing an eclectic approach to analysis, description, and explanation, the core theory is of a linguistic orientation. More specifically, CDA is constrained by a condition that it uses specific linguistic instruments of analysis. Importantly, the analysis needs to identify and label certain key linguistic constructions, relating them to their contexts in particular ways. To achieve reliable identification and labeling terminology CDA borrows from various linguistic theories, but more regularly from systemic functional grammar.

1.2 Systemic Functional Grammar
Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a model of grammatical representation that treats language as a network of meanings (see Halliday 2004). For analytic convenience, SFG identifies two basic types of linguistic meaning: transactional and interpersonal. The transactional/interpersonal differentiation corresponds to referential/emotive, ideational (cognitive)/interpersonal, representational/expressive descriptive/affective, or denotation/connotation distinction. These meanings are also described as language metafunctions. Transactional metafunctions are message oriented and the interpersonal ones speaker oriented.

The transactional view of meaning refers to the intentional transmission of propositional content, primarily either seeking to inform a hearer something or enjoin some action upon them. Basically this metafunction depends on the general assumption that the basic function of language is communication of information. The value of language use as an information system is well-embedded in the diverse development and transmission of cultures. This metafunction is of considerable interest to philosophers and psychologists.

On the other hand, the interpersonal metafunction is of particular interest to the sociologist and the anthropologist. The interpersonal view of meaning emphasizes the phatic function of language, with particular concern for role relationships, peer solidarity, exchange of turns in conversation, or the saving of speaker-hearer face that characterizes everyday human interaction. In this case, the discourse analyst is concerned with what language is used for, on and above its formal properties or propositional content.

Functional linguistics thus views speech as rule-governed social behavior, without which language as we know it would not exist. Critical to functional linguistics is the notion of communicative competence. The latter deals with speakers as incumbents of social roles,
and seeks to explain their use of language to achieve self-identification while conducting their affairs. The notion of language use applies technically with reference to what is said on a particular occasion and how it is coordinated with non-verbal signs. Significantly, discourse analysis is necessarily the examination of language in use.

The theoretical orientation developed here provides students of language with a conceptual framework within which sociolinguistic information can be related to the grammatical theory of language structure and function. It may serve as a means of showing how relations of language to society can look to a student trained in either a more linguistic or more sociological perspective. It therefore constitutes a principled approach to a sociolinguistic description of Sheng' that is dependent on specific grammatical properties.

2.0 Linguistic Properties
Linguistic analysis is valued for the light it throws on the nature of language in general or on the characteristics of a particular variety. In this regard, the theoretical models outlined above stimulate and focus the researcher to ask questions seeking both general and specific information relating to the structure and function of Sheng'. Consider:

• What is Sheng'? What are the distinctive features?
• Who speaks Sheng'? Where do they come from?
• Do the Sheng' speakers speak any other languages?
• When do they speak Sheng' and why?
• Are there special reasons for the use of Sheng'

In answering these questions the respondent is bound to give general and specific information regarding Sheng' itself, Sheng' in relation to others language varieties, and Sheng' in relation to the society: something will be said not only about Sheng' and other language varieties, but also about one aspect or other of social groups that use it. Such questions would therefore elicit information, based on which the researcher is able to define the structure and status of Sheng' as a language variety.

2.1 Linguistic Structure
Dating back to the earliest available studies, Sheng' has been treated as a variety of Kiswahili that incorporates loanwords from African and foreign languages it has had contact with. (see Echessa 1990, Chimerah 1998, Ongechi 2005). Sheng' is thus a name used to describe a language variety that conforms to the formal grammatical constraints of Standard Kiswahili in particular, and Bantu structure in general. Structural correlation is based on parameters at the levels of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.

2.1.1 Phonological Parameters
Contemporary approaches to Optimality Linguistics approach phonology as a set of universal principles which regulate the sound system, but which are actualized differently in individual languages (see Kager 1999). Phonological principles are dependent on parameters, such as the phonemic constraints and the syllable structure conditions.
The phoneme may be defined as the basic phonological unit, capable of distinguishing two words of the same language. The Sheng' phonemic inventory comprises seven vowels and twenty-nine consonants (see Mugambi 2007), as illustrated in these charts.

**Vowel Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Tongue</th>
<th>Tongue Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-high</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mid-low</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Consonant Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner of Articulation</th>
<th>Place of Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>labial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obstruent</td>
<td>p b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affricate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fricative</td>
<td>f v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prenasal</td>
<td>mb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sonorant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liquid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where: j = dʒ; and ʂ = ʃ.

It remains to be determined whether certain nasal + consonantal sequences, as in /nz/ of #manzi# ‘girlfriend’ or /nð/ of #ndhom# ‘bhangi’, should be recognized as Kiswahili phonemes. In contrast with Standard Kiswahili, Sheng’ incorporates the mid-high vowels which are probably loans adopted along with such words as #manyamoo# [maɲamo:] ‘money’ and #gĩthabu# [yeθaɓu] #gĩthafu# [yeθaɓu] ‘a mathematical problem’. In adopting the latter, Sheng’ also accommodates Dahl’s Law of Dissimilation (see Kenstowicz and Kisseberth 1977, and Mwihaki 2006) as actualized in Gikuyu. This law explains the suppletion of the voiceless velar plosive to the homo-organic voiced fricative. Phonemic constraints thus interact with phonotactic constraints at the level of the syllable.

The syllable (σ) may be defined as the basic phonotactic unit, incorporating a concatenation of consonantal (C) vocalic (V) units, but which can also be composed of a single phoneme (see Goldsmith 1990). Syllables observed in Sheng’ words manifest six shapes: CV, CVC, V, N (nasal), VC, CCV, and CVCC. Some of these shapes are rather rare but none the less attested:

- σ → CV: as in the two syllables of the word #noma# ‘great’.
- σ → CVC: as in the monosyllabic word #chik# [čik] ‘girlfriend’.
- σ → V: as in the first syllable of the word #ochaf# ‘rural home’.
- σ → N: as in the first syllable of #msee# ‘youthful male acquaintance’
• $\sigma \rightarrow \text{CCV}$; as in the first syllable of the word #prezo# ‘president’.
• $\sigma \rightarrow \text{CVCC}$ as in the monosyllabic word #disk# ‘chapati’.

Note that a hiatus of two vowels as in #poa# or #doo# is tautosyllabic (see Goldsmith 1990). As in the Standard Kiswahili, the preferred syllable shape is CV with the variant shapes arising as a result of linguistic borrowing or historical change. The CV unit serves as a basis for the generalization of some phonological strategies that are involved in the adaptation of Sheng’ loanwords, and particularly: vowel insertion. Other formal strategies involve syllable metathesis and deletion,

- Vowel insertion, as in #cage# [keij] > #keja# [keja], deriving two CV syllables out of a CVC syllable. This strategy may interact with syllable metathesis.

- Syllable metathesis: the juxtaposition of syllables, as in #card# [ka:d] > kadi > dika or #numa# [numa] > [mapu] ‘buttocks’.

- Syllable deletion: truncation of actualized or potentially derivable syllables to derive two-syllable words as in #bus-fare# [bAsfe] > #buufe# [bu:fe:], with compensatory lengthening, or #trouser# [trauso] > #trau# [trao]. Phonological deletion may involve units larger than a syllable, occurring alongside morphological strategies of word-formation.

2.1.2 Morphological Parameters

Morphology may be defined as a set of principles which regulates the internal structure of words and the concomitant affixation processes (see Katamba 1993). The minimal and traditionally preferred unit of analysis is the morpheme (distinctive morph), exemplified in the verbal structure and the plural-singular alternation of the nominal class prefixes.

The verb #kukaza# literally ‘tighten grip’, for instance, agglutinates three morphs: the infinitive {ku}, the root {kaz}, and the affirmative suffix {a}. Verbs can be extended step by step first into the applicative form #kukazia# for example, as in yule masa amemkazia hasii ‘that woman has kept a firm reign on her husband’. Finite verbs however need to include elements of formal agreement with the nominal category of the referent.

One approach to nominal categorization often appeals to a numerical paradigm, meant to enhance comparative Bantu morphology. Specified classes correspond to morphological identification on the basis of correlative singular–plural alternation. Consider the alternating prefixes {m → wa} {ge → ma} as in #msee# → #wasee# or #githafu# → #mathafu#, already cited (see 2.1.1) which are members of the numerical classes 1-2 and 5-6, respectively. Some of these prefixes are involved in morphemic blending.

Morphemic blending refers to a coalescence of morphemes from different languages to derive a single word. The Sheng’ word #mapero# [maperɔ] for #parent# [pərɔ] is derived by means of blending the Kiswahili morpheme {ma}, and {parɔ} subsequent to the deletion of the syllable coda /nt/. In this connection, it is important to appreciate the interaction of phonological and morphological strategies of word-formation.

Many of the Sheng’ nouns seem to fall under the nominal class numerically identified as
where an underlying /N/ marker is not realized in the surface derivation, though assumed to be underlying certain prenasalized phonemic derivations (see Polome 1967) as in /ŋj/ and /ŋg/ of [ŋjärɔ] 'strategy' and [ŋgɛma] 'music', respectively. The identification process however creates no difficulty since the singular-plural distinction is determined contextually in relation to the syntactic structure.

2.1.3 Syntactic Parameters
Syntax is defined as a set of principles which determines the grammatical structure of phrases and sentences, involving both universal and typological constraints (see Radford 1997 and Poole 2002). A salient Bantu constraint relates to a syntactic agreement feature dependent on the nominal category of the subject specifier. Syntactic agreement is observed in Sheng' utterances, as in: *yule mbuyu amechota rwabe* 'that man has given two hundred shillings (literally: a two-hunderd shilling note)'.

Current approaches to syntax (e.g. Radford 1997 and Halliday 1994, 2004) specify syntactic structure in relation to a simple sentence, the minimal grammatical unit that carries analytic propositional content. A simple sentence is equated with a syntactic clause and re-interpreted as an inflection phrase (IP). The structural configuration of the IP is graphically represented as follows, with reference to the example cited above:

\[ \text{IP} \]
\[ \text{DP} \]
\[ yule \]
\[ mbuyu \]
\[ I \]
\[ ame \]
\[ VP \]
\[ V \]
\[ N \]
\[ chota \]
\[ rwabe \]

where: DP = determiner phrase, I = inflection bar (inner level)
To determine the application of syntactic agreement, we need to focus on the inflective element (I) of the verbal structure and particularly the bound morph {a} exclusive of the tense marker {me}. The first of these morphs agrees with the syntactic subject of the predicative verb *chota*. This agreement is dependent on the fact that the thematic referent is animate, possessing the lexical feature [+ANIMATE], implying the interdependence of syntax and semantics.

2.1.4 Semantic Parameters
Linguists (e.g. palmer 1984) generally approach semantics from both the propositional and the lexical levels. Although propositional meaning is essential to linguistic communication, we will focus more specifically on lexical semantics as it is basic to determining transactional meaning and more definitive of dialectal variation. The lexical
system distinguishes Sheng’, as a linguistic code, most aptly. For purposes of this discussion, we need to focus attention on aspects relating to three parameters: lexical fields, sense relations, and the transient nature of meaning in Sheng’.

For the most part the lexical items have been adapted in the form of loanwords. These loanwords are sourced from different languages that Sheng’ has had contact with and particularly Standard Kiswahili and English. The degree of lexical sourcing from individual languages varies, depending on the demographic strength of the language as well as the closeness of communicative and cultural contact. In addition to lexical borrowing, Sheng’ has own coinage (see Ongechi 2005 and Mugambi 2007), as exemplified in this chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jingili</td>
<td>bicycle</td>
<td>noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rwabe</td>
<td>two-hundred shilling note</td>
<td>noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punju</td>
<td>kiss</td>
<td>noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gota</td>
<td>pickpocket</td>
<td>verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zuzu</td>
<td>stupid</td>
<td>adjective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, the lexicon is concentrated in the semantic fields relating to friendship, beauty, education, money, residence, authority, family connections, and love relationships. These fields can be said to involve those aspects of life which are considered important by the youth of today and especially the urban and educated youth. Significantly, most of these meanings contain synonymy.

Synonymy is a lexical relation whereby one meaning goes by several words, usually without etymological connection. Observed synonymy ranges in depth from two-word to four-word synonyms, implying that it evolves progressively. Of greater interest therefore are the deeper four-word synonyms, as in:

- chik > demu > kenge > manzi ‘girlfriend’.
- Poonyi > pai > karau > gava ‘police officer(s)’
- Ushago > shake > shags > ocha ‘rural home’

Progressive multi-level synonymy in the Sheng’ depends on the transient nature of the lexicon, where new words for existing meanings are introduced. Once words become too familiar to the wider speech community, the “out group”, new ones are coined or adapted. The older words however do not disappear but continue to co-exist with the newer. The gradual evolution of synonymy implies that a transformational analysis of Sheng’ lexicology is viable’. Further to transformational analysis, the evolved lexicon provides a wealth of data for determining the strategies involved in semantic adaptation. They also imply principled criteria for the determination of linguistic status of Sheng’.

2.2 Linguistic Status

Apparently, the proliferation of synonymy in the Sheng’ lexical system is geared towards the obfuscation of meaning for the uninitiated. Despite the proliferation of synonymy
and lexical borrowing, researchers are unanimous that Sheng' is a variety of Kiswahili. What however has been more elusive relates to the status of Sheng as a language variety, since it has been variously defined as a pidgin, a code, and an argot.

2.2.1 Sheng' as a Pidgin

Pidgin is a cover term for any language variety created out of two previously existing varieties, where speakers share no other means of communication. Pidgins have a simple syntax and are limited to a lexicon meant to serve basic and practical communicative needs, but have no native speakers. The formal structure is normally based on a local variety and the lexicon on a foreign variety. The term pidgin was probably derived from the English word *business*, as pronounced in a Chinese variety of pidgin (see Hudson 1980). Notably, most pidgins arose as trade languages.

The known pidgins and Sheng' share some formal grammatical properties, but the similarity seems to end there. Sheng' differs from pidgin in various ways, particularly: formal structure, semantic structure, and in the genesis of these varieties:

- From a formal perspective and unlike pidgin, Sheng' is inflected for various aspects of grammatical function, both morphologically and syntactically.
- From a semantic point of view, Sheng' is characterized by a proliferation of synonymy which would be uneconomical or superfluous in a pidgin.
- Unlike pidgin, Sheng' arose out of social and psychological needs, rather than immediate communicative needs. To remake this point, Sheng' emerged among speakers who already shared knowledge and proficiency in other languages.

Given these aspects of contrast, scholars do not seem to have any principled basis for defining Sheng' as a pidgin. It is probably on the basis of the recognition of this fact that some latter day language researchers have used the term code (see Erastus 2003). In these studies, code is vaguely defined as a cover term for language, dialect, or register.

2.2.2 Sheng' as a Code

Defined from a semiotic point of view, code refers to any set of principles used by convention for the purpose of encoding and decoding meaning (see Giraud 1975). Every code must have users who depend on mutual overt or covert agreement. The main definitive feature of a code therefore is contained in its capacity to represent and communicate accepted meanings. Scholars (e.g. Eschbach 1983 and Echo 1984) recognize many types of codes but also agree that these are logically classifiable into two broad categories, linguistic and non-linguistic, depending on whether or not they are articulated. Sheng' would hence be a linguistic code.

A real problem with this definition lies in its generality. The term linguistic code is still too broad for concrete conceptualization, since it could refer to a full fledged language, one of its dialects or one of its registers. The status of Sheng' thus still requires closer specification. There are writers who refer to Sheng' as *Kilugha* (see Nyawande 1985), a term denoting a sub-standard language variety. This means that we are back to square one, since this variety needs to be specified in some way. In some cases (e.g. Mbaabu and Nzuga 2003), Sheng' is either explicitly or implicitly equated with an argot.

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2.2.3 Sheng' as an Argot

Sociolinguistic analysis makes a distinction between upper class speech, jargon, and that of the lower class counterpart, argot (see Wardhaugh 1985). Argot refers to a variety of speech with a heavy slang component, which is zealously fostered by its speakers as the outward expression of unity of thought, feeling, and action, in revolt against conventional language. Argots often describe the peculiar language of low prestige groups such as common prostitutes, drug addicts, and urban nomads. Urban nomad refers to people with no fixed employment who roam about in towns engaging in crime and leisure.

In their dictionary of Sheng’, Mbaabu and Nzuga (2003) qualify their title as *Deciphering an Underworld Language*, an elaboration which can be interpreted to mean argot. It is true that usage of Sheng’ may be observed in some argot varieties. All the same, it would not be the Sheng’ element which makes these varieties argots. The varieties would be argots with or without Sheng’. Various language varieties, as exemplified in the matatu register (see Mbugua 2004 and Kung'u 2006), are selectively infused with a Sheng’ element for pragmatic purposes.

Sheng’ may have been an underworld language variety some decades back, but I doubt whether that opinion is any longer tenable. If that were the case, social organizations such as those targeting AIDS control would not dare to use Sheng’ for public information and education (see Kimani 2006). Sheng’ may have a slang component probably intended for creativity, but it is no longer the language of idlers and low prestige groups since University students and educated musicians use Sheng’ varieties all the time. Significantly some sub-groups of Sheng’ speakers are identified as the maghetto and mababe, based on the perceived social prestige of speakers and hence the variety involved. For these reasons, I would be hesitant to describe Sheng’ as an argot. I would rather use the less controversial concept of a social dialect.

2.2.4 Sheng’ as a Social Dialect

The term dialect is a regular component of linguistic studies, since languages naturally subdivide themselves into discernible dialects. A dialect is any variety of a language used by a group of speakers, which manifests systematic formal and semantic differences with other varieties of the same language (see Hudson 1980, Gumperz and Hymes 1989, Aswani, Njogu and Mwihaki 2006). The rule of thumb, says that the dialects of one language are mutually intelligible. This rule may not always apply, but we will not go into this controversy. Our discussion is more interested in the distinction between regional or geographical, and social dialect. Indeed, sociolinguists are more interested in the social dialects. Social dialects refer to language varieties used by specific social categories of speakers, for the basic purpose of distinguishing themselves as groups and expressing their perceived oneness.

We must however take care not to confuse social dialect and register, since the registers a speaker has access to could be a function of one’s social class. The two varieties of language are inter-connected and hence the two concepts can easily become entangled.
Dialect variation expresses the diversity of social structures and social hierarchies of all kinds, while register variation expresses the diversity of social processes. The emphasis of register is on the use, in terms of communicative efficacy, and that of social dialect on the user, and particularly the awareness of what one is. In this discussion, we emphasize the use of Sheng' as an instrument of social identity and group interaction.

In its patterns of dialectal variation language actively symbolizes social systems, and metaphorically represents the variation that characterizes human culture. This capacity for variation and symbolism enables people to play with language, using it to create meanings of a social kind, to participate in all forms of verbal contest and display in the elaborate rhetoric of daily conversation. A claim that has endured through decades, states that Sheng’ was at first and still is used by the youth of different backgrounds for their everyday social interaction (see Mwihaki 2006). Sheng’ is hence a social dialect, a social category of language, used by the youth of Kenya for self-identity and self-definition.

Social categories of discourse are part of the outside world along with the physical environment and cultural artifacts. A social dialect is a particularly significant part of a speaker’s social space, since it gives the speaker a clearly structured set of symbols which one can use in locating oneself in the world. Since speakers will mold their speech largely on that of the group they identify with, each utterance of speech can be seen as an act of identity; in that it is the language pattern one chooses. The proficient Sheng’ speaking youth can thus be considered a member of a speech community directly identified with.

Speech community refers to a group of speakers who share knowledge of communicative constraints and options governing a significant number of social situations. Granted that there are many regional varieties of Sheng, and probably social class distinctions, but it is possible to identify correlative characteristics. While it is true that all speech communities are linguistically and socially diverse, there is a correlation between the characteristics of the communicating group and nature of diversity.

It is true that adults and the younger children also use some expressions of Sheng’, but this can be interpreted as a form of intrusion by the youth. No wonder the vocabulary seems to many observers as unstable since it keeps changing in an attempt to discourage this intrusion (see mbaabu and Nzuga 2003). The proliferation of synonymy has been regarded a strategy meant confuse and probably discourage unwelcome Sheng’ users.

These trends imply that the youth of Kenya recognize the psychological reality of Sheng’, as a means of self definition. Though these youth may also communicate through Sheng’ the real motivation for the use lies in an attempt at self identity as members of an ‘in-group’, within the mainstream speech community. In other words, the youth do not require Sheng’ to be able to communicate. Mostly, these youth share proficiency in Kiswahili as well as English and probably a third language.
These claims derive support from the recognition of two basic perspectives of language use, language as an instrument of communication and language as a social symbol (see Eastman 1983), correlating with the transactional and interpersonal meanings defined in relation to the theoretical orientation. Intertwined with the symbolic function of language is the psychological reality of the perceived value systems involved. No doubt the youth are all too conscious of these values. Any objective observer will also be able to discern value parameters, as evident in emerging linguistic studies.

3.0 Sheng’ and Linguistic Scholarship
The preceding debate indicates that Sheng’ is accorded certain symbolic value by its speakers. In recognition of this fact, linguists need to capture this reality in a scholarly and objective manner in order to channel the relevant knowledge into profitable avenues. Indeed the earliest available studies recommended that Sheng’ should be the object of further systematic study geared towards determining the structural and functional implications (see Nyauncho 1986 and Echessa 1990). Despite the fact that Sheng’ has been the object of debate among language educationists and linguists, we will focus on a few selected linguistic studies.

Linguistics adopts a scientific approach to Sheng’. To the linguist, Sheng’ is a physical entity, an observable linguistic phenomenon, which could be used to explain social patterns and language change. However, there seems very little systematic work that directly addresses the linguistic question of Sheng. A few linguistic studies have touched on the usage of Sheng’, mostly indirectly, from different perspectives, notably: sociolinguistic, pragmatic, semiotic, and semantic.

Various sociolinguistic studies have focused on code switching with regard to the usage of Kiswahili and English. In her M.A. thesis, Munuku (2005) examines the code switching patterns observed in the Kiswahili Rap song, where the Standard Kiswahili functions as the matrix language and either English or Sheng’ is perceived to be an embedded code. These songs incorporate both situational and metaphorical code switching. For instance, the texts seem to switch to Sheng’ when one of several contexts is indicated: the message targets the youth, makes reference to law enforcement agencies such as the police, communicates sensual information relating to sex or love affairs:

- *Ikifika weekend anakopa mapeni*  
  ‘Come the weekend he borrows coins’.

- *Friday mpaka Sunday anahanya mahani*  
  ‘From Friday through to Sunday, he romances sweethearts’

This usage is interpreted as a correlate of euphemism. Euphemism is used in normal interaction as a mode of politeness where certain meanings are considered to be taboo. The youth are able to circumvent the usual requirement of euphemism by using Sheng’, with reference to taboo subjects such as sex and sexual matters. By using Sheng’ the youth express sexual matters explicitly to their peers, since these meanings are coated in terms that are unfamiliar to the ‘out group’ member of Kiswahili speech community. This usage can also be said to accomplish a pragmatic function.
The pragmatics of Sheng’ has been rather more directly addressed by Kung’u (2006) in his M.A. research, concerning language use in the matatu register. The relevant aspect of study notes the way in which service providers, in particular, make tactical use of Sheng’ addresses with certain desirable attributes in order to achieve complimentary effects. Targeted effect includes the communication of a sense of youthfulness or beauty for women, and that of power or strength for men. Consider the substitution of the terms #aunti#, #mami# or #boss#, for the regular respective addresses of #msichana# ‘girl’, #mama# ‘mother’ or #mzee# ‘old man’. It transpires that the interlocutors are well aware of the relevant pragmatic value, as discernible from a semantic study.

A semantic study of Sheng’ has been carried out by Ongechi (2005), who particularly looked at the lexicalization processes, and treats lexicalization. He outlines some aspects of the psychological and cultural motivation of the discernible strategies. One interesting example is to be found in the use of the word #teke# for a beautiful woman; #teke# is the Kiswahili word for a kick. The motivation for this derivation would seem to come from certain cultural conception of beauty as judged from the shape of legs. Other associations are discussed in a study by Mugambi (2007) in connection with M.A. research.

Mugambi (ibd) has carried out a systematic analysis of the strategies involved in the semantic adaptation of Sheng’ loanwords, and particularly: semantic expansion, semantic narrowing, and semantic shift.

- **Semantic Expansion**: meaning expands the scope of reference, as in the word #chuo#. Derived from Standard Kiswahili, this word would refer to college and with some qualification also university #chuo kikuu#. In Sheng’ #chuo# refers to primary and secondary schools as well and hence generally a learning institution.

- **Semantic Narrowing**: The scope of reference becomes more restricted, as in the Gikuyu word #ngirir# ‘thousand’, which is generally a numerical value for any entity. In Sheng’, #ngiri# exclusively denotes a thousand-shilling note.

- **Semantic shift**: a logical modification of a meaning as in the word #jamaa#, used in Standard Kiswahili to mean ‘relative’. In Sheng’ #jamaa# is used by girls with reference to an intimate boyfriend.

Intertwined with these strategies are subtle lexicalization processes of, including metaphorical connections. Such connections imply cognitive bases for adaptation processes. This study thus indicates the need to look at Sheng as sub-cultural symbolism, intertwining with the structural semiotics of linguistic analysis.

Though not explicitly discussed, Sheng texts are incorporated in the data of a semiotic study by Kimani (2006). In her M.A. research, Kimani (ibid) is specifically interested in the communicative efficacy and the compatibility of the textual message with the accompanying picture metaphor in the Kiswahili advertisements relating to HIV/AIDS. Some of her data indicates regular usage of Sheng’ when a message targets the youth.
Viewing Sheng’ as a Social Dialect: A Linguistic Approach

Consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHENG’</th>
<th>GLOSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chanuka chukua control</td>
<td>Wise up (and) take control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni poa kuchill</td>
<td>It is better to chill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex? Zi, tumechill</td>
<td>Sex? No way, we have chilled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom ni kiboko yao</td>
<td>A condom is the best solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishi maisha poa</td>
<td>Live quality life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can conclude that the advertisement agents aim to introduce an element of acceptability of the message to the targeted youth. Acceptability arises where the target audience feels recognized and hence valued (see Beaungrade and Dressler 1972). The youth would feel that they own the message and, as a result, would be more likely to comply with the required behavior change. In a manner similar to the pragmatic function, language use in these advertisements involves code switching.

Significantly, Sheng’ is regularly used to refer to those meanings that concern the youth. It can be considered a natural choice for in-group interaction: it is the ‘we’ symbol for group identity and solidarity. Notably, speech as a symbol of group membership captures the psychological interests and needs of the in-group speakers: speakers of a social dialect. More importantly, each case of switching into Sheng’ is deliberate in that it is calculated to accomplish a given pragmatic function. It is for this reason that loans from Kiswahili and other languages undergo semantic adaptation.

Besides semantic adaptation, loanwords also undergo phonological and/or morphological adaptation to various degrees depending on the grammatical structure of the source language. The various forms of loanword adaptation define the grammatical implications and consequences of linguistic borrowing (see Anttila 1972, Bynon 1977, Hock 1986, and Mwihaki 1998). Borrowing is a process of linguistic change in which a linguistic form is taken over by another language. The changes involved in linguistic borrowing have implications for further study.

Summary and Conclusion
This paper set out to address the status of Sheng’ as a linguistic variety. It presents arguments for the conception of Sheng’ as a social dialect of Kiswahili. This conception depends on the assumption that Sheng’ speakers are prominent social categories that differentiate themselves through language use. The youth of Kenya seem to use Sheng’ for the purpose of group identity, solidarity, and self-definition. Since the paper focuses on the social function of language, the preferred theoretical orientation is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA is a sociolinguistic model of language use which approaches discourse in terms of a three-tier concentric framework, involving: text structure, discursive practice, and social practice. This model is ideally suited for this subject since it integrates social symbolism, communicative function, and a grammatical view of language, operating under the general umbrella of functional linguistics. CDA has its origins in issues of language ideology and social conflict, coupled with the wish to treat linguistics as a social science.
While sociolinguistics is reliant on other social sciences, there would appear to be a new, linguistic emphasis on the sociological theory. The emphasis on this reciprocal relation is not just because language is the main medium of social control, but rather that language has grown greatly in terms of functions to which it applies in modern society. Discourse texts have become a means of gaining access to an understanding of social organization.

Sheng' can be considered a reflection of some kind of social and cultural organization, sharing some properties of a pidgin. All-the-same, it is hardly logical or principled to define Sheng' as a pidgin. Based on formal, semantic, pragmatic, and historical criteria, Sheng' fails to meet the specification properties of a pidgin, on the one hand. On the other hand the term code is too general since it merely provides the information that Sheng' is a system of communication. A more specific description uses the term argot, whose negative connotations fail to accommodate more prestigious varieties of Sheng'.

Conception of Sheng' as a social dialect is assumed to be more flexible yet adequate, noting that its usage symbolizes the self-perception of the youth and communicates their aspirations as sub-cultural groups operating with mainstream speech communities. In effect, the notion of social dialect enables us to account for the use of Sheng' by the youth to establish social space in terms of the symbolic value of language function. Moreover it captures the psychological value of a group language, lending it more interesting for linguistic study.

Studies relating to Sheng' fall into two categories: those that directly set out to analyze Sheng', and those that examined Sheng' by default as this was not the initial objective. The latter can hardly be expected to present systematic analyses of Sheng' and the former have covered too little ground. The structural and functional properties of Sheng' therefore need to be more systematically and exhaustively studied. It can be assumed that more systematic studies of Sheng would reveal novel insights into language use and probably language change. These studies would also have both theoretical implications and application for dialectology.

Questions of language use, and various forms of inter-group communication, have always received serious attention from cultural anthropologists. This attention particularly concerns the differentiation of social categories in the lines of age, gender, or social class. Researchers of Sheng' ought to find it intellectually stimulating, since its usage is creatively different from regular language and yet may be unexpectedly similar to other varieties that new generations come up with.

The functions of language varieties imply more than the simple notion that languages express social structures and social systems. By addressing these language varieties and their functions, we might succeed better in our endeavor to account for the emergence of dialects, the correlation of social dialects and registers, and the whole complex of the ideology of value judgments and language attitudes.
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