

ENGLISH VERSUS SWAHILI: LANGUAGE CHOICE IN BONGO FLAVA AS EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN TANZANIA

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Since around 2011, Bongo Flava musicians use significantly more English in their lyrics than in the previous years, particularly in love songs. This article documents and describes this new trend and discusses the reasons for the change in language use. It reveals that the new development is indicative of a transformation of Bongo Flava towards pop, caused by changes in the domestic market on the one hand and by a growing outward-looking market orientation on the other. These changes are demanding new ways of constructing identities through the use of language.

Tangu mnamo mwaka 2011, wasanii wa Bongo Flava walio wengi hutumia kiasi kikubwa cha Kiingereza katika nyimbo zao ukilinganisha na miaka ya nyuma. Hali hiyo inajionyesha zaidi katika nyimbo za mapenzi. Makala hii inaeleza mwelekeo huo mpya na kujadili sababu zake. Inatoa hoja ya kwamba mwelekeo huo umesababishwa na mabadiliko katika soko la muziki ndani na nje ya Tanzania, hasa katika bara la Afrika. Mabadiliko hayo ndiyo yanayosababisha kutumia zaidi lugha ya Kiingereza.

Introduction

Tanzanian Bongo Flava artists generally choose among, or mix, Standard Swahili, Swahili urban street language (*Lugha ya Mitaani, LyM*), English and local languages to write their song lyrics. In doing so, they rely on their socio-cultural knowledge and their commercial awareness to position themselves within national and international music cultures. Birgit Englert (2008) has shown that artists from up-country who are striving for fame, the *maandagraundi*, tend to use a strategy of mixing to provide something for every taste and thus potentially reach a wide audience. This mixing applies to language, musical styles and themes of songs. Yet the approach is not restricted to the *maandagraundi*. In fact, artists who have established a national reputation also adopt a mixing strategy to reach diverse target audiences. In addition, if they want to branch out to new markets beyond the borders of Tanzania where audiences are more competent in English than in Swahili, the artists will insert at least some core words or phrases in English. Bongo Flava artists also generally choose language according to the identities that they want to project in their songs. If they want, for example, to emphasise their identities as young urbanites, they tend to use youth language comprising a certain percentage of English words. If their aim is to project a hip-hop identity, they mark this linguistically by using current English slang terms and expressions (Reuster-Jahn 2012: 159-164). In contrast, more tradition-oriented artists usually express themselves through lyrics in Swahili and a smattering of proverbs and metaphors. However, whether these musicians are urban or tradition oriented, their language choices are not static. Indeed, artists often possess a seismographic sensitivity to cultural, social, political and

economic conditions and factors, and thus changes in these areas can lead to changes in their language choice as well.

Recently, Bongo Flava musicians use significantly more English in their lyrics, particularly in love songs. It is the aim of this article to document and describe this new trend, which has snowballed since roughly 2011, and to reveal why this change has happened. On one level it seems to reflect a reversal of the initial phase of the emergence of Bongo Flava, when Afro-American hip-hop, reggae and rhythm & blues were localised by urban youth, particularly through replacing English with Swahili (Perullo & Fenn 2003: 8-19; Saavedra 2006: 230). A closer look, however, shows that the new development is not such a reversal but is rather indicative of a transformation of Bongo Flava towards pop, caused by changes in the domestic market on the one hand and by a growing outward-looking market orientation on the other. These changes are demanding new ways of constructing identities through the use of language. In order to contrast the increased use of English with the initial move from English to Swahili, a brief summary of the formative period of Bongo Flava is given below.

The emergence of Bongo Flava through Swahilization of hip-hop

Bongo Flava and its history have been explored in a good number of articles and books since the late 1990s.¹ The following summary concentrates on the problem of language choice, which early on featured prominently in scholarly studies on Tanzanian hip-hop and Bongo Flava (Remes 1999, Perullo & Fenn 2003, Saavedra 2006, Reuster-Jahn 2007, Englert 2008, Reuster-Jahn 2012).

Hip-hop reached Tanzania between 1984 and 1989, when, at the end of *ujamaa* socialism, “the socialist practices that limited people's access to foreign music and culture began to break down” (Perullo 2007: 252). As a consequence, musicians resumed the pre-socialist practice of cultural borrowing from outside Africa. It was music and video cassettes which brought the lively sounds and images of hip-hop from the U.S. to Tanzania. However, these cassettes were at first only accessible through relatives or friends in Western countries. As a result, the first people to obtain them were youths from middle- and upper-class families, usually secondary school students. They copied the cassettes, circulated them among themselves and in their free time watched U.S. hip-hop films together (Remes 1999: 2, 8). Secondary schools were thus the cradle of a domestic hip-hop movement. Soon, sampled beats from U.S. rap stars like Tupac Shakur, Snoop Doggy Dogg or Naughty by Nature were sold on the streets, and rapping in English became the favoured pastime of many secondary school students. Initially, they imitated both the music and the

¹ These sources include, in chronological order: Remes 1999, Englert 2003, Mangesho 2003, Perullo & Fenn 2003, Raab 2006, Roch & Hacke 2006, Saavedra 2006, Reuster-Jahn 2007, Suriano 2007, Perullo 2007, Englert 2008, Reuster-Jahn 2008, Omari 2009, Reuster-Jahn & Hacke 2011, Perullo 2011, Mwanjoka 2011, Sugu 2011, Reuster-Jahn 2014.

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language of their Black American idols when they performed at school events and discotheques. Through imitation, these young rappers learned to combine music with rapid speech and developed a feeling for beat and rhythm, rhyme and flow. Over time, some local rappers attained a certain fame, and the first Tanzanian rap groups were formed. However, rap music could only gain widespread popularity among Tanzanian youth if the songs were performed in Swahili. This was because most of the youth in Tanzania at that time had a very limited knowledge of English. Consequently, Swahilization of rap music became a powerful trend, starting in 1991 with the artist Saleh J's Swahili version of *Ice Ice Baby* (1989) by the white U.S. American rapper Vanilla Ice (Remes 1999: 6-7, Gesthuizen 2002). Saleh J not only replaced English by Swahili and included some code-switching to English, he also altered the content from drive-by shootings, self-praise and praise for Miami to warnings about AIDS and the dangers of promiscuity (Remes 1999: 6). Thus, using Swahili and addressing topics relevant for Tanzanian youths went hand in hand. Although some purist and elitist hip-hop pioneers initially resisted the trend toward Swahilization, they eventually had to accept it in order to remain part of the Tanzanian hip-hop scene (Perullo 2007: 261).

Swahilization meant much more than easier comprehension of the lyrics. It meant that topical or controversial issues could now be communicated to a broad swath of young people, who were thirsting after facts, feelings and attitudes which they could relate to (Saavedra 2006: 232). It was Swahilization which facilitated the spread of hip-hop to poorer neighbourhoods and to economically deprived youths, who then used rap music to speak out about their lives, in a role perceived as a *kioo cha jamii* ("mirror of society") (Suriano 2007).² Technology carried it one step farther: Private broadcasting media and new production and distribution methods facilitated the rapid spread of hip-hop, which around 2000 came to be known as Bongo Flava, meaning 'the flavour of Dar es Salaam'. Bongo Flava enabled young Tanzanians to draw attention to their living conditions, to articulate their needs and desires and to make their voices heard in public. Often related in the first person, their songs exposed the hardships of the poor, warned against harmful behaviour, especially in the context of drugs and HIV/AIDS, and spoke out on political issues such as corruption. Very importantly, youth thus "turned a foreign musical form into a critical medium of social empowerment whereby they [were] able to create a sense of community among other urban youth" (Perullo 2005: 75). Bongo Flava artists assumed a role as "educators of society", a role linked not only to the cultural politics of the previous socialist era but also to Tanzania's long-established tradition of poetry and song as political commentary (Saavedra 2006: 235-237). However, another strand of Bongo Flava songs was joyful or boastful celebrations of fun, parties, and sexual prowess (Saavedra 2006: 233, Reuster-Jahn 2007). Through their choice

² However, the rap scene was not uniform. Talking about the late 1990s, Remes remarked that "contradictory trends co-exist and tensions between different outlooks persist" (Remes 1999: 11).

of themes, these songs initiated a discourse on the new values of the young generation in the liberalization era of Tanzania in the 1990s. In such songs it became fashionable early on to use some English words and phrases emblematically as a sign of urban youth identity and worldliness (Reuster-Jahn 2007: 15-17).

Tanzanian hip-hop and later Bongo Flava became trendsetting music in neighbouring countries as well. In the early 2000s Bongo Flava dominated the East African music market, “selling its songs in Kenya, Uganda and even overseas in Europe and North America where there are Swahili-speaking expatriate communities” (Saavedra 2006: 230). The sense of community was thus expanded even to areas where the lyrics in Swahili were not always fully understood. The fact that there were young artists who had appropriated hip-hop using their own African language was met with admiration and had an empowering effect on local musicians in other East African countries. Soon, there emerged national hip-hop scenes in which local languages also played an important role, such as “Genge” in Kenya using Sheng and “Luga Flow” in Uganda using Luganda. Against the backdrop of the importance of African languages for the success of Bongo Flava, it is all the more intriguing why English has recently seen a comeback. In order to understand this, it is necessary to take a closer look at language use and identity construction in Bongo Flava of the 2000s, with a focus on the use of English.³

English and its functions in Bongo Flava

Language is an important marker of identity in linguistically heterogeneous communities typical of urban spaces (Anchimbe 2007: 3). As mentioned above, Bongo Flava artists generally choose between Swahili, *LyM*, English and local languages. The song *Mikasi* (‘Sex’) by Bongo Flava artist Ngwair, released in 2004, is a good example of how identity can be constructed through language choice. Narrating from a first person perspective, the singer boastfully describes the everyday life of a group of young men from the Bongo Flava scene. They enjoy hanging around as a group - and the chorus makes it clear that “enjoying life” means smoking, drinking and having sex. The text of the song is basically in Swahili, but the artist uses words from *LyM* and from English, including English slang. In the following lyrics from *Mikasi*, lexemes borrowed from English or derived from English are represented in bold italics, while lexemes from *LyM* based on Swahili are in bold letters; an English translation is given in parenthesis.

Ni asubuhi naamka ninapiga mswaki
(*It's morning, I get up and brush my teeth*)

Kisha naenda kubath kuweka mwili safi
(*Then I go and take a shower, clean my body*)

³ I wish to thank Kimata S. Kimatta, a young university student currently living in Germany, for many discussions of recent music trends in Dar es Salaam as well as for his checking of my transcriptions and translations.

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Narudi **ghetto** nafungua kabati
(*I go back to my room, I open my wardrobe*)

Nachukua **pamba**⁴, **blingbling** kwa **chati**
(*I take stylish clothes, jewellery, only the best*)

N'na **T-shirt black**, n'na **jeanz** ya kaki
(*I've got a black t-shirt and khaki jeans*)

Na chini nina **simple white**, chata **Nike** [...],
(*And down there I'm wearing "Simple White", trademark Nike*)

Ukitaka **fegi** mezani kuna pakiti [...]
(*If you want cigarettes, there are packets on the table*)

Tunakamua⁵ mpaka ile mida ya **lunch** [...]
(*We're enjoying ourselves until it's time for lunch*)

Makamuzi yanaendelea mpaka night
(*The enjoyment continues, until it's nighttime*)

(Lyrics from Reuster-Jahn 2007)⁶

The English lexemes in *Mikasi* fall into three categories (Reuster-Jahn 2007). First, there are English slang lexemes which have become part of youth language in Tanzania, such as *fegi* (from English slang 'fag') for 'cigarette'. Second, there are terms connected to global hip-hop culture, including dress styles. Examples of these are *jeans*, *blingbling* ('jewellery'), and "simple white" Nike sneakers which are particular markers of urban youth identity. The term *ghetto*, interestingly, has undergone semantic change: in Tanzanian youth language, it denotes a 'room shared by a number of youths in order to economise'. Third, there are English lexemes such as 'lunch', 'bath' or 'night' used in code-switching, which have not (yet) become part of *LyM*, lacking distinct semantics. The use of this third category is characteristic of a style of speech called *Kiswenglish* in Swahili, where English lexemes are used in word-internal and intra-sentential code-switching (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 134). It is widely used in Tanzania, in particular by persons with higher education (*wasomi*). Thus, by using different types of English lexemes, Ngwair in his song *Mikasi* expressed aspects of his identity as a Tanzanian urban youth, a member of the global hip-hop culture, and an educated and cosmopolitan young person. All in all, English is used here emblematically.

The use of *LyM* is also an important marker of identity in *Mikasi* as well as more generally in Bongo Flava songs during the 2000s. Some new slang terms were even introduced through

⁴ *pamba* meaning 'cotton' in Standard Swahili through metonymic extension has come to denote 'fashionable clothes' in *LyM*.

⁵ *-kamua* (verb) meaning 'to milk, to squeeze' by metonymic extension in *LyM* means 'to enjoy' or 'to get a profit'. The noun *makamuzi* is derived from the verb *-kamua*.

⁶ If not indicated otherwise all transcriptions and translations are done by the author. Original English elements are in bold characters, the English translation is given in parentheses.

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Bongo Flava songs, thus adding vitality to *LyM* (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 63). Some musicians coined new words in their lyrics. Ngwair, for example, spoke of *mikasi*, which in Standard Swahili means ‘scissors’ but was used in his song to mean ‘sex’. Such new coinages were usually embraced by the urban youth. A journalist from the region once described Gangwe Mobb, a Dar es Salaam rap crew, as “major enforcers of street slanguistics” (Khaemba 2002). Some Bongo Flava artists’ names were even used in onomastic synecdoche. The artist Feruzi, for example, released a popular song about HIV/AIDS, and thus his name became a euphemistic term for the disease.

In the second half of the 2000s, however, Bongo Flava was increasingly transformed into mainstream pop music. Influential agents of this change were music managers and some private media and entertainment companies within the larger framework of a rising consumer culture in Tanzania (Clark 2013, Reuster-Jahn 2014). The song *Pii Pii* (*I’m missing my baby*) by Dar es Salaam-based artist Marlaw is a striking example of the pop music direction that Bongo Flava was taking. A huge hit in 2009, it tells the story of a man stuck in a traffic jam on a highway somewhere between Nairobi and Dar es Salaam while his wife is waiting for him at home:

Ninataka niwahi kufika, njia ina **jam** sasa wapi nitapita
(*I want to be in time, but there is a traffic jam, where can I pass*)

Nimekaa karibia saa sita, sasa kukaa nimechoka ooh **baby**
(*I’m stuck for almost six hours, I’m now tired, ohh baby*)

Sijamwona **long time now**, nimerudi toka mwezi jana
(*I haven’t seen her for a long time now, for one month*)

Nimeshkwambia mama nimefika tangu mchana
(*I have told you, mama, that I would arrive at noon*)

Anajua nimeshafika, ameshapika, amekasirika
(*She knows that I have already arrived in town, she has cooked, and is angry*)

Alipika tangu mchana, ila sasa, **lunch** imegeuka **dinner**
(*Food has been ready since noon, now lunch has turned into dinner*)

Chorus:

Nimechoka kupiga honi **now**, pii pii, hatuelewani
(*I’m now tired of hooting (pii pii), we don’t understand each other*)

Pii pii, **move out the way**, nimechoka kupoteza **time**
(*Pii pii, move out of the way, I’m tired of wasting time*)

Nina siku nyingi kwenda home, I’m missing my baby
(*I haven’t been at home for many days, I’m missing my baby*)⁷

⁷ Lyrics modified by author from:
http://lyrics.fienipa.com/node/3475?utm_source=fienipa&utm_medium=wij&utm_campaign=aesitesearch.

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Regarding language choice, the song differs from *Mikasi* mainly in that it does not use *LyM*. As in *Mikasi*, however, there is some *Kiswanglish*. The melody is highlighting English words and phrases, such as “home”, “time”, “highway”, “long time now” and “move out the way” (Reuster-Jahn 2012: 162-163). In addition, the song makes use of the English phrase “I’m missing my baby”. This is not just code-switching but the use of a formula that stands for a whole modern concept primarily represented in global pop-cultural products. The phrase ‘I’m missing my baby’ is one of the many formulas used globally to express romantic love. Thus, in using such a formula, artists allude to and quote from internationally known pop songs or even films. Once again, one can see that English is used as a sign of cosmopolitanism providing a link to globally circulating concepts, images and expressions.

The use of English formulas in Bongo Flava has grown considerably since 2009, when Marlaw released his song. As can be seen from the following short list of English formulas used in Bongo Flava songs from 2012, they are characteristic of love songs.

Will you baby marry me (artist Rich Mavoko in the song *Marry Me/Follow Me*, 2012)

She’s gonna be my wife (artist MB Dogg in *The Only One*, 2012)

If you don’t want me, someone will (artist Linex in *Aifola*, 2012)

You are my baby (several songs)

Sweet sixteen (artist Nako 2 Nako in the song *Sweet Sixteen*, 2011)

You’re always on my mind (artist P.H.D. in *Mombasa Queen*, 2012)

I’m a single boy / single girl (artist Ali Kiba ft. Lady Jaydee in *Single Boy*, 2012)

Tell me why (artists Makamua and Chid Benz in *Tell Me Why*, 2012)

Usually, the formulas are placed in the chorus. In the song *Aifola* by Linex (2012), the lyrics in Swahili tell the story of a young man rejected by the girl he loves. The chorus in English summarises the message:

Baby, I don’t wanna waste my time

Change how you feel

If you don’t want me, someone will

Similarly, in Ben Pol’s hit *Number One Fan* (2012) the verses are in Swahili while the chorus summarises the lyrical content in English:

You’re just my number one fan

She is the one, and I love her

She is everything in my life, my dreams depend on her

In some cases English lines turn up in the middle of the Swahili verses. A pattern is emerging which consists of English choruses and additional word-internal code-switching between Swahili and English in the verses. This is illustrated by the 2012 hit song *Marry Me* by Rich Mavoko:

Walisema penzi limeni**oversize**, siyo kweli
(*They said this love is too big for me, it's not true*)

Mbona machoni nime**realise**, washafeli [...]
(*But I easily realised that they are not right*)

Will you baby marry me? Oh baby you marry me

I think baby you'll marry me, oh baby you marry me

The ability of Swahili as an agglutinative language to replace Swahili stems by words of foreign origin makes it easy to spice the lyrics with English elements. Thus, Swahili can easily embed English words, and treat them as any Swahili word stem, such as in *nime**realise*** which is read as the first person singular, present perfect of the verb 'realise': I have realised. This is characteristic of the *Kiswanglish* speech style. Used in songs, these small bits of English used to embellish the lyrics in Swahili are called *vionjo* ('flavours' or 'tastes'; singular *kionjo*) by the Swahili audience. Consisting of words as well as longer phrases, *vionjo* make songs more attractive and demonstrate that an artist is able to speak English and up-to-date regarding the latest styles. The song *Mombasa Queen* by P.H.D. (2012) is another such example where Swahili is mixed with English in intra-sentential code-switching and where whole English lines are interspersed in the lyrical text. Swahili only slightly outweighs English here, and if we take the repetitions of chorus lines into account, the overall result is balanced:

Usiponipa mapenzi utani**drive crazy**
(*If you don't give me love you'll drive me crazy*)

When I look into your eyes

Baby you're so sexy

Usinifanye mimi kucry
(*Don't make me cry*)

Utanifanya kuwa chizi
(*You'll drive me crazy*)

Mombasa Queen, girl you are

Mombasa Queen, you shine like a star

Naomba unipende
(*I beg you to love me*)

Nakiri uzuri wako siyo na kifani
(*I admit that your beauty is without equal*)

You're always on my mind

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Unavyopita **baby** we unang'aa
(*As you pass by, baby, you are shining*)

The influence of Naijabeats on Bongo Flava

While code-switching to English is today very hip, it was regarded very critically in previous years. This was a period in which Bongo Flava was strongly associated with the pride of having turned a foreign art form into a local one, as well as using it as a mouthpiece for the urban youths. The audience then would not have welcomed so much English in the song lyrics. In contrast, *Marry Me* and *Mombasa Queen* became hits in 2012. What then facilitated this profound change? The most obvious reason seems to be an increasing participation of Tanzanians in a pan-African and even global culture and economy, first and foremost as consumers, but also as cultural producers. Indeed, wider audiences in Africa have become a realistic possibility through international TV stations such as MTV, DSTV Channel O from South Africa, Black Entertainment Television (B.E.T.) from the U.S., as well as through youtube and social networks such as facebook.

Through these channels, Tanzanians increasingly receive and consume music and music videos from other parts of the world and from other African countries outside East Africa. A start was made with South African music, in particular Kwaito, but now Nigeria is closely following with the new Afrobeats music, an up-tempo fusion of Afrobeat and electronic dance music, which is to a large part in English and Pidgin English.⁸ In Tanzania, Afrobeats is referred to as “Naijabeats”, a term that is in use since roughly the year 2011, when the Nigerian duo Bracket’s hit song *Yori Yori* was immensely popular in the country.⁹ Naijabeats songs have become particularly popular as dance songs in clubs and for parties. Their song lyrics range secondary, and many people do not even understand them, as I was told. Because of its popularity in the country, Naijabeats is clearly influencing Bongo Flava since the last few years, resulting in an increased use of English as well as a trend towards faster beats.

The new attitude of cultural producers in Tanzania is more outward looking than ever before. Artists want to demonstrate that they are not confined to their local culture, including the language. This attitude also reflects the growing competency of young Tanzanians in English as well as their desire to demonstrate it to the world. The increased competency in English is due to the parallel system of private primary schools, where English is the medium of instruction. In the government schools, the language of instruction is Swahili, while English is a compulsory subject. Thus, the increase of English in song lyrics implies the ability to compete on an

⁸ The older genre called Afrobeat emerged in the late 1960s and is closely connected to the Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti.

⁹ *Naija* is a common *LyM* term for Nigeria.

international, or at least on a pan-African, level. This does not mean that Swahili has been abandoned. On the contrary, Swahili is still essential to give the songs local flavour. This is important not only for the national audience as a sign of faithfulness to the national culture, but also towards the international audience as a sign of African-ness. The increase of English in Bongo Flava has thus mainly resulted in more bi-lingual song lyrics.

The Bongo Flava artist A.Y. who started his career early in the 1990s has produced a wide range of stylistically different songs, including many club songs. In the song *Party Zone* (ft. Marco Chali, 2012), he uses English *vionjo* in an especially creative way. He combines word-internal and intra-sentential code-switching, *Kiswenglish*, with whole phrases in English. In addition, the Swahili noun *somo* ('lesson') in the second line is pronounced in an English manner [so^umo^u]. Thus it not only rhymes better with "don't know" in the preceding line, but also gives the Swahili language a special appeal, creating the impression that an English native speaker is talking Swahili.

Sikia hii ndio fact usiact like you don't know
(Listen, this is a fact, don't act as if you don't know)

The way you treated me ulishanipa somo
(The way you treated me, you have already given me a lesson)

Dance tonight, drink tonight, smoke tonight,

Nijipe raha tu
(Let me just enjoy myself)

Nihave fun tonight
(Let me have fun tonight)

Cruise tonight, blast tonight

Stress zigoooo
(Let stress go away)

Niache nienjoy my life
(Leave me alone, let me enjoy my life)

Nawe enjoy ya' life
(And you, enjoy yours),

Sleep all day, up all night

Nishazoea new life
(I'm already used to a new life)

Huna tena nafasi
(There is no room for you any more)

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Niache nienjoy my life

(Leave me alone, let me enjoy my life)¹⁰

As the examples of new songs using a high percentage of English in code-switching show, their content centres on love and club-life. *Party Zone*, for example, is a party song with its video set in a luxury club with beautiful women drinking and dancing. The song has a melancholic undertone when it tells about a man seeing his girlfriend flirting with another man, and the video shows the lonely man trying to forget his problems by dancing, drinking and smoking. This is a great contrast to the party song *Mikasi* from one decade earlier that celebrates collective enjoyment.

English as co-language in Bongo Flava songs

While the matrix language is Swahili in the examples above, the relation between the two languages has become reversed in some recent Bongo Flava songs. Such songs consist of a higher percentage of English than Swahili. Even the habit of giving translations of the English passages is sometimes not observed any more. Thus, in the song *The Only One* by MB Dogg (2012) English has already become the dominant language. The few lines in Swahili are translations of English lines, but a number of English lines remain untranslated:

Everybody knows me

But nobody knows my baby girl

I wanna ever want to know

My sweet girl

Kila mmoja ananijua mimi
(Everybody knows me)

Ila hamjui **sweet girl**
(But they don't know the sweet girl)

Nataka wote wamjue yule
(I want all people to know her)

Anayenipoza moyo
(Who comforts my heart)

When I'm with her, I don't feel shy

When I touch her body I feel so high

She calls my name, Makopa

And she says she will die for me

The one that satisfies my soul

¹⁰ Lyrics modified by author from: <http://www.aytanzania.com/profiles/blogs/partyzone>.

The one I love so much

The one that's gonna be my wife, the only one

Those who particularly stand for the trend for increased English and who have initiated it are mainly younger artists, such as Ommy Dimpoz, Gelly wa Rhymes (from Zanzibar), Linex, Ben Pol, C-Pwaa (*Action*, 2010), Rich Mavoko, and P.H.D. (*Mombasa Queen*, 2012). That they have successfully established a broader trend is evident from the fact that even Bongo Flava veterans like Prof. Jay (*Kipi Sijasikia*, 2014) and T.I.D. (*Raha*, 2014) are now bringing out songs that contain some English phrases. The most popular female Bongo Flava artist Lady Jaydee, who usually avoids *Kiswanglish*, reflects in her latest song *Forever* (November 2014) just how strong the trend towards English is. *Forever* contains more English than Swahili. Lady Jaydee switches between whole lines of Swahili and English. Moreover, the song contains a reggae verse sung by the male artist Dabo. This verse is partly in Caribbean-style English and partly in Swahili.

For the past seven years you have been my shoulder to cry on

But today I'm dedicating this song, it's for you – and only you

For you're my sunshine!

I want you to know, I will forevereverever love you, never leave you oh

Ooh, I will forevereverever love you, I want you to know,

Ooohhh, I will forevereverever love you, never leave you oh

Haya mapenzi kweli
(*This love, really*)

I just can't explain

Utanielewa vipi
(*How will you understand me*)

Moyo wangu wote upo kwako
(*My whole heart is with you*)

When you're not around, you're not here with me

Oh Baby I can't breathe

Unapotoka tu, usipokuwepo tu, moyo wangu wakufuata
(*When you leave, when you're not here, my heart follows you*)

Dabo:

From the East to the West, believe you are the best,

I love the way you move, I be happy when you smile

I'm addicted to your love, confused by your love

Me telling that I love you every time of the day

Twende sasa sote mi na wewe moja kwa moja
(*Let's now go together, you and me*)

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Tukabane kichizi mimi na wewe kama **soldier**
(*Let's stay firmly together, you and me, like soldiers*)

Love is a gift, never leave it behind

Upendo ni muungano usioweza kutenganishwa
(*Love is a union that can't be separated*)

Wataponda watachoka na wengine kuumiza vichwa
(*They'll try to attack us until they get tired*)

Pamoja tupo sote hizi ngazi kuzipandisha
(*Together we'll climb up the stairs*)

Kamwe tusikubali ndoto zetu woi
(*Let's never give up*)

With *Forever*, Lady Jaydee demonstrated her international ambitions and that she can compete on the national music market with younger artists, who are the main promoters of using English. However, Lady Jaydee illustrates well that the trend towards English must be seen as striving for addition rather than complete replacement. This applies not only to individual songs but also to song repertoires as a whole. Thus, in mid-2013, Lady Jaydee released *Yahaya* (proper name) which is entirely in Swahili targeting a national audience. In the previous year, 2012, she released *Yeye* ('He'), with lines in Swahili, English, Lingala and Luganda, the chorus line saying "will you spend the night with me". This song clearly aimed at an East African audience.

The internationalization of Bongo Flava and the role of artistic collaboration

Apart from its symbolic meaning, the use of English lyrics in Bongo Flava has also a more direct economic rationale. On the one hand, Tanzanian musicians try to compete with Naijabeats on the national market. Thus, the craze for Naijabeats in the last few years has influenced Tanzanian music producers who are now trying to adapt their own music accordingly. On the other hand, Bongo Flava artists feel encouraged by the international success of Naijabeats to also target a regional and even international audience.

Stories of the international success of Nigerian artists such as P-Square and D'Banj, who landed hits on European and U.S. American markets, have fuelled Tanzanian artists' dreams of entering international markets both within and outside of Africa. The Nigerian musician D'Banj in particular is pursuing the goal of opening up the African music market to international labels. After his song *Oliver Twist* succeeded in European and U.S. charts in 2012, he was signed to the U.S. American label Def Jam in the same year. As he revealed in an interview with the journalist Ayeni Adekunle, his project is to develop the pan-African music market in partnership with international companies:

I've made them realize how much they were losing in the African region. Over 150m Nigerians, over 800m Africans. 2% of that is 8.5m. They were not making anything

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except from S.A, which has been the U.S. of Africa. So we will be launching this label in Ghana, in partnership with Vodafone, launching in Nigeria in partnership with MTN. Def Jam Africa will be up soon; Kenya, S.A. and North Africa will follow. (D'Banj quoted in Adekunle 2012)

In Tanzania, Nigerian music became particularly popular in 2006 with the song *African Queen* by the artist 2Face Idibia, and it was noted that this artist won numerous prestigious international awards, such as the MTV Africa Music Award, Black Entertainment Television Award, and Channel O Music Video Award. The success of D'Banj's 2012 single *Oliver Twist* on the U.S. and European charts was closely tracked by Tanzanian musicians and studio producers and stoked their ambitions of achieving international success for Tanzanian songs. This was intensified when D'Banj won many awards for the song and its video. Other internationally successful Nigerian Afrobeats musicians popular in Tanzania are the duos P-Square (*Temptation*, 2005) and Bracket (*Yori Yori*, 2010; *Yori Yori Remix* featuring P-Square 2011), and the solo artist Davido (*Skelewu*, 2013). In Tanzania, their songs are currently very popular in clubs, especially during the hot phase after midnight, as people love to dance to their beats. But Afrobeats has got international recognition as well, particularly in the U.K. where it is currently in demand in clubs and on radios (Hancox 2012, Dotiwala 2014).

The success of Afrobeats or Naijabeats in Tanzania is also affecting Tanzanian music culture through musical collaboration. A “collabo” with an internationally successful artist is a way to participate in the respective musician's market. In Tanzania, one of the pioneers of international collaboration is the artist A.Y. who in an interview with the BBC in London has compared collaborations to a “barter trade” in which the two sides “exchange fans” (A.Y. 2013). After a number of collaborations with East African artists from Kenya and Uganda, he ventured in early 2008 beyond East Africa, producing the song *Freeze* together with the Nigerian duo P-Square. In that song, P-Square use English, while A.Y. inserts some Swahili in his mostly English verse. Swahili here has become reduced to a small yet important mark of A.Y.'s Tanzanian identity. In addition, the artist proudly refers to his East African and Tanzanian origin (lines underscored).

Chorus:

Ikibidi hata wote tuwe high, freeze
(*If necessary, we all can be high, freeze*)

P-Square alongside A.Y, freeze

Let's party put your hands in the sky, freeze

Here we go, freeze, once more, freeze

A.Y.:

Sishuki chart **kama** jeans, trick **huwezi hisi**,
(*I don't descend in the charts like jeans, you can't realise the trick*)

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Masafa ya mbali kama blog ya Michuzi

(My fame has reached distant places like Michuzi blog¹¹)

So everybody clap,

Nobody can't stop, from the bottom to the top

From the East to the West Africa

We made up all ma' fellaz,

Go down shake your wings **nikubali**

(Go down shake your wings to impress me)

A.Y., let me freeze

Attention, sit back let me do

My things am from Tanzania eeh!

Tension! I, I know what you like

All my girls, tik tak, tik, tak, tik tak¹²

P-Square's verse in English deals directly with the collaboration between them and A.Y., depicting it as a strategy to increase the fame of both parties:

Oh no! This is serious,

But don't be scared of us,

Coz we are not dangerous,

From Nigeria so notorious

Here goes one and two to buckle my shoe,

This is how we living and doing the things we do,

Peter and Paul No. 1 not be two in Africa,

A.Y. coming from East Africa,

We control it, coz if you do me do me roll it eeh!

But in case you don't know this eeh!

You go notice, eeh!

Attention, collaboration,

Now we are the centre of attraction,

Making all the hits all over nations,

You go notice, eeh!

¹¹ A weblog and discussion forum in Tanzania by Issa Michuzi, which is popular in Tanzania and with Tanzanians in the diaspora (<http://issamichuzi.blogspot.de/>)

¹² Lyrics from: <http://koralyrics.com/text.aspx?id=519>; Swahili elements in bold characters.

Collaboration projects also aim at audiences beyond Africa. A.Y. has already collaborated with the Jamaican singer Ms. Triniti in the song *Good Look* (2011) and with Sean Kingston and Ms. Triniti in *Touch Me* (2014), which both are similar to *Freeze* in terms of language choice, with much English and little Swahili. In a 2009 interview with Irene Sporah Njau in her *Sporah Show* at Black Entertainment Television, A.Y. and his colleague MwanaFA were asked about the languages they choose for their songs when aiming at international markets. MwanaFA, whose real name is Hamis Mwinjuma, explained that:

We conquered home and we are trying to reach other people as well who don't understand our language and stuff. So that we'll penetrate in their market through their own language and attract them to our own. (Mwinjuma 2009)

While MwanaFA did not explain in more detail how he would attract Anglophone audiences to Swahili lyrics, his statement about the use of English was programmatic. When A.Y. collaborated with U.S. artists Romeo and Lamyia in the song *Speak to Ya Body*, he did not use Swahili.

Diamond Platnumz, who currently is the biggest Bongo Flava star in Tanzania and beyond has also ventured into collaboration with Nigerian artists. He made his breakthrough in Tanzania in 2010 with *Mbagala*, a song about an indigent guy from Mbagala, a poor neighbourhood in Dar es Salaam. This song, as well as most of those which followed, was in Swahili. Since then, Diamond Platnumz has risen to international fame, particularly in Africa, and thus has become a model for many Tanzanian artists. His song *Number One* (2013), whose chorus is in English, became a hit all over Africa. Due to this song, Diamond was nominated for several highly prestigious prizes in 2014, such as the MTV Africa Music Award and the MTV Europe Music Award, and won the Channel O Music Video Award. The verses of *Number One* are in Swahili while the chorus is in English.

Kwanza mapenzi safari
(*Firstly, love is a journey*)

Ujana ni maji ya moto walinenaga zamani
(*In the olden days, they said youth is hot wate*)

Pili tumetoka mbali kwa matatizo
(*Secondly, we have come a long way*)

Changamoto tu visa visa fulani
(*Through problems and various troubles*)

Tatu kidonda chako kwangu maradhii
(*Thirdly, what for you is a wound for me is illness*)

Ma tu usononekapo kwangu simanzi
(*Ma, when you are not satisfied, I feel grief*)

Kwa mahaba ulionipa nimenogewa
(*The love you gave me makes me wanting more*)

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Vurugu patashika ahh punguza kidogo!
(Please reduce the chaos)

Na mengine kadhalika mtoto si unanielewa!
(And the other things, I think you understand me)

Hapo hapo uliposhika
(Here where you have touched)

Ukiongeza kidogooo!! mmmh mwenzako ntaumia!¹³
(If you add a little bit, mmmh, it will be too much)

You are my number one

My sweetie sweetie number one

My baby ooh you are my number one

My Darling, my number one

Roho yangu mama, **my number one**
(My soul, mama, my number one)

Now show me how they do ngololoaaa aah ngololo aah ngololo

Oooh baby show me how you do ngololo

The song's success paved the way for a remix version in collaboration with the Nigerian music star Davido. *Number One Remix* was produced in 2014 and became a hit across Africa. Interestingly, Davido in his verse sang two lines in Swahili, which Diamond had taught him in the studio in Dar es Salaam, as can be watched in the video from the studio session (<http://suruleretv.com/2014/03/31/video-diamond-platnumz-ft-davido-number-one-remix-studio-session-b-t-s/>). This can be interpreted as homage to Swahili by Davido and gives this language special prestige. Davido uses Swahili here as a *kionjo*, a decorative element that nevertheless is an important mark of African identity. As such, it is complementary to the use of English *vionjo* in Swahili song lyrics in Tanzania. In the following lyrics of Davido's verse, the Swahili words are in bold characters.

Your body de shake, my money de wait for you baby,

No more time de waste, make you go de place,

For real, oh sweetie,

Tupate na ubaridi kidogo,
(Let's get a little refreshment)

Kwa mama ukale ugali wa mwogo,
(and you can eat ugali¹⁴ made from cassava flour at my mother's place)

Baby we can do it your way,

¹³ This verse uses *lugha ya kitandani* ('language from in the bed') which is full of indirect sexual allusions.

¹⁴ *ugali* is the staple food in Tanzania, a stiff porridge made from maize-, millet-, or cassava-flour.

Anything you want it's okay,
Tanzania to Lagos, I go make you famous
Even if they mad at us

Similar to P-Square's verse in the collaboration with A.Y., Davido refers to the greater chances for success that result from a collaboration between artists from West and East Africa. This was also expressed by Diamond in an instagram message, when he said that

Hivi karibuni nilipata fursa ya kuonana na mwanamziki mkubwa kabisa Afrika na anaeliwakilisha vyema kabisa bara letu la Afrika kimziki, namzungumzia Davido, kila mtu anafaham uwezo mkubwa alio nao linapokuja swala la mziki, na katika kutafuta namna ya kuwapatieni taste tofauti mashabiki zangu na zaid kukuza mziki wetu wa Tanzania..tulikubaliana mimi na Davido Tutengeze number one remix yenye vionjo vya Skelewu na ngololo [...].¹⁵

Recently I had the opportunity to meet the biggest music star in Africa who is representing our African continent very well with regard to music ... I'm talking about Davido, everybody knows his great musical ability, and when I was looking for something to bring you a different taste and above all to expand our Tanzanian music, me and Davido agreed to produce a number one remix with vionjo from Skelewu and ngololo [...].

In such collaborative projects, English is indispensable as a business language. This also applies to Diamond's video productions in Nairobi and South Africa. Diamond has done well in giving some interviews in English. This evokes comparison with the late Steven Kanumba, Tanzanian actor and national super star, who in 2009 publicly failed speaking English when he was a celebrity guest at the Big Brother Africa show in South Africa. This was taken as an act of putting shame on the nation and led to a temporary fall of the star (Böhme 2014). Obviously, since then times have changed profoundly.

After the success of *Number One* in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, Diamond produced another song, *Bum Bum* ('Buttocks, Buttocks', 2014), in collaboration with the Nigerian artist Iyanya. This song is very similar to original Naijabeats, and in fact could be called the first Tanzanian Naijabeats song. *Bum Bum* is faster than usual Bongo Flava and it does not contain any Swahili. The song is in English but due to acoustic distortion the song text is hardly intelligible, apart from some phrases such as "shake your bum bum", "the way you shake you drive me crazy", "I like the way you put up your breasts" and "beautiful eyes". It is a song with a highly erotic character to dance to in clubs and at parties. For the present, *Bum Bum* clearly is the epitome of Tanzanian Naijabeats.

However, Diamond's success on the African market does not mean that in future he will only produce songs in the Naijabeats style. He has publicly acknowledged that the national and the

¹⁵ <http://hotlinktz.blogspot.de/2013/10/picha-diamond-akiwa-studio-na-davido.html>

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international market are two different things, and that he will continue to produce songs for both markets (Diamond 2014a). Thus, he will follow the well-tried mixing strategy, with songs in Naijabeats style using mostly English and with Tanzanian Bongo Flava songs using Swahili with or without some English.

Conclusion

Practices of language choice in popular music are “functions of explicit and implicit language ideologies that underlie social life” (Perullo & Fenn 2003: 20). The growing choice of English for Bongo Flava song lyrics certainly reflects the growing prestige of English in Tanzania since the end of state socialism. This is related to socio-economic factors and also corresponds with the growing English competency in Tanzania, which is mainly due to the mushrooming of private primary schools in urban spaces in which English is the language of instruction. In addition, the number of secondary schools has greatly increased since the late 1990s. Thus, the language situation has changed since the times when hip-hop in Tanzania was Swahilised. The increased use of English in song lyrics reflects its prestige as well as the growing confidence of musicians in using it. Artists also project urban and cosmopolitan identities through the use of English. Moreover, it is an expression of artists’ desire to be heard outside the country. This is reflected in a broad range of code-switching. This starts with the insertion of English words and phrases into otherwise Swahili lyrics in a speech style called *Kiswanglish*, with a mainly emblematic function as a marker of a cosmopolitan identity. The percentage of English in songs becomes higher when whole English formulas are used, mainly in chorus lines. The use of *Kiswanglish* as well as that of English formulas is seen as *vionjo*, some added flavour that increases a song’s appeal. Most recently, however, artists sing whole passages in English, in chorus lines as well as in verses, with or without repetition in Swahili. In some cases, English has even become the matrix language with only some inserted Swahili. In at least one song, *Bum Bum* by Diamond Platnumz, no Swahili is used at all. In sum, there is thus a clear tendency towards a strong comeback of English in Bongo Flava after a period when the use of Swahili was the order of the day.

An important reason for this process is the trade liberalization since the late 1980s, which has changed the country’s economic orientation from inward looking to outward looking, that is, seeking commercial and business contacts as well as international dealings outside the country. This has indirectly favoured the use of English and positive attitudes towards it (Batibo 1992). In this context, the use of English phrases interspersed in Swahili lyrics is used as a strategy to reach wider markets; these often simple formulaic phrases summarise the lyrical content for audiences with limited knowledge of Swahili. On the one hand, TV stations such as EATV, Channel O, MTV and B.E.T. have created large media networks through which Tanzanian music is able to

reach other countries, especially in Africa. On the other, these media networks make music from the outside accessible to many Tanzanians.

Since roughly the year 2012, Bongo Flava has been strongly influenced by a music style that originated in Nigeria in the early 2000s combining Congolese rumba, hip-hop and dancehall. This music has become internationally prominent under the name Afrobeats. Afrobeats has its origin in *African Queen* by Nigerian artist 2Face Idibia in 2004, and as a genre has developed further in the direction of up-tempo songs in recent years. In 2012, Afrobeats gained recognition outside Africa, when the song *Oliver Twist* by Nigerian artist D'Banj entered the top ten in UK music charts. This has caused an upsurge of its popularity in Tanzania where the genre is known as Naijabeats. As a result, Bongo Flava artists have started to produce songs that are modelled after Naijabeats, which prominently includes the use of English. As has been shown in this study, the amount and “dosage” of English lyrics varies from one artist to the other, but there is almost none who has not been affected in his language choice. This development goes hand in hand with increasing commercialisation of music in Tanzania. Interestingly, the famous Bongo Flava artists A.Y. and Diamond both stated proudly in internationally broadcasted interviews that for them music is “business” (A.Y. 2013) or “*biashara*” respectively (Diamond 2014b), and that this attitude is in fact the secret to their success. This differs substantially from the spirit of early Bongo Flava, when a song’s message and social commentary was seen as the music’s primary objective. Such songs have now become marginalized as they do not attract resourceful promoters. Many of the new songs are certainly not comprehensible for many Tanzanians, and in the case of club songs they put no emphasis on thoughtful lyrics at all. Instead, artists increasingly revert to the use of some key words and globally known formulas such as “you are always on my mind”, “I will forever love you”, and “you’re my number one”. This reflects also that the new songs centre on love.

Artists, however, do not completely replace Swahili with English lyrics. Rather, one could speak of English lyrics as complementary, embellishing Swahili lyrics with recognisable, easy to memorise English phrases which presumably add the flair of worldliness. The few who rely more on English rather than Swahili lyrics ensure that their repertoire includes songs of different styles, and of different language use in order to reach broad audiences. Indeed, I argue that Swahili as the Tanzanian national language is still essential for Tanzanian artists if they want to be fully accepted by Tanzanian audiences. The main question therefore becomes whether Swahili will remain the uncontested matrix language or whether this role will be taken over by English. Some recent songs indicate that the latter development is feasible. On the other hand, Bongo Flava comprises of different styles of music including rap music for which Swahili is essential for talking about resonating social and political themes in songs. This is the reason why Swahili still predominates in rap songs, although the use of *Kiswanglish*, as part of urban youth language is

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also common practice in that genre. Other styles such as zouk and *mchiriku* are even more closely tied to the use of Swahili. Thus, the comeback of English is not a reversal of the initial Swahilization of hip-hop which brought about Bongo Flava. For now, the two languages are mostly used in an additive manner further expressing the aim of Bongo Flava artists to participate and compete in an African, if not international music market.

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